

The Promise

From the early days of Israel's history, God's people had a concept of Yahweh as a saving God, a God who was concerned about His people and who would perform mighty acts in order to deliver them from their enemies. Of course, that went back to Moses and the epic rescue of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. But, as you read through the Old Testament, you see a growing sense of God as the Redeemer of Israel. It is out of this appreciation for God's intention to protect and to bless His people that the concept of Messiah grew stronger through the years. Today we'll start to look at the development of the concept of Messiah through various stages of Israel's history.

The hope for deliverance goes all the way back to the garden of Eden, after the first humans had disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After God confronted first Adam and then Eve, He cursed the serpent who had deceived them into eating the forbidden fruit. The curse ends like this:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman
And between your offspring and hers;
He will crush your head
And you will strike his heel. (Gen. 3:15)*

As we move through Genesis, we see the beginning of a pattern being established. The pattern is that God tells His people what's going to happen, prepares them for any action they need to take and then brings about their deliverance. One of the first of these is the story of Noah, where God told Noah that He was going to flood the earth, told him what to do about it -- build an ark -- then saved a remnant of all living creatures through the great flood.

An impressive example of this pattern is found in Genesis 15:13,14:

Then Yahweh said to him (Abraham), "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

This prophecy was made close to six hundred years before Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. For the children of Israel, generations later, it would have the effect of showing them that God loved them, that He had promised good to them and that, no matter what they might be suffering at a particular time, He would be their Deliverer. The fact that everything happened as it was prophesied only confirmed in their minds that their God would be on their side and would rescue them from evil.

This principle was severely tested as Israel approached the Promised Land. Moses had told them that God would give them victory over the Canaanites, but most of the spies who went in to check out what they were up against told them they would be better off to go back to Egypt. Their unbelief caused them to waste 40 years wandering in the wilderness to the south of Canaan ... but, again, the long term effect

of those wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of Canaan that followed, was to confirm the people's trust in Yawheh their God. He is a powerful God and is able to deliver our enemies into our hands.

That was the confident belief of a young shepherd boy named David. When he saw the giant Goliath and heard his taunts against the Israelite soldiers, his reaction was:

Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God? (1 Sam. 17:26)

And to put that confidence to the test, he later said to King Saul:

The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. (17:37)

And he went out boldly and killed the giant.

The concept of this salvation of God coming in the form of one person, a deliverer, a Messiah, really started to take shape around the person of King David. The kings of Israel, starting with Saul and David, were anointed for their role as the rulers of God's people and the term "messiah" literally means "anointed one". The priests were also anointed for their role of offering the sacrifices on behalf of the people, but they were less likely to be associated with the role of the deliverer which developed alongside the term "messiah".

Because Saul flubbed the role of deliverer by relying on himself and then on a witch instead of turning in a whole-hearted way to God, he was not the prototype of the messiah that was to come. But David was different, a man after God's own heart, a worshiper, a man who trusted God in most aspects of his life, particularly as a leader of men, going into battle, honoring God in worship and humility, refusing to trust himself but seeking the Lord's direction. And it was to David that God gave the promise that would become the heart of the Jewish expectation of a Messiah:

Yahweh declares to you that Yahweh Himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:11,12,16)

Near the end of the story of David's life, we read this song that he wrote which reflects the promise that God had given to him:

*I will praise you, O Yahweh, among the nations
I will sing praises to Your Name.
He gives His king great victories
He shows unfailing kindness to His anointed
To David and his descendants forever (2 Sam. 22:50f)*

The concept of a David-like Messiah was strengthened in a couple of ways, through some of David's psalms and, especially, through the writings of the prophets. First, let's look at some of the Psalms.

Psalm 2 is an important one for the Messianic vision as it was for John's visions in Revelation:

*Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers gather together against the LORD and against His anointed one.
The One enthroned in heaven laughs, Yahweh scoffs at them
Then He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath, saying,
"I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill."
I will proclaim the decree of Yahweh
He said to me, "You are My son; today I have become your Father.
Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your inheritance
The ends of the earth your possession."* (Psalm 2:1-8)

This seems to be working on two levels, one having to do with David's reign as king over Israel and the other having to do with an anointed one who reigns over the whole earth. In either case, there are enemies who oppose the LORD's anointed one, but the psalm states that it is God's purposes that will prevail. God is not impressed with the kings of the earth who form an alliance against Him, but replies that He has installed His King on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, and that His king is now His Son and will rule the nations. Again, this "anointed one" is unlikely to be a priest; he is a ruler, and therefore better understood as being a king, like David or a descendant of his.

The word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew "mashiach" which literally means "anointed one". Anointing is the act of setting one person apart, under God's commission, under God's protection, to fulfill an important role in God's king-dom on earth. These elements are clearly visible in Psalm 2 - from the setting apart (*I have installed My King*) to the task of defeating those who conspire against God.

The idea of special protection for God's anointed is made even more clear in Psalm 20:

*Now I know that Yahweh saves His anointed
He answers him from His holy heaven
With the saving power of His right hand.
Some trust in chariots and some in horses
But we trust in the name of Yahweh our God.* (vv. 6,7)

And then, down in verse 9:

*O Yahweh, save the king!
Answer us when we call.*

Here the anointed one, the *mashiach*, is the one God has chosen to rule over His people Israel. God rescues His anointed king and the king becomes the redeemer or rescuer of Israel.

So you have these two themes merging together over time to build the concept of Messiah: the redeeming purposes of God towards His people Israel and the anointing of a deliverer king to carry out God's saving purpose.

By the time of the great prophets of the Old Testament, and especially in the writings of Isaiah, a fuller picture of Messiah has been fashioned. At one time, the rabbis had applied no fewer than 456 passages of Scripture to define the person and work of the coming Messiah. In the literature between the Old and New Testaments, called the Apocrypha, the writers have a growing preoccupation with the Messiah, looking for his coming reign in Jerusalem and to an age of great peace and prosperity for Israel.

That's still the expectation among orthodox Judaism today and it now includes the rebuilding of the great temple and the reestablishment of both priesthood and sacrifice. The more liberal Judaism of our day has rejected the idea of a personal Messiah in favor of belief in a "messianic age", an era of peace and progress brought about by the two Jewish ideals of justice and compassion.

The problem with this view is that it doesn't take into account human sin and there are several passages in the Old Testament that indicate that the Messiah will deal with our sin problem, to liberate us from the guilt and shame of our failures before God.

I want to do something a bit different right now. I want to show you the testimony of one Jewish believer in Jesus as his Messiah and then we'll comment on the reference he makes to the prophet Daniel.

video clip of Dennis Karp testimony

Daniel 9 begins with a long prayer, asking God to act on behalf of Jerusalem, not because the Jews were behaving well, but because the city and the people bore God's name. Then the angel Gabriel came and spoke to Daniel, telling him what lay in store for God's people:

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens . . . After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come, will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

And the prophecy goes on from there to describe continual warfare, desolations and the end of sacrifice and offering.

Now there are some variations in the way this Daniel passage can be interpreted. We don't know which decree to rebuild Jerusalem he might be referring to -- there were three that we know about -- but one of the three points to the late 20's, the actual time of Jesus' public ministry. The thing that is most unexpected is that Daniel prophesies that the Messiah, the Anointed One, will be cut off. In other words, he will be killed. This was not the common expectation for what would happen to the Messiah. The common expectation was that he would be victorious in battle, a king who conquered nations and who ushered in a time of peace and prosperity for Israel as a result of those conquests.

But Daniel says "no" to that expectation. The other thing which Dennis pointed out in

his testimony is that all that happened to the Messiah had to take place before 70 A.D., the year that the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. In other words, if you take Daniel seriously, there is no possibility of a Messiah that is still to come. He had to have come before the end of the first century. And yet, in many Hebrew prayer books today you can read this statement: "I believe with a perfect heart that the Messiah will come; and although his coming be delayed, I will still wait patiently for his speedy appearance."

Over the next couple of teaching sessions, we're going to look at some of the Old Testament prophecies that point to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and at how the writers of the New Testament understood who Messiah would be and what Messiah would do.