

Messiah In the Promise Plan of God Part 2 by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

IV. The Messiah Predicted in the Latter Prophets

One would have thought that the promise-plan of Messiah would have ended when the predictions made to Eve, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David were over. Surprisingly enough, this was only the beginning, for now these same promises begin to proliferate and blossom way beyond anything anyone could have imagined once we come to the sixteen writing "Latter Prophets." These prophets exhibit thirty-nine direct predictions concerning the Messiah. Yet what they wrote was no mere day-dreaming of a better day and time of blessing for all concerned; instead what God was going to do through his coming Messiah became the basis for repentance and a real change of heart in the present. This is because the promise doctrine had a two-fold character: it was a standing prediction of what God would do in the future, but it was just as much a doctrine by which men and women could live in their contemporary situations.

The Ninth Century: Messiah as a Teacher.

The prophet Joel is probably set in the 800s B.C., though this cannot be stated with certainty. In Joel 2:23 he speaks of God sending his Messiah as "The Teacher" (Hebrew, hammoreh). Some want to render this Hebrew word as "rain," but the Hebrew for that would be yoreh, which appears later in this verse. Indeed, the blessing of God in sending his Messiah as "The Teacher" is depicted in terms of the coming of rain and fruitfulness on the land after a time of locusts invasions and a famine. Thus, the coming of God's Teacher signals the autumn and spring rain in their seasons.

The Eighth Century Non-Isaianic Prophecies

There are four prophecies during this period from three writing prophets: Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 2:12-13; and Micah 5:1-4. While Joel focused on Messiah as Teacher, Hosea emphasized his kingship, throne, dynasty and kingdom. He acknowledged that even though Israel would be a long time without sacrifices, an ephod, or the services of a king, yet when Israel returned and sought the Lord, the new David would come as king with his blessings in the last days. Amos also acknowledged that the mighty house of David was at that time in a dilapidated state, but God would once more raise it up in that latter day as he unified the divided nation, rebuilt the dynasty of David and brought what had to be the new or second David back to the rule and reign of a kingdom that would extend over all the earth. God would do this, in Amos 9:11-15, so that both the remnant of Israel and all in the nations who were owned by the Lord, and had his name called over them, might be under Messiah's dominion.

In this same eighth century B.C., the prophet Micah saw Messiah as the "Breaker" (Mic 2:12-13,) who would open up the gate so that those who had been pent up could now be released and enjoy God's salvation. Indeed, Micah 5:1-4 told us exactly where Messiah was to be born: in Bethlehem. And Messiah would rule as the ancient plan finally takes its final shape.

The Eighth Century Prophecies of Isaiah

Few prophets are as detailed in their predictions about the coming Messiah as the prophet Isaiah. He, under the inspiration of God, contributed fourteen parts to the promise-plan. There is only time to briefly list some of the magnificent prophecies that Isaiah set forth in his writing.

Messiah will be known, Isaiah taught in 4:2, as the "Branch of the LORD," surely a reference to Messiah's divinity. This coming Man of Promise would also be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14) and carry a most awesome set of names and titles: "Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:1-7). In Isaiah 11:1-16, Messiah's reign is described while Isaiah 24:21-25 treats Messiah's universal triumph and his defeat of Satan when he was released after being bound in prison "many days." Other Isaianic texts treating the Messianic promise are 28:16; 30:19-26; 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; 55:3-5; 61:1-3; and 63:1-6.

Seventh Century Prophecies of Jeremiah

Just as Isaiah used the "Branch" to talk about Messiah, so also the prophet Jeremiah 23:5-6 used this same symbol for the Messiah, who according to Jeremiah, would also come from the line of David. Later in Jeremiah's Book of Comfort (Jer 30-33), the prophet makes it clear once again that God would raise up "David their king" "in that day" (Jer 30:8-9), which king would also be a priest (Jer 23:21c). The prediction of Jeremiah 23: 5-6 is essentially repeated in Jeremiah 33:14-26.

Sixth Century Prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel

Ezekiel, the younger contemporary of Jeremiah likewise ministered from the Babylonian exile. In his view, Messiah would grow up as a "tender sprig" (Ezk 17:22-24), yet he would rule as the One "to whom [the throne of David] rightfully belonged" (Ezk 21:25-27)- a filling out of the meaning of the cryptic word "Shiloh" in Genesis 49. Ezekiel also set forth Messiah as the "Good Shepherd" in Ezekiel 34:23-31. But Ezekiel's greatest prophecy was in 37:15-28, where Messiah was seen as the great unifier of the divided kingdom of Israel. He would once again join the two houses of Ephraim (the ten northern tribes) and Judah (the two southern tribes) into one nation under his leadership. Daniel, just a like Ezekiel, was carried off into captivity in Babylon with his three friends Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego. For Daniel, Messiah came as the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13-14 to receive the kingdom and authority from God the Father. Messiah was the "Anointed One" who would come in Daniel 9:24-27 as "the Ruler," and the one who would defeat the "little horn" that represented the evil one and

all his forces.

Fifth Century Post Exilic Prophets

There are eleven major Messianic prophecies in this final time period where the plan of God was unleashed: two were from the prophet Haggai, seven were from the prophet Zechariah and a final two came from the prophet Malachi. Haggai 2:6-9 saw Messiah as “the Desire of all the Nations.” He also reported that Messiah was the “Signet Ring” (Hag 2:21-23), which was the God-ordained emblem of the office and authority of the Davidic kingship.

But in this post-exilic era, few were more specific and graphic in detailing the life and ministry of Messiah than the prophet Zechariah. He again included the work of a High Priest in the ministry of Messiah (Zech 3:8-10). This Messiah would be a Priest-King over all the nations on earth in that final day (Zech 6:9-15). Messiah’s kingly aspect would be noted more definitely in Zechariah 9:9 as he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. This prophet also gave Messiah four titles in Zechariah 10:4. He, as the “cornerstone,” would be the foundation and unifier of those who belonged to him by right of redemption. Secondly, he would be the “tent peg” or “nail,” where everything would be secured in the household of faith. Thirdly, he would be the “Battle-bow,” a symbol of strength for his military conquests as he secured the kingdom. Finally, in the fourth place, Messiah would be the “taskmaster,” the absolute Ruler on whom all sovereignty rested. Zechariah 11:4-14 noted that Messiah would be rejected by his own people Israel and he would be “pierced” by them (Zech 12:10), but those setbacks would not last, nor would the smiting of Messiah as noted in Zechariah 13:7. Messiah would emerge triumphant over all these adversities and he would rule from Jerusalem as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The prophet Malachi described Messiah as the “Messenger of the Covenant” (Mal 3:1), who would purify the Levites when he came, but he would also judge all unrighteousness. The final title given to Messiah in the Tanak is the “Sun of

Righteousness" in Malachi 4:2. Messiah would come with healing in his wings like the bursting forth of the sun at sunrise.

V. The Messiah in Modern Interpretational Schemes

Given this plethora of references to the Messiah in the Tanak, even on a selective basis, the modern conclusion of Joachim Becker is easily refuted as he summarized his study of Messiah: "there is not such a thing as messianic expectation until the last two centuries B.C."³ But even Becker could not stand his own conclusion, for he wondered how such a conclusion could be reconciled with one of the most central affirmations of the New Testament, which with "unprecedented frequency, intensity, and unanimity [insisted that] Christ was proclaimed in advance in the Old Testament."⁴ Becker's way out of his own dilemma was to fall back on the method of exegesis in late Judaism, namely *Pesher* exegesis, which denied that there was a historic meaning to the Messianic references in the Old Testament, but the text could be read now to mean this new attributed interpretation to the Messianic texts in order to make a new Christian point of view.

Such bold statements as Becker's is one reason why we are not also happy with what many have called in our circles, "Double Meaning" of prophecy. According to this view, there is a distinction to be drawn between what the prophets had intended as they wrote from their limited perspectives and what God the Holy Spirit meant by the same utterance. But as Milton Terry warned, "If Scripture has more than one meaning, it has no meaning at all."⁵

The Promise-Plan view avoids both extremes set forth by a *Pesher* type exegesis and a Double Meaning type. There is a single, unified, continuing, purpose and plan that is organically related as the seminal germ in a seed is related by the final fully developed plant and all the stages of growth found in between the two ends of this process. It is this plan and this method of interpretation that I commend to the body of Christ and to all believers

everywhere.⁶

Notes (#1 and #2 were in Part I):

³ Joachim Becker. Messianic Expectations in the Old Testament. Transl. David E. Green. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980, p. 93.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Milton Terry. Biblical Hermeneutics. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1890, p 384.

⁶ The basic thrust of this lecture can be seen in more detail in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. The Messiah in the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995 and my other book entitled: The Promise-Plan of God. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

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