



# The Centrality of the Messianic Idea For the Old Testament

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**The Tyndale Old Testament Lecture for 1953. The lecture was delivered in Cambridge on 3rd July, 1953 at a meeting convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research.**

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## Introduction

This lecture is reproduced in almost the identical form in which it was delivered. I have added a few paragraphs, but beyond that I have resisted the entirely reasonable wishes of some of my hearers that certain points should be enlarged. The subject is such that in one lecture only an outline of the desirable treatment can be suggested. To deal with any aspect in greater detail would be to disturb the balance of the whole.

In this lecture I am using the term Messianic prophecy to cover all those predictions in the Old Testament which deal with the fulfilment of redemption through a man of God's choice, i.e. I am not restricting it to those predictions that speak expressly of a king.

No point in my argument is really bound up with any specific answer to the problems of the literary criticism of the Old Testament. Two assumptions have, however, been made. It has been taken for granted that we must look to Sinai and not to the eighth century prophets for the true beginnings of Israel's religion. I further reject the conception that all the older writings of the Old Testament have been so radically edited by post-exilic priestly writers as completely to eradicate elements which contradicted their conceptions of what should have been. While I have made no secret of my views on controversial points outside the scope of this lecture, I have sought not to obtrude them.

The subject of this lecture had already been announced, and its main outline was complete, when I first saw a copy of Professor C. H. Dodd's recent work *According to the Scriptures*. Those familiar with it will realize that one of my main arguments is identical with one of his main conclusions. Had I seen the work sooner, I should probably have modified the presentation of my subject even more than has been the case.

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## The New Testament Interpretation Of The Old

Twice in the twenty-fourth chapter of his Gospel Luke tells us how the risen Christ interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures to His disciples, showing them that 'in all the Scriptures' there were 'things concerning Himself'<sup>1</sup> Such a repetition would under any circumstances call for comment; coming as it does in matter peculiar to Luke, we can only interpret it reasonably as a

claim that the Church's use of the Old Testament was in fact based on and legitimized by the teaching of its Founder.

Though it would be precarious and indeed illegitimate to argue on the basis of these passages that every New Testament use of the Old has Christ's express teaching behind it, it seems to me hyper-critical to query Luke's claim. Familiarity has tended to blunt our appreciation of the fact that the handling of the Old Testament by the various writers of the New is essentially a unity, and that their interpretation was fundamentally novel. There is in the New Testament use of the Old the impress of one mind, and that can be only Jesus Christ's, unless we are prepared to deny all historic and objective value to the New Testament documents.

The acceptance of some such view has led to various interesting theories about the New Testament which are, however, outside the scope of this lecture. None the less we must look for a few minutes at the conclusions reached by Professor Dodd in his work mentioned in the introduction. He argues cogently that as far back in the Church's *kerygma* as we can penetrate on the basis of the New Testament documents certain large sections of the Old Testament had been chosen for oral teaching and that they were applied as a whole to Jesus. This means that most of the Messianic quotations from the Old Testament in the New are not to be taken as proof texts, but rather as pointers to the passages from which they had been drawn, and which were already familiar to the readers from the basic oral teaching of the Church.

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How extensive these passages may have been we cannot now establish, for those enumerated by Dodd<sup>2</sup> are merely those that can be reached virtually without a doubt from the study of the New Testament. There were almost certainly others which did not happen to be quoted in our written sources. More important than the extent of these passages is that we should realize that they were chosen, not because they, and they alone, referred to the Christ, but because the demands of practical teaching made a selection of the most suitable passages imperative. The whole Old Testament, and not merely an anthology of proof passages, was looked on as referring to Christ Jesus.

Perhaps the most important question in Old Testament studies today is whether we can construct a theology of the Old Testament or whether we must restrict ourselves to a descriptive Religion of Israel<sup>3</sup>. It is widely felt that such a theology is possible only if some central unifying principle can be discovered in the Old Testament, and some such have been proposed but have not proved entirely satisfactory. Jesus Christ virtually claimed that such a unifying principle exists, viz, the witness of all parts of Scripture to Him.

Many have tried to evade the cogency of this contention by maintaining that, after all, Jesus and the early Church merely took over current Jewish ideas to which not too much respect need be given. Irrespective, however, of whether any particular New Testament exposition of the Old can or cannot find support or close parallel in apocryphal or pseudepigraphic literature or in the later Talmudic and midrashic writings, it is quite clear that the over-all New Testament treatment of prophecy has no real parallel in Jewish thought.

Though the 150 years before Christ show an increasing fervour in Messianic belief, Delitzsch is not exaggerating when he says, 'The development of the Messianic idea after the conclusion of the canon remains... far behind that which precedes in the time of the Old Testament prophecy. It affords no progress, but rather a regress<sup>4</sup>'. When we examine contemporary evidence it is clearly impossible to deduce even a common theology and still less a common pattern of interpretation of the Old Testament from it. What is still more important, there is no convincing evidence that the three concepts of Messianic King, Suffering Servant and Son of Man were ever

brought together before the time of Christ<sup>5</sup>. In addition there is no evidence outside the

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Christian sources for Moses' prophecy of 'a prophet like unto me' (Dt. xviii. 15, 18) being applied to the Messiah<sup>6</sup>, though on this point we shall have more to say later.

The rabbinic attitude towards Messianic prophecy was profoundly influenced by the disasters of 70 and 135 A.D., and also by the influence of Hebrew-Christian propaganda, which lasted at least into the 3rd century A.D.<sup>7</sup> But, for all that, Greenstone, a Jewish writer, can say, 'The same indefiniteness is to be noticed in the interpretation which the Rabbis gave to the popular hope for a Messiah... the conception... varies so much with individual Rabbis, and the divergence of opinion with regard to its details is so great, that its form remains loose and unlimited<sup>8</sup>. The frequently quoted rabbinic aphorism attributed to Rabbi Jochanan, which may go back to before 70 A.D., 'All the prophets prophesied only with reference to the days of the Messiah', has no reference to any general interpretation of the Old Testament in Messianic terms, but means that all promises of blessing are to be fulfilled in the Messianic age<sup>9</sup>. So far from the New Testament reflecting the views of contemporary Jewry, it is far more probable that many of the rabbinic views about the Messiah are, positively and negatively, the result of the impact of Christian teaching.

Granting, then, that we have grounds for tracing the New Testament interpretation of the Old to Jesus Christ Himself, are we justified in considering this to be the true understanding of the Old Testament, or has it been merely superimposed on older Israelite traditions which bore very different meanings originally, as many would have us believe? The rest of the lecture is devoted to an elucidation of this point.

### **God's Man As Fulfiller Of God's Purpose**

It is not unusual to find stress laid on the fact that certain prophets speak of the 'Messianic age' without any mention of the 'Messianic king'. Though this distinction may be of importance in our understanding of the individual prophet, it is more apparent than real in a wider setting. Israel lived in a world in which the gods had their visible representatives, and there is no evidence that Israel ever thought of Yahweh's rule without a human representative, though it never attributed any form of divinity to those that represented Him. It would seem

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wrong then, when considering the setting up of God's rule on earth, as presented in the Old Testament, to ignore the agent or agents whom God will use for the purpose, even if they are not expressly mentioned.

In contrast to the dominant pattern of the fertile crescent in which existence was symbolized under the cyclic form of the fertility myths, and in which human life had little purpose beyond doing its part in seeing that chaos did not break in again<sup>10</sup>, the Israelites saw purpose in life which transformed it into history. How old the concept of the Day of Yahweh, with its connotation of the perfect rule of God, may be we do not know, but since Amos (v. 18) can use it as one of those fundamental conceptions that needed no explanation, it is clearly much earlier than his own time. Views to the contrary are based on a concept of the 8th century prophets as complete innovators, which I consider fundamentally false. We are not likely to be wrong in assuming that the conception of an eschatological goal to history is as old as the other elements

that make the religion of Israel unique. In fact, irrespective of whether the usual modern literary views of the Pentateuch are accepted or not, we find the concept of purpose and a goal in the earliest biblical literature. Examples are the curse on the serpent (Gn. iii. 15)<sup>11</sup>, the promise that Abram is to be a blessing (Gn. xii. 1-3)<sup>12</sup>, and Jacob's blessing on Judah (Gn. xlix. 8-12).

The last of these is particularly valuable for our purpose. On purely rationalistic grounds Jacob's blessings are commonly regarded as *vaticinia ex eventu* and are placed, with the exception of the blessing on Judah, in the period of the Judges. The blessing on Judah is usually placed in the time of the early monarchy, but even on rationalistic grounds there seems little reason for this. On the most probable exegesis it is not the monarchy but stable tribal rule and justice that are being foretold. So we can look on it as an extremely early poem, either from the period of the Judges or, as I believe, a genuine prediction from the patriarchal period.

After more than a century of learned controversy it is gratifying to see that the majority opinion among scholars seems to have veered round to what is almost certainly the oldest interpretation of *shiloh*, viz. *shel-lo*, i.e. 'he whose right it is'. This is given by Ezk. xxi. 27, on the most likely interpretation of the verse, also by the Syriac and Onkelos, and is supported by LXX

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and Vulgate. We must beware of reading too much into such a cryptic phrase, but surely we can find in it the conviction that human history can be expressed in a divine purpose, which will be summed up and fulfilled in an individual, God's man.

### **The Messiah As Perfect King**

In the Old Testament there is a tension in the conception of kingship which seems only recently to have received adequate attention, for it tended to be masked by the literary criticism of the historical books. It seems impossible to take the passages condemnatory of kingship in an absolute sense, as some earlier scholars were prepared to do, or to regard kingship *per se* as a denial of the theocracy. To do so is to fail to do justice to so much, especially to the prophecies of the Messianic king; for, in fact, we can get the picture of a restored theocracy without a king only by illegitimate exegesis. Nowhere does the king play a smaller role than in Ezk. xl-xlviii, but even there 'the prince' has an assured and necessary place.

It would seem that in Dt. xxxiii. 5 Moses is called king; quite correctly too, though the title was doubtless never applied to him in his lifetime. I am not competent to express an opinion on the value of Samaritan tradition, though I think it probable that not enough attention has been paid to it. Whatever its value, it is very likely that in calling the judges (*shophetim*) kings (*melakhim*) it is giving a much truer estimate of their power and position - however much the term may be anachronistic - than the very watered down conception found in most modern textbooks<sup>13</sup>. By this I am merely trying to bring out that Samuel's words, 'Yahweh your God was your king', irrespective of the judgments of literary criticism on 1 Sa. xii, must be construed as a condemnation of a type of kingship, not of kingship itself.

The *shophetim* were clearly charismatic persons, which is in itself sufficient explanation why the chief sign to Saul that Yahweh had really chosen him was that he 'prophesied'. Though Saul was to be the founder of an essentially non-charismatic order in Israel, he was in this way to show his link with those that had gone before him as divinely appointed rulers in Israel. It does seem somewhat ingenuous to suggest that men who not only claimed the divine *charisma*, but who

had also shown by their deeds that they possessed it, had their influence

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limited to their own tribe or even their own clan. We have sufficient evidence, old and new, from Bible lands, to show how far-reaching such a man's influence and authority may be.

By demanding a king 'like all the nations' Israel was not denying Yahweh's kingship, for all the nations looked on their kings as supreme representatives of their gods - and this statement holds good whatever date we give to 1 Sa. viii and xii. They were limiting Yahweh's kingship by refusing His gift of charismatic leaders, whom He could raise up whenever He willed and whenever they were needed. They were demanding that He should be represented by one who would normally hold his office by accident of birth. That is why in later prophecy the Messiah's descent from David is obviously secondary to his endowment with the spirit of Yahweh.

The tension has also been obscured by the traditional conservative interpretation of the royal Psalms as purely Messianic and by the insistence of the Wellhausen school that they were all, or almost all, post-exilic, thereby making a serious estimate of the implications of their language unnecessary. Though the older critical view still has its influential supporters, especially Pfeiffer<sup>14</sup>, there can be no doubt that in ever widening circles, especially in those where archaeological and cultural factors weigh more heavily than those of purely literary criticism, the views of Gunkel, Mowinckel, Engnell, Albright, etc. have won the upper hand. That means that all, or almost all, the royal Psalms are to be regarded as pre-exilic. This in turn demands that similarities in language and setting with similar literature of the fertile crescent dealing with the 'divine kings' may no longer be ignored.

Quite a popular modern idea<sup>15</sup> is that the concept of the Messianic king is not really to be found before the exile and is the outcome of the failure of the Davidic kingship. It has its first cautious beginnings in Jeremiah, while its full flowering is to be found in passages interpolated into Micah and especially Isaiah. But if we may base ourselves on the evidence of Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah, it would far rather seem that there was a scaling down in the concept of the Messianic king during and after the exile, than the reverse. Passages like Is. ix. 2-7, Mi. v. 2 link far better with Pss. ii. and cx and the pre-exilic monarchy than with the post-exilic community with its changing scale of values.

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The pre-exilic tension round the king consisted of the vision of one who should perfectly represent Yahweh, even as the heathen around Israel declared their 'divine kings' represented their gods, and the stark reality of one who, however great his office, fell far short of the vision. If they were ever tempted to forget this under the better kings, the divided kingdom remained an abiding reminder. This falling short was symbolized by the withholding of priestly power from the king. Uzziah will not have been the only one to attempt its usurpation (2 Ch. xxvi. 16-21); the attempt lost Saul his throne, for it was one ground of his rejection. Some scholars seem to suffer from the strange delusion that an apparent doublet means that at least one of its forms is unreliable. There is no reason why 1 Sa. xiii. 8-14 and 1 Sa. xv should not both be true. In the former Saul is rejected because he claims priestly authority, in the latter prophetic, or at least he claims by implication to know the will of Yahweh better than Samuel<sup>16</sup>.

There is every sign that most later kings learnt the lesson of Saul's fate. Their respect for the prophets hardly needs to be stressed. False prophets were doubtless often played off against the true, but there was seldom an open flouting of the prophets as such. We need not doubt that the kings were constantly tempted to encroach on the powers of the priests, and from the time of Solomon it is clear that they had to a great extent become state officials. But with the already

mentioned exception of Uzziah the only certain examples preserved for us of kings taking on themselves priestly functions come from the lives of some of those who had embraced a Canaanized form of Yahweh worship and so naturally had also assimilated the concepts of their neighbours as to the powers of the king. Much modern scholarship has rightly stressed the unique position of the king in the pre-exilic worship of Jerusalem, but we have no right to assume in the teeth of biblical evidence that the unique was identical with the royal position elsewhere in the religion of the fertile crescent. *Mutatis mutandis* his role can probably be best visualized in the one that Henry VIII aspired to play in the Church of England. Fundamentally, the union of religious and civil leadership seen in the 'divine kingship' of the fertile crescent was dissolved. In Ps. cx. 4 we see the union re-created.

There will be few today to support the once fashionable attribution of this Psalm to the time of Simon the Hashmonean<sup>17</sup>.

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Though one may hesitate to accept some of the extremer interpretations of this Psalm, which by textual emendation would bring it right into the sphere of mythological thought<sup>18</sup>, there seems no doubt that it clearly fits into the pre-exilic pattern and equally obviously does not fit the post-exilic pattern, so far as it is known to us. David, the conqueror of Jerusalem, should have continued the tradition of its priest-kings, but could not; the oracle of 'a priest for ever after the order of Meichizedek' points to one who will reconcile the contradiction.

I believe Bentzen<sup>19</sup> goes too far when he claims that the preexilic king was the present saviour and present 'Messiah'. He seems to be making a common error among the Scandinavians of pressing the language of the Psalms in the light of the ritual pattern of the fertile crescent to the exclusion of balancing Scriptures. The royal Psalms show that the king should have been more than the civil head and war-leader (*naghidh*) of the state, but the sum of pre-exilic writings shows that he never was in fact, what from one point of view he was in theory.

In other words Messiahship is for the Israelite inherent in kingship; the king always looks forward to one who is to come, not back to a perfect figure whose descendant he is. David is looked back to as the best king, never as the perfect king. It can be argued that I go too far on the evidence. The Messiah is an eschatological figure, while the perfect king to be theoretically need not be. But as I have already said in this lecture, I believe that some form of eschatology is as old as the religion of Israel and is inherent in its conception of goal and purpose.

So far, then, from the Messianic conception being virtually a replacement of discredited kingship, I believe it to have been a necessary concomitant of the peculiar Israelite conception of kingship from the first. It is quite consistent with this that the highest conception of the Messianic king, which we find in Is. ix and xi, should come just at the time of Ahaz, when Israel was going to its doom and Judah showed every sign of going the same way. When the turn of the Judaeian monarchy came we find Jeremiah with but little to say about the Messianic hope, not because he was the first clear enunciator of a new idea<sup>20</sup>, but because of the very nature of his message. He who had denied to the external all ultimate spiritual and soteriological power<sup>21</sup> was not the man to encourage his people to put their hope in the merely outward advent of the Messiah. The popular

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faith of New Testament times shows how real the danger linked with the prophecies of the Messianic king was, and by his realization of this fact we can best explain Jeremiah's reticence on the subject.

## The Messiah As Son Of Man

It is not surprising that in the heat of the controversy over the date and authorship of Daniel scholarly exegesis of the book itself tended at times to be a trifle superficial. It is, however, a matter of legitimate surprise that even today we find repeated without qualification the statement that the 'one like unto a son of man' (*kebhar ʿenash*) in Dn. vii is merely personified Israel<sup>22</sup>.

Superficially, of course, the interpretation is attractive. Four heathen empires are personified by beasts, so Israel, that is true Israel, 'the saints of the Most High', is personified as a man, and the interpretation is apparently borne out by verses 18 and 27. But the personal and Messianic interpretation offered by the Similitudes of Enoch only about half a century after the alleged date of Daniel should have checked this over-confidence. If the national interpretation of 'the son of man', as we shall call this figure for convenience, is so obvious, it should have been equally obvious at the beginning of the first century B.C.

In fact the four beasts are not just four empires; they are four kings (vii. 17). A similar linking of king and people in apocalyptic can be found in Dn. ii. 37f., viii. 20f., Rev. xiii. Similarly we note that in both Dn. viii and xi the interest is solely with kings and rulers; their countries are merely the sources of their power. Even if this were all the evidence, it would be safe to assume that in fact 'the son of man' is the king of and therefore the personification of, or rather the representative of the saints of the Most High. In addition it would seem that the judgment scene in Dn. vii is on earth; if so, whatever we do or do not read into 'coming with the clouds of heaven', it would seem to imply that 'the son of man' is brought from another sphere. It is almost certain that the Hebrew 'with the clouds of heaven' is correct as against the Greek 'upon the clouds of heaven', but that does not justify our ignoring a major factor in the vision, merely because we cannot interpret it with absolute certainty. When we add all these factors together, it becomes very difficult to maintain what has become the traditional modern view.

I am not maintaining that 'the son of man' here is just the

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Messiah; he is not. He is the Messiah as head of his people, who cannot be disassociated from him, a conception which reminds us of the Pauline picture of the Messianic people in which the Messiah is the head and the Church His body.

In general terms I am inclined to agree with Prof. T. W. Manson's interpretation of the term 'Son of Man' as used by our Lord<sup>23</sup> and his statement that 'the Messiah is the embodiment of the true Israelite ideal'. Where I differ from him is that I find our Lord's use of the title already clearly implicit in Dn. vii.

The coming of the Persians largely broke the old pattern of the fertile crescent and deeply influenced the thinking of the Near-East. Among the Jews the old links between deity and the Messianic king, which we find in pre-exilic prophecy, rapidly die out. It is clear from the New Testament evidence and from much pseudepigraphic literature that, whatever speculation some might have carried on, for the vast majority the Messiah was no longer expected to be more than a purely human figure. This is borne out too by the Messianic pretenders of the first two centuries A.D., of whom Bar Kochba is the best known figure, for whom no supernatural claims were made.

For all that, much of the old thought lived on under variant forms. The real prototype of the king

was Adam, God's vice-regent, with his dominion over the world. Here too the inadequacy of the Israelite monarchy was displayed in that the representatives of the God of all the earth had such imperfect and limited dominion. Though Ps. viii speaks of mankind in general, it is really looking back to Adam and then forward to the new Adam. The New Testament use of the Psalm in Heb. ii is in accordance with its basic idea.

In Dn. vii the contrast between the beasts and 'the son of man' is not merely, or indeed primarily, between the brutishness of one and the humanity of the other. It is far rather that 'the son of man' is the new creation of God, the new Adam, who is to rule over the beasts just because he is man. That is probably the reason why Israel is not mentioned by name; 'the saints of the Most High' are a new spiritual creation.

In Is. xi. 1-9 the Messiah and the new Adam are clearly linked by the picture of the Messianic king reigning over the new Paradise. Prof. W. D. Davies may perhaps be right in his view that the conception of Christ as the second Adam is peculiarly Pauline<sup>24</sup>, but if he is, there is none the less abundant evidence

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that the way had been prepared for that identification both by the Old Testament and by later Jewish speculation. Apparently what happened was that in the post-exilic separation of Messianic kingship and deity the two concepts implicitly connected in Is. xi drifted apart. The result seems to have been that though a personal interpretation was given to 'the son of man' in Dn. vii, it was found impossible, except perhaps in Essene circles, which we believe were responsible for the Enoch literature, to unite this plainly more than human figure with the concept of the Messianic king.

It is noteworthy that though 'the son of man' becomes accepted as Messianic by the Jews in the 2nd century A.D., and it is fully realized that he is more than human, rabbinic Judaism has never been able to reconcile the two conceptions, human and super-human, which continue side by side in popular orthodox Judaism to this day.

### **The Messiah As The New Moses**

Early rabbinic Messianic interpretation merits re-examination. Very much of their interpretation of Messianic prophecy is, allowing for the difference created by the rejection or acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, the same as that of the New Testament and early Church. But in certain features there is a striking difference. There is no positive evidence that Ps. cx was understood Messianically by the rabbis before the second half of the third century A.D.<sup>25</sup> similarly the concept of a suffering Messiah can hardly be traced earlier than the middle of the second century A.D.<sup>26</sup> Because the influence of Hebrew Christian propaganda, which must have been felt for at least two centuries after the resurrection, has been underestimated by most modern scholars, we have failed to realize how impossible it will have been for the rabbis to adopt Christian interpretations of prophecy, unless indeed they had been there all the time. It is insufficiently realized that the Talmudic and midrashic literature before 250 A.D. is far more eclectic than the later literature. By the middle of the third century Hebrew Christianity had lost its dynamic power and was rapidly becoming a sect despised by Jew and Gentile Christian alike. It was therefore possible to allow traditional interpretations of prophetic scripture once again to be taught.

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If any think that this is an impossible reconstruction of events, I need point only to the mediaeval Jewish interpretation of Is. liii. By this time Gentile Christianity with its compulsory disputations between clergy and rabbis had become dangerous to the bodies, if not to the convictions of Jews. So we find both Rashi and Ibn Ezra openly acknowledging that the traditional interpretation of Is. liii was Messianic, but they would interpret it of Israel. In other words, expediency had its part to play in rabbinic exegesis.

I am not suggesting that the dominant interpretation of Ps. cx or Is. liii in the first half of the first century A.D. was Messianic, but that we need not look on the interpretation given by our Lord or His apostles as necessarily novel; they will certainly have been held by some, even if only by a few.

In the light of this it is the more remarkable that there seems to be no trace at all of Moses' prophecy of 'a prophet like unto me' being interpreted Messianically in rabbinic literature. In the New Testament it is used almost casually, as though its Messianic meaning would be accepted without cavil (Acts iii. 22, vii. 37); indeed its use by Stephen almost demands the supposition on his part that his hearers would accept it Messianically. This argument is not affected by a denial of the historicity of the early chapters of Acts. Even if we were to reject them, we should still have valuable testimony to Jewish belief in the later 1st century A.D. In addition it is claimed that there are several implicit references to it in the Gospels of a type which could only mean the wide knowledge of the Messianic use of the passage. Schoeps has shown that the conception of Jesus as the new Moses was central to Ebionite Christianity. All this can have only one explanation. If Moses' promise of 'a prophet like me' is never referred to the Messiah in rabbinic literature, if indeed it is seldom referred to at all, then it can mean only that the rabbis saw in the Christian interpretation something so dangerous that every reference to it had to be suppressed, even when the main danger of Christian propaganda had passed.

This is obviously the case. The rabbis never thought through the relationship of the Messiah to the Law. Some believed that in the days of the Messiah certain laws would be abrogated, but the Messiah even then is the keeper of the Law and its enforcer, not its abolisher. But if the Hebrew-Christians were correct in saying that Jesus of Nazareth was not merely the

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Messiah but also a new Moses, it meant inevitably that a new revelation and the abolishing of the old had become possible.

The position of Moses is virtually unique in the Old Testament. I have already referred to the fact that in Dt. xxxiii. 5 he is called king; though he will have hardly borne the title, he was in fact Israel's first king. This is virtually affirmed by Stephen in Acts vii. 35. In addition he was Israel's first priest. At the solemn conclusion of the Sinaitic covenant he is the priest (Ex. xxiv. 3-8). The twelve young men who kill the sacrificial oxen are merely the representatives of the people, for the sacrifices were normally killed not by the priest, but by the persons bringing the sacrifice. It is Moses who performs the priestly task of manipulating the blood. Equally it is Moses who consecrates Aaron and his sons to their priestly office. It is Moses who finds fault with Aaron when he does not carry out his tasks to the full (Lv. x. 16-20). Most significant of all, it is Moses, not Aaron, who passes on the high-priesthood from Aaron to Eleazar on Mount Hor. In other words, though after the consecration of Aaron Moses did not act as priest, he had only delegated the office.

Finally Moses was the prophet *par excellence* (Dt. xxxiv. 10), the perfect spokesman and revealer of God. With one exception, whom I shall refer to in a minute, the prophets had no

power of enforcing their message. Personally I am not convinced that Dt. xxxiv. 10 forces me to assume that no prophet of the Old Testament revealed the mind and will of God as perfectly as Moses did, or that Nu. xii. 6-8 implies that no later prophet ever enjoyed the communion with God that Moses had or obtained as clear a revelation. But the prophet was prophet. He might be priest as well, but we have no evidence for any one of high standing in the priesthood being a regular prophet. David was prophet as well as king, but it is clear that his prophesying was exceptional. Even as kingship and priesthood were separated so that man should look to the future to the one who should unite them, so prophecy is separated from the other offices that represent God.

There is one exception to this. We normally think of Samuel as prophet, but it is quite clear that it was normal for him to function as priest on occasion, and it may well be regularly. In addition, if we can in any sense look on the judges as kings, as suggested above, then Samuel had probably more claim to the

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title than any since the days of Joshua. It is in the light of this fact that we can best understand Samuel's reaction to the request that he should appoint a king (1 Sa. viii. 6). It is worth noting too, that it seems to be taken for granted among the people that the only one who can give them a king is Samuel.

Though it does not concern our subject, I do not think it out of place to say that it is one of my convictions that the underestimation of Samuel is one of the major errors of Old Testament scholarship. Though I am far from accepting all their views, I believe that scholars like Edward Robertson and R. Brinker<sup>27</sup> have a far truer understanding of Samuel's position than most. I look on him as in many senses the re-founder of the Israelite nation which explains why he alone has a status comparable to that of Moses.

While there is no doubt that Dt. xviii. 15-19 refers in the first place to the succession of prophets that God would raise up in Israel, yet because they were not like unto Moses, because in a vital respect they missed what he had, I believe that the promise was from the first intended to refer to the coming one, who should perfectly unite in his person every aspect of God's representative. So then the long line of prophets that are the most striking feature of Israel's religion not merely speak of the Messiah, but by their very incompleteness bear witness to the necessity for his coming.

It is to be noted that some at any rate, and I believe correctly, see in the figure of the Servant of Yahweh in Is. xlix. 1-9 the new Moses<sup>28</sup>. Though there are only few exegetes who have seen king, prophet and priest combined in the Servant of Yahweh, yet taking modern exegesis as a whole, it is striking that each of the three offices has been clearly recognized by one or another who has written on the Servant.

### **The Messiah As Servant Of Yahweh**

I do not intend to make even a superficial attempt to expound the Servant Songs in this lecture. I must, however, point out that they too, like other passages we have dealt with, seem to sum up and give meaning to aspects of the religion and experience of Israel which otherwise seem to remain unrelated to other aspects of the people's understanding of God, and which indeed otherwise seem to lose their point altogether.

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I believe that most of the friends of the Graf-Wellhausen theory of the Pentateuch have sooner or later had to recognize that the Achilles heel of the theory is the compulsion it is under of placing the ceremonial legislation of the priestly code in the exilic and post-exilic period. It seems probable that even if this side of the theory had not been fatally undermined by the archaeological discoveries at Ras Shamra and elsewhere, it would on other grounds have become discredited. The deepest objection to it is not its contradiction of what we have gradually learnt to know of religion in the fertile crescent during the pre-exilic period, but its spiritual barrenness.

The theory has been conspicuously incapable of making spiritual sense or giving spiritual value to the cultus, which is after all the major constituent of the Pentateuchal legislation. At first, too, it led to a serious spiritual misinterpretation of the Inter-Testamental period and beyond. As is well known, Wellhausen's estimate of the Pharisees and their piety would find few scholars today to support it.

This virtual writing off of the ceremonial law for at least half a century, so far as spiritual value is concerned, has tended to obscure for many students of the Old Testament one of its major spiritual problems. That it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin is an obvious spiritual truism, which we do not owe to the Christian revelation. There is ample prophetic enunciation of this principle. The Pharisee will have objected to its being expressed so bluntly, but there is no reason for thinking that he would have rejected a more guarded statement of the truth. The relatively easy adaptation of the Palestinian synagogue to the new conditions after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. shows that the principle of the insufficiency of animal sacrifice had been widely grasped. For all that, the Talmud says three times<sup>29</sup> that without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

We can recognize here a contradiction and tension in the Pharisaic outlook, which may well be a main cause of one of the chief spiritual weaknesses of Pharisaism, a weakness that long antedates the destruction of the Temple, viz, an insufficient conception of sin. This will have in large part come from the fact that, though the Pharisee rejoiced in the sacrificial ritual and availed himself of it gladly, he was deeply conscious of its inability to deal with sin, and this in turn led to an inevitable

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minimizing of sin, at least in those that sought to observe the law.

Provided we do not insist on interpreting the 8th and 6th century prophets in terms of modern humanism, there is ample evidence of the same tension in the pages of the Old Testament. It is pleasing to see that there is an increasing reaction today against the view that some at least of the prophets were root and branch enemies of the cultus. But what was a tension felt apparently by very few before the exile, became a reality for a considerable portion of the population after the return. We should remember that the Essenes went so far as to refuse to bring bloody sacrifices at all. Here again we see how in the Messianic figure of the Servant of Yahweh we find the tension resolved and satisfied, for he is what the sacrifices could never be.

It is more than the problem of sacrifice that finds its answer suggested here. Some of the finest modern Old Testament exegesis has been devoted to the problem of suffering, whether in Job or the Psalms, in Isaiah or Jeremiah, whether dealing with the prosperity of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous, or with the final mystery of death itself. I am tempted, however, at times to wonder how far those who then faced these problems realized the spiritual riches we have been able to draw from their experiences, for we must distinguish between the spiritual

solace that comes to the sufferer when he turns to God and the theological answer to the problem of suffering. That I am comforted in my suffering does not imply that I know why I had to suffer.

This problem, which is no other than the whole problem of human sin and imperfection, finds its answer foreshadowed, as in the Servant of Yahweh we see the triumph of God, not through might or power, but through what men count the foolishness and weakness of God.

### **The Messiah As The Corner Stone**

We can best end this lecture with a consideration of the three prophecies of the corner or topstone, viz. Is. xxviii. 16, Zc. iii. 9, iv. 7, Ps. cxviii. 22. It is of course incapable of mathematical proof that the three passages are connected, but the strong impression created by the second and third that a definitely known stone is under consideration makes such a connection highly probable.

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We are first introduced to the stone in Isaiah when the scornful rulers of Jerusalem with their self-chosen and self-confident foreign policy are confronted with a stone laid by Yahweh in Zion. Their building is to be swept away by the coming storm but the stone will abide. It is called an *ʾebhen bochan*, which is in the English versions rendered 'a tried stone' (A.V., R.V., R.S.V., Moffatt). But as Delitzsch points out *bochan* is active and means testing. Brown, Driver, Briggs in their Lexicon agree, but in spite of that give it a passive meaning<sup>30</sup>. The fact is that it is a testing stone. Isaiah never speaks of its being built on. It is a pledge of safety to those that believe in the day that 'the shelter of lies' is swept away.

This stone rejected by the builders, the rulers of the people, appears again in Zechariah, after the exile caused by the false building of the pre-exilic rulers. We now find that it is a headstone or a topstone. This is a stone cut beforehand by the architect, which not only, as the last stone to be dropped into place, bonds the building together, but also by whether it fits or not tests whether the architect's plans have been truly followed. We are not called on to judge how truly Zerubbabel built for his day and generation, for in 'Ps. cxviii we find the fulfilment expressed in the prophetic perfect but none the less future, for the Psalm is clearly Messianic<sup>31</sup>.

Even so it is with Jesus Christ. The various forms of Messianic prophecy knit together divergent lines of Old Testament thought and mould them into a pattern whose final form may not be clear but which can yet be inferred. Bring the fulfilment in Christ and drop it into place as the topstone and the house is complete in all its portions and proportions.

For the one who will work or expound without thought of God's Messiah, the testing stone has been laid by God there in Zion. He will not be able to avoid it, and 'he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces' (Mt. xxi. 44). There is, however, a worse fate foretold for the man who in theory accepts the testing stone, but in practice works and expounds led by his own wisdom and will. When the topstone is hoisted to its place on the summit of his building, it will come crashing down and 'on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust'.

### **References**

<sup>1</sup> Lk. xxiv. 25-27, 44-47.

<sup>2</sup> For Prof. Dodd's list see *According to the Scriptures*, p. 107 f.

<sup>3</sup> For a survey of the problem cf. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, chapter 11, by Prof. N. W. Porteous.

<sup>4</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion and literature cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord*, chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> For evidence see Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, III, p. 626; for the conception of Jesus as the new Moses cf. H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*, esp. pp. 87-116.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Schoeps, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 315-320.

<sup>8</sup> Julius H. Greenstone, *The Messiah Idea in Jewish History*, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 602f.

<sup>10</sup> See esp. H. Frankfort and others: *Before Philosophy* and H. Frankfort: *Kingship and the Gods*.

<sup>11</sup> Few today would take the older suggestion seriously that this is merely a picture of the feeling of men for snakes.

<sup>12</sup> I consider the R.V. to be correct, but this holds good whether we render the last clause as a passive or a reflexive.

<sup>13</sup> I owe my information to E. Robertson, *The Old Testament Problem*, pp. 179ff., 188ff.

<sup>14</sup> R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edit.), pp. 619 seq.

<sup>15</sup> A good example is L. E. Brown: *The Messianic Hope in its Historical Setting*.

<sup>16</sup> There seems to be a peculiar reluctance on the part of many moderns to come to grips with the reasons for Saul's rejection, e.g. Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, II, pp. 85f., Oesterley and Robinson, *A History of Israel*, I, p. 186, Lods, *Israel*, where it is not mentioned. There is a careful study of the problem resulting in the position defended in this lecture in E. Robertson: *Samuel and Saul* (republished in *The Old Testament Problem*) and the same opinion at least in general outline is expressed by others, e.g. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, p. 81, Auerbach, *Wüste und Gelobtes Land I*, *passim* (though he takes the part of Saul!).

<sup>17</sup> R. H. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 630, is a notable exception.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. Bentzen, *Messias, Moses redivivus, Menschensohn*, p. 14, note.

<sup>19</sup> A. Bentzen, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> So L. B. Browne, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Je. iii. 16f., vii. 3-15, vii. 21ff., viii. 8f., ix. 25f.

<sup>22</sup> That no dogmatic motive need be present is shown by the fact that the statement is found in the conservative commentary of C. Lattey, while it is denied by some liberals, e.g. L. E. Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 53f., who gives much the same interpretation as in the lecture.

<sup>23</sup> T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 211-234, summarized in *The Servant Messiah*, pp. 72ff.

<sup>24</sup> W. D. Davies: *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, pp. 41 seq.

<sup>25</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 452 seq.

<sup>26</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 273 seq.; H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord*, chapter 2.

<sup>27</sup> E. Robertson, *The Old Testament Problem*; R. Brinker, *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel*.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. A. Bentzen, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> *Yoma* 5a, *Menahoth* 93b, *Zebahim* 6a.

<sup>30</sup> Koehler's derivation from Egyptian seems dubious.

<sup>31</sup> For a fuller exposition see articles by B. E. Le Bas in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, July-Oct. 1946, July-Oct. 1950, July-Oct. 1951.