

MESSIANIC HOPES AND MESSIANIC FIGURES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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The nature and importance of messianism for early Judaism and Christianity continue to be debated. Its definition and how far back it may be traced are among the points that are the most sharply disputed. Another important question concerns the extent to which messianism played a role in the shaping of the theologies of various expressions of Judaism and Christianity.¹ For example, was messianism a central or fundamental tenet in early Judaism, as it came to be for Christianity?

This essay will address all of these questions, and will attempt a sketch of the origins, development, forms, and influence of messianism in late antiquity. A chronological approach will be taken, beginning with the (1) idealization of David and proto-messianism in the Old Testament, (2) intertestamental expressions of messianism, (3) “messianic” figures in the Roman period, and (4) messianic ideas in Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. This chronology, of course, is only approximate, for items in the respective categories will sometimes overlap.

I. IDEALIZATION OF DAVID AND PROTO-MESSIANISM

Idealization of the Davidic dynasty is ancient, reaching back to the time of the dynasty itself, at least in its later life.² The messianic trajectory begins with the emergence of

¹ In this connection we need to be reminded of the helpful qualification offered by Marinus de Jonge (“Messiah,” *ABD* 4.777-88): “Because a central tenet of Christianity has always been the conviction that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah expected by Israel), much attention has been paid to the study of Jewish expectations of the Messiah. The Christian focus upon the person of Jesus has led to an undue concentration on the *person* of the Messiah in Jewish thought, even in the works of recent scholars. One should realize that in the OT the term ‘anointed’ is never used of a future savior/redeemer, and that in later Jewish writings of the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100 the term is used only infrequently in connection with agents of divine deliverance expected in the future” (p. 777).

² Important literature includes: H. Ringgren, “König und Messias,” *ZAW* 64 (1952) 120-47; S. Mowinckel, *He that Cometh* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1954); M. Rehm, *Die königliche Messias im Licht der Immanuel-Weissagungen des Buches Jesajas* (Est 1; Kevelaer: Butzon & Becker, 1968); K.-M. Beyse, *Serubbabel und die Königserwartungen der Propheten Haggai und Sacharja: Eine historische und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1972); K. Seybold,

royal ideology,³ in which the ideals of Israelite kingship are expressed. These ideals are rooted as much in the Near East in general, as they are in Israel's unique experiences and religious convictions.⁴

The oldest tradition appears to be Nathan's oracle, in which is found the so-called "Davidic Covenant" (2 Sam 7:12-16). Through his prophet God promises David:

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; 15 but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.

From this oracle the messianic "paradigm" will emerge: The Davidic descendant is expected to build God's House, he will be established on the throne of his kingdom, and God will be his Father, while he will be God's son.

Some of the Royal Psalms allude to this covenant. Best known among them are Psalms 2 and 89:

"Spätprophetische Hoffnungen auf die Wiederkunft des davidischen Zeitalters in Sach. 9-14," *Judaica* 29 (1973) 99-111; T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (ConBOT 8; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1976); J. Becker, *Messiaserwartung im Alten Testament* (SBS 83; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977); ET: *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); A. S. van der Woude, "Serubbabel und die messianischen Erwartungen des Propheten Sacharja," *ZAW* 100 (1988) 138-56; A. Laato, *Josiah and David Redivivus: The Historical Josiah and the Messianic Expectations of Exilic and Postexilic Times* (ConBOT 33; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksel, 1992); M. Saeboe, "Zum Verhältnis von 'Messianismus' und 'Eschatologie' im Alten Testament: Ein Versuch terminologischen und sachlichen Klärung," *JBT* 8 (1993) 25-55; K. E. Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (SBLEJL 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); A. Laato, *A Star is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations* (USF International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 5; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); R. S. Hess and M. D. Carroll R. (eds.), *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), esp. the first two chapters by D. I. Block, and J. D. Hays. Some of this literature applies equally well to the other categories being considered in this study.

³ Laato, *A Star is Rising*, 4.

⁴ Laato, *A Star is Rising*, 13-32.

1 Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed, saying, 3 “Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.” 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.” 7 I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my son, today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” (Ps 2:1-9)

26 He shall cry to me, “Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.” 27 And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth. 28 My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. 29 I will establish his line for ever and his throne as the days of the heavens. (Ps 89:26-29)⁵

Psalm 2 declares that God has established his king (v. 6: “my king”) on Mount Zion. This king, the Lord’s “anointed” (v. 2), is also God’s son (v. 7: “my son”), whom the Lord, in a figurative sense, has “begotten.” Israel’s king will triumph over the kings of the earth. Psalm 89 calls the Lord’s anointed (see v. 20: “I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him”; cf. v. 51) his “first-born,” who shall cry out to God: “You are my Father” (v. 26). The Davidic covenant is explicitly referred to in vv. 3-4 (“I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant . . .”; cf. vv. 35-36). The Davidic line will endure “forever” and “his throne” will last as long “as the days of the heavens.” The divine “covenant will stand firm for him.” As in Psalm 2, so in Psalm 89, the Davidic descendant will become “the highest of the kings of the earth.”

The idealization of the Davidic covenant and dynasty is enhanced in prophetic oracles. The appearance of Davidic tradition in the prophetic proved to constitute an important step toward infusing royal idealism with eschatological expectations. This combination—royal ideology and eschatological hopes—provides the matrix out of which subsequent messianism would grow.

The prophet Hosea expresses the hope and confidence that “in the latter days” the estranged northern tribes of Israel will repent and seek out God and “David their king” (Hos 3:4-5). The terminology, “in the latter days” (MyImÎ¥YAh tyîrSjAaV;b), becomes thematic in the highly eschatologically oriented pesharim of the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. 1QpHab 9:6; 4Q162 2 1; 4Q163 23 ii 10; cf. CD 4:44; 6:11; 1QSa 1:1). In

⁵ Contrast the conditionality of the Davidic covenant, as it is expressed in Psalm 132. See also Jer 22:4: “For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people.”

one text the Davidic covenant is explicitly interpreted in the light of this eschatological expectation: “[I appointed judges] over My people Israel’ [2 Sam 7:10-11a]. This ‘place’ is the house that [they shall build for Him] in the Last Days [מִיָּמֵי הַתַּיָּרָבָב] . . .” (4Q174 3:2).

Micah anticipates that Bethlehem will some day once again provide Israel with a Davidic king: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Mic 5:2). The mysterious quality of the awaited Davidic king is augmented in Isaiah’s famous oracle:

1 But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. 3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Midian. 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isa 9:1-7)

The Davidic covenant is clearly echoed in the promise that the “throne of David” will be “over his kingdom, to establish it . . . forever.” The intriguing language in v. 6 has occasioned a great deal of scholarly discussion. Whatever its original meaning and application, it is not hard to see how it contributed new ideas to royal ideology, ideas that would fuel later, emerging messianism.

Another Isaianic oracle reflects royal ideology near the end of, or shortly after the end of the dynasty:

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the girdle

of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. (Isa 11:1-5)

The Davidic dimension is brought to mind immediately in the reference to the “stump of Jesse,” that is, David’s father. The “Spirit of the Lord” will rest upon this royal Davidic descendent, just as it came upon David (e.g., 1 Sam 16:13). But the qualities of David’s descendent are expressed in terms that seem to surpass his great ancestor. This oracle also contributed significantly to the emerging messianic expectation (e.g., 1QSb 5:22, 25, 26; 4Q161 7 iii 15-29; 4Q285 5 i 3; *Pss. Sol.* 17:24, 29, 36-37). The wise, ideal king is alluded to elsewhere in Isaiah: “Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice” (Isa 32:1).

Two other important texts should be mentioned, neither of which is specifically Davidic, but in later traditions were sometimes treated as messianic oracles. The first is Gen 49:10, part of Jacob’s blessing of his son Judah (vv. 8-12): “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” The other is Num 24:17: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth.” In the Dead Sea Scrolls both of these texts are linked to Isaiah 11, the Davidic “Branch” text (cf. 4Q252 1 v 1-6, which cites Gen 49:10; and 1QSb 5:20-29, which cites Num 24:17). How far back the messianic interpretation of Gen 49:10 and Num 24:17 may be traced is difficult to tell. Both of the Scrolls just mentioned probably date well back into the first century C.E. Messianic interpretation may also be attested in Philo (*On Rewards and Punishments* 16 §95) and in Josephus (*J.W.* 6.5.4 §312-313; cf. 3.8.9 §400-402). Hints of this tradition seem to be present in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (e.g., *T. Judah* 24:1, which alludes to Gen 49:10; and v. 5, which alludes to Num 24:17; cf. 24:6, where allusion is also made to Isaiah 11).

Hopes for a renewed Davidic dynasty are expressed in the exilic period, notably by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The former consoles Judah:

8 And it shall come to pass in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more make servants of them. 9 But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. (Jer 30:8-9)

The prophet promises that for Judah God will raise up “David their king.” An eschatological figure, possibly endowed with extraordinary powers, is not envisioned here. The prophet looks for an idealized Davidic scion, through whom the dynasty and the nation will be restored.⁶ Ezekiel hopes for essentially the same thing, though he paints the picture with a different brush:

⁶ Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition*, 32-34.

23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. (Ezek. 34:23-24)

24 My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. 25 They shall dwell in the land where your fathers dwelt that I gave to my servant Jacob; they and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever; and David my servant shall be their prince forever. (Ezek. 37:24-25)

Ezekiel longs for a new David, a “shepherd,” “king,” and “prince” who will faithfully lead God’s people. The epithet “shepherd,” of course, recalls the Mosaic prayer that God provide a shepherd for his people (Num 27:17: “who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd”), while the epithet “prince” probably implies a subordination of Judah’s monarch, a subordination to God, who is the true King. (And, in any event, “prince” does not preclude kingly or Davidic function and identification, for Solomon himself is so designated in 1 Kgs 11:34.⁷)

The prophecies of the second Temple and exilic periods anticipated the coming of a king who would fulfill the Davidic ideal—a king who would obey Torah, reestablish and defend in Jerusalem true worship, and bring about an everlasting and unprecedented era of peace and prosperity. Although not yet “messianism,” these hopes would ultimately prove to be a step toward the emergence of messianism.

The evidence surveyed above suggests that in some circles in the latter stages of the first Temple period a sort of “Davidism” had emerged, in which hopes were expressed for a return of a David-like king. Idealization of Israel’s king intensified in the exilic and post-exilic periods, and, very importantly, an idealization of the high priesthood also took place. The idealization of the two anointed ones—the kingly and the priestly—would also play an important role in the later development of Jewish (and Christian) messianism.

Hopes of diarchic restoration are implicit in Haggai:

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God . . . 14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked

⁷ Pomykala (*The Davidic Dynasty Tradition*, 28) plausibly suggests that the title “prince” implies subordination to a greater power, which for Israel is the LORD. Because of Solomon’s sin, the ten northern tribes will defect, with the result that Solomon’s and his successor’s regal authority will be reduced.

on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God . . . (Hag 1:12-14)

2 “Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, 3 ‘Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? 4 Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD ; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts . . . (Hag 2:2-4)

Zerubbabel the governor was of Davidic descent, while Joshua the High Priest was a descendant of Zadok. Because both “obeyed the voice of the Lord,” God “stirred up” their spirit to rebuild the Temple and purify worship. In anticipation of the completion of this task, the prophet announces the overthrow of Judah’s enemies and the elevation of Zerubbabel:

20 The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, 21 “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, 22 and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his fellow. 23 On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of She-alti-el, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts.” (Hag 2:20-23)

The promise to make Zerubbabel “like a signet ring” (compare Jer 22:24) probably means that Judah’s governor will act as God’s vice regent in the anticipated new world order. Although it is too much to claim that Haggai’s vision of restoration is “messianic,”⁸ the association of the exaltation of a Jewish king and high priest with a major eschatological event lays important groundwork for future messianic speculations.

Visions of diarchic restoration are explicit in Zechariah:

6 And the angel of the LORD enjoined Joshua, 7 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those

⁸ The editor of the notes on “Haggai” in B. M. Metzger and R. E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 1217, summarizes the prophet’s message as the hope that “God would . . . establish Zerubbabel as the messianic king on the throne of David.” Use here of the adjective “messianic” is imprecise and misleading. In my opinion Haggai’s (and Zechariah’s) vision of restoration represents a mid-point between the older hope of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty the later hope of a coming Messiah.

who are standing here. 8 Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. 9 For behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. 10 In that day, says the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.” (Zech 3:6-10)

Reference in v. 8 to God’s “servant the Branch” (jAmRx; cf. 6:12) recalls Jer 23:5: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (cf. 33:15). The epithet, “Branch of David” (dwd jmx), appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls (see below). When God brings his servant, he will remove the guilt of the land and prosperity will follow.

Passages in Zechariah 4 emphasize the duality of Judah’s political restoration:

2 And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it. 3 And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” 4 And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” (Zech 4:2-5)

11 Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” 12 And a second time I said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the oil is poured out?” 13 He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” 14 Then he said, “These are the two anointed [lit. two sons of oil] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” (Zech 4:11-14)

The “two sons of oil who stand by the Lord of the whole earth” are Zerubbabel and Joshua. The epithet “sons of oil” is not messianic, rather it hints at the fruitfulness of the land and the prosperity that will ensue. Nevertheless, this epithet could evoke messianic ideas, as may have been the case in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (i.e., 4Q254). Of interest also is the picture of these two figures standing by the Lord of the whole earth. This picture connotes a cosmic and universal dimension that moves beyond the older and less ambitious visions of a restored Judah who triumphs over her enemies.

The restorative hopes of Haggai and Zechariah are in essential continuity with the oracles considered above. Although it would be claiming too much to describe their vision as a “messianic” one, it is fair to say that their distinctive ideas—diarchism, a more pronounced eschatology, grander ideas of worldwide exaltation—made vital contributions to the Old Testament matrix upon which later messianic expectation would be based.

II. INTERTESTAMENTAL EXPRESSIONS OF MESSIANISM

It is during the so-called intertestamental period that the transition from hope of restoring the dynasty (with a succession of Davidic kings) to messianic expectation takes place. What may be regarded as “messianism,” as opposed simply to the hope of Israel’s king being restored, is the expectation of the coming of an divinely anointed and empowered figure who inaugurates something dramatically new, something that even exceeds the idealized reigns of David and son Solomon. When this anointed king comes, no successor is expected. Everything will forever be changed. Some traditions envision judgment taking place at this time (as in Daniel 12), with history as we have known it coming to an end. Other traditions envision history ending after the reign of Israel’s Messiah (as in 4 Ezra).

The transition to messianism, of course, did not take place everywhere at the same time and in the same way. “Davidism” never actually died out, probably not until well into the Common Era. But in the late intertestamental period, hopes of royal restoration began taking on new characteristics—characteristics, which through hindsight we now can see represent important steps in the development of “messianism.” One might say that “Davidism” begins to evolve into “messianism,” as idealism begins to yield to apocalyptic surrealism. With this surrealism comes diversity of expectations.⁹

There are traces of Davidism, perhaps even messianism, in the LXX. One immediately thinks of Ezek 34:25, which in the Hebrew reads: “I will make with them a covenant of peace,” but in the Greek reads: “I will make with David a covenant of peace.” The expectation that the eschatological “David” will (re)build the Temple may be attested in 2 Sam 7:11, where the Hebrew reads: “the Lord announces to you that the Lord will make a house for you,” but in the Greek it reads: “the Lord announces to you that you will build a house for him.” If these elements are indeed traces of messianism, then they may be the oldest elements.

Some have claimed that very early messianism is present in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben

⁹ Important literature includes: J. Neusner et al. (eds.), *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); I. Gruenwald, “From Priesthood to Messianism: The Anti-Priestly Polemic and the Messianic Factor,” in Gruenwald et al. (eds.), *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity* (TSAJ 32; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1992) 75-93; W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1998); idem, *Messianism among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2003).

Sira (ca. 180 B.C.E.).¹⁰ Frequently appealed to is 47:11: “The Lord forgave his sins and exalted forever his horn, and gave to him a covenant of kingship and his throne he established over Jerusalem.” What is conspicuously missing is reference to the promise of a son who would sit on David’s throne forever. Pomykala rightly interprets Ben Sira’s reference to David as historical, not eschatological or messianic. Indeed he correctly observes that Ben Sira transfers the functions and prerogatives of the king to the High Priest.¹¹ There is therefore no Davidic messianism in Ben Wisdom.

The *Psalms of Solomon*,¹² derives from a group with many affinities to the Pharisees.¹³ In chap. 17 (and the later, secondary chap. 18) we have perhaps the earliest explicit expression of messianism. Passages of major importance include the following:

Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel, and swore to him about his descendants forever, that his kingdom should not fail before you. (v. 4)

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. (v. 21)

He will gather a holy people who he will lead in righteousness; and he will judge the tribes of the people that have been made holy by the Lord their God. (v. 26)

He will distribute them upon the land according to their tribes . . . (v. 28)

And he will purge Jerusalem (and make it) holy as it was even from the beginning. (v. 30b)

And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah. (v. 32)

And he himself (will be) free from sin, (in order) to rule a great people. He will expose officials and drive out sinners by the strength of his word. And he will not weaken in his days, (relying) upon his God, for God made him powerful in the Holy Spirit and wise in the counsel of understanding, with strength and

¹⁰ See M. R. Lehman, “Ben Sira and the Qumran Literature,” *RevQ* 9 (1961) 103-16; J. D. Martin, “Ben Sira’s Hymn to the Fathers: A Messianic Perspective,” in A. S. van der Woude (ed.), *Crises and Perspectives* (OTS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1986) 107-23; S. M. Olyan, “Ben Sira’s Relationship to the Priesthood,” *HTR* 80 (1987) 281-86.

¹¹ Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty*, 131-52.

¹² G. L. Davenport, “The ‘Anointed of the Lord’ in Psalms of Solomon 17,” in J. J. Collins and G. W. Nickelsburg (eds.), *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980) 67-92; M. de Jonge, “Psalms of Solomon,” in de Jonge (ed.), *Outside the Old Testament* (Cambridge Commentaries on the Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); idem, “The Expectation of the Future in the Psalms of Solomon,” *Neot* 23 (1989) 93-117.

¹³ G. W. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 204.

righteousness. (vv. 36-37)

Faithfully and righteously shepherding the Lord's flock, he will not let any of them stumble in their pasture. (v. 40b)

This is the beauty of the king of Israel which God knew, to raise him over the house of Israel to discipline it. (v. 42)

These passages, and others not cited, allude to 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 11, Isaiah's Servant hymns, and the promise of a righteous king in Jer 23:5. In *Pss. Sol.* 17:31 we are told that the nations will come "from the ends of the earth to see his glory." The passage alludes to Isa 55:5 (and perhaps 56:6-7) and reminds us of Solomon's fame (a tradition in circulation, as attested by Jesus in Matt 12:42 = Luke 11:31). The allusion to Jer 23:5 is qualified by a further allusion to Isa 54:13, when it says that the expected Messiah will be "taught by God." His fidelity to Torah is underscored elsewhere in *Palms of Solomon* 17. This theme will become greatly embellished in the later rabbinic writings, where in some traditions the Messiah is portrayed as a great Scripture scholar.

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of all is *Psalms of Solomon* 17's reference to Israel's awaited king as "the Lord Messiah." The Greek mss read *basileu;*" *aujtw'n cristo;*" *kuvrio*", though modern editions are frequently emended to read *basileu;*" *aujtw'n cristo;*" *kurivou* ("their king is the Lord's Messiah"). Robert Wright finds no compelling reason to emend the text in this way, noting that the reading "the Lord Messiah" is found in all Greek and Syriac texts.¹⁴ Moreover, the appearance of *cristo;*" *kuvrio*" in Luke 2:11 demonstrates the messianic function of this epithet, while references to Herod the Great and Herod Agrippa as *basileu;*" *kuvrio*" ("the lord king") demonstrate that "lord" can function in a purely honorific manner. Wright rightly comments that the "assumption that *christos kurios* was an impossible combination in the mouth of a devout Judean Jew is to read *christos* in terms of its meaning for later Christology and not in terms of its use as a political title in its own time."¹⁵ Thus, calling the expected Davidic king the "Lord Messiah" confers great honor, but not divinity on this figure.

Other Pseudepigrapha portray messianic figures in a variety of ways.¹⁶ In the

¹⁴ R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols., ABRL 13-14; New York: Doubleday, 1983-85) 2.667-68 n. z.

¹⁵ Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," 668 n. z. Wright also points out that in later rabbinic literature this epithet is applied to Simon ben Kosiba.

¹⁶ Important literature includes P. G. R. de Villiers, "The Messiah and Messiahs in Jewish Apocalyptic," *Neot* 12 (1978) 75-110; J. H. Charlesworth, "The Concept of the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha," *ANRW* II/19.1 (1979) 189-218; M. de Jonge, "Two Messiahs in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs?" in J. W. van Henten et al. (eds.), *Tradition and Reinterpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (SPB 36; Leiden: Brill, 1986) 150-62; repr. in de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian*

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, whose dating and history of composition are quite difficult, priestly and royal figures are exalted, perhaps reflecting the diarchic messianism of Haggai and Zechariah. According to *T. Issachar* 5:7-8:

And Levi and Judah were glorified by the Lord among the sons of Jacob. For the Lord made choice among them: and to one he gave the priesthood, and to the other the kingship. Therefore, obey them . . .¹⁷

Whereas this passage looks to Israel's past, *T. Naph.* 8:2 looks to the future:

Accordingly, command your children to unite with Levi and Judah, for through Judah salvation will arise for Israel and in him Jacob will be blessed.

Diarchism seems quite clear in *T. Sim.* 7:1-2:

And now, my children, obey Levi and by Judah you will be redeemed. And do not exalt yourselves over these two tribes, because from them will arise for you the salvation of God. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as High Priest and from Judah someone as King . . .¹⁸

Other passages could be cited. However, as Pomykala has shown, it is not clear to what extent the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* originally contained Davidic messianism.¹⁹ Hopes of diarchic restoration seem clear enough, but messianic elements, if any, are vague.

4 Ezra, a late first-century C.E. text, contains two important references to the Messiah (Latin: *unctus*).²⁰ Other passages, which refer to the "Servant" (in Semitic texts, though, probably secondarily, *filius meus* in the Latin) include 13:32, 37, 52; and 14:9. 4 Ezra 7:27-30 and 12:32-34 read:

27 And every one who has been delivered from the evils that I have foretold shall see my wonders. 28 For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are

Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays (NovTSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1991) 191-203; M. A. Knibb, "Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha in the Light of the Scrolls," *DSD* 2 (1995) 165-84.

¹⁷ The translations are based on H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1.782-828.

¹⁸ The concluding portion ("God and man. He will save all the nations and the people of Israel") is probably a later Christian interpolation. Kee ("Testaments," 787) only brackets off "God and man" as an interpolation.

¹⁹ See the helpful critical discussion in Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty*, 246-55.

²⁰ M. E. Stone, "The Concept of the Messiah in 4 Ezra," in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity* (Studies in the History of Religions 14; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 295-312; idem, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 207-13; B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in Charlesworth (ed.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1.517-59.

with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. 29 And after these years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. 30 And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings; so that no one shall be left.

32 this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak to them; he will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will cast up before them their contemptuous dealings. 33 For first he will set them living before his judgment seat, and when he has reproved them, then he will destroy them. 34 But he will deliver in mercy the remnant of my people, those who have been saved throughout my borders, and he will make them joyful until the end comes, the day of judgment, of which I spoke to you at the beginning.

In the first passage the Messiah reigns four hundred years, thus concluding human history as we know it. It is interesting that human history does not end with his appearance, but ends *after his reign*. In the second passage the Messiah is explicitly identified as arising “from the posterity of David.” In a manner reminiscent of *Psalms of Solomon* 17, this Davidic Messiah will denounce and eliminate ungodliness. Consistent with the first passage, the messianic reign will bring joy “until the end comes, the day of judgment.”

Most of the terms used in reference to messianic figures in second Temple Judaism are attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The obvious terms include jyCm , ayCn , jmx dywd , and fbC . Less certain, often disputed, epithets include Nb (and its many variations: abrahlad hrb , la yd hrb , Nwylo rb , rwkb Nb), rCbM , and ahla ryjb . The messianism of the Scrolls has been extensively discussed by scholars, and with the recent release of all remaining texts, mostly from Qumran’s fourth cave, we can expect the discussion to continue unabated.²¹

²¹ The principal literature includes K. G. Kuhn, “The Two Messiahs of Aaron and Israel,” *NTS* 1 (1954-55) 168-80; repr. in K. Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1957; repr. New York: Crossroad, 1992) 54-64, 256-59; A. S. van der Woude, *Die messianischen Vorstellungen der Gemeinde von Qumrân* (SSN 3; Assen: van Gorcum, 1957); A. Caquot, “Le messianisme Qumrânien,” in M. Delcor (ed.), *Qumrân: Sa piété, sa théologie et son milieu* (BETL 46; Paris and Gembloux: Duculot and Leuven University Press, 1978) 231-47; “Messianism, Resurrection, and Eschatology at Qumran and in the New Testament,” in E. Ulrich and J. C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) 235-56; J. C. VanderKam, “Jubilees and the Priestly Messiah of Qumran,” *RevQ* 13 (1988) 353-65; idem, “Messianism in the Scrolls,” in Ulrich and VanderKam (eds.), *The Community of the Renewed Covenant*, 211-34; J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABRL 10; New York: Doubleday, 1995); C. A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (AGJU 25;

I and a colleague have in a recent publication reviewed all of the messianic passages (certain, as well as possible).²² I have no intention here of reviewing all of the texts. Instead, I shall summarize a few of the principal issues and suggest at what points the messianism of the Scrolls coincides with the messianism of other literature.

The messianic texts of Qumran fall into two basic groupings: the sectarian texts that evidently reveal what the men of the New Covenant anticipated,²³ and the other texts, which are non-sectarian, or at least non-Qumranian in origin, that probably tell us about the views of other Jews and Jewish groups from various parts of Palestine. Some of the more sensational texts belong to this second group. Two will be briefly considered.

4Q521 speaks of a “Messiah, whom heaven and earth will obey.” The text goes on to describe things expected to take place: God’s “Spirit will hover over the poor, and he will renew the faithful with his strength.” He will free prisoners, restore the sight of the blind, heal the wounded, make alive the dead, and proclaim good news to the poor. The parallels to Jesus’ reply to the imprisoned John the Baptist have been pointed out (Matt 11:5 = Luke 7:22).²⁴ Jesus’ reply, like 4Q521, is heavily dependent upon words and phrases drawn from Isa 26:19; 35:5-6; and 61:1-2. The parallels suggest at the very least that Jesus’ reply would have been understood as an implicit claim to a messianic role

Leiden: Brill, 1995) 53-181; idem, “A Note on the ‘First-Born Son’ of 4Q369,” *DSD* 2 (1995) 185-201; F. García Martínez, “Messianic Hopes in the Qumran Writings,” in F. García Martínez and J. Treballe Barrera, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 159-89; idem, “Two Messianic Figures in the Qumran Texts,” in D. W. Parry and S. D. Ricks (eds.), *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Conference on the Texts from the Judean Desert, Jerusalem, 30 April 1995* (STDJ 20; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 14-40; J. H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern S. Oegeman (eds.), *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1998); J. Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran: Königliche, priesterliche und prophetische Messiasvorstellungen in den Schriftfunden von Qumran* (WUNT II/104; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1998).

²² M. G. Abegg Jr. and C. A. Evans, “Messianic Passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Charlesworth, Lichtenberger, and Oegema (eds.), *Qumran-Messianism*, 191-203. For recent bibliography, see *Qumran-Messianism*, 204-14.

²³ I accept the traditional opinion that the sectarian Scrolls were produced by the Essenes.

²⁴ For principal literature, see É. Puech, “Une apocalypse messianique (4Q521),” *RevQ* 15 (1992) 475-522; J. D. Tabor and M. O. Wise, “On ‘Resurrection’ and the Synoptic Gospel Tradition: A Preliminary Study,” *JSP* 10 (1992) 150-61; R. Bergmeier, “Beobachtungen zu 4Q521 f 2, ii 1-13,” *ZDMG* 145 (1995) 38-48; J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 117-22; M. Becker, “4Q521 und die Gesalbten,” *RevQ* 18 (1997) 73-96.

(though whether principally in a royal or prophetic capacity remains an open question).

4Q246 is an Aramaic text, in which a seer evidently interprets a vision, or dream, to a king. Although it is disputed, many think that the “son of God” and “son of the Most High” figure, whose “kingdom will be an eternal kingdom,” is a messianic figure.²⁵ Again, the parallels with the New Testament are suggestive. This time, however, the parallels help with the interpretation of the Qumran text. The angelic announcement in Luke 1:32-35 offers several striking parallels to 4Q246. Because the angel’s epithets are obviously intended to convey messianic import in the context of the Gospel of Luke, it is reasonable to assume that the epithets of 4Q246 do also. Thus, although the anticipated actions of the figures envisioned in Luke and 4Q246 are significantly different, the common language suggests that both writings are speaking of the Messiah.

The portrait of the Messiah in the sectarian writings is consistent and makes use of terminology such as “Messiah” (CD 12:23–31:1; 14:19 [= 4Q266 18 iii 12]; 1QS 9:11; 1QSa 2:11-15, 20-21; 4Q252 1 v 3-4), “branch of David” (4Q161 7-10 iii 22; 4Q174 1-3 i 11; 4Q252 1 v 3-4; 4Q285 5 3-4), and “Prince” or “Prince of (all) the congregation” (CD 7:19-20 [= 4Q266 3 iv 9]; 1QSb 5:20; 1QM 5:1; 4Q161 2–6 ii 19; 4Q285 4 2, 4 6; 5 4; 6 2; 4Q376 1 iii 1). In the *Damascus* and *Community Rule* documents the coming of the Messiah is linked with the coming of the High Priest (i.e. the “anointed one of Aaron”). His cooperation with the High Priest is strongly implied in 1QSa and 1QSb. His bellicosity is made clear in 4Q285, where evidently he meets on the field of battle and slays the leader of the Kittim, who may have been understood to refer to the Roman Emperor.²⁶ It is thought by some that 4Q285 is part of the *War* document.

The Messiah of the Dead Sea Scrolls is similar at points to the Messiah of *Psalms of Solomon* 17 and 4 Ezra. However, the former portrayal is less exalted and is more closely linked to the High Priest and the legal, priestly interests of the community of the New Covenant. In the latter portrayals nothing is said about the role of the High Priest.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Qumran’s Messiah is his association with the restored priesthood. He cooperates with the High Priest, perhaps is even subordinate to

²⁵ É. Puech, “Fragment d’une apocalypse en araméen (4Q246 = pseudo-Dand) et le ‘royaume de Dieu’,” *RB* 99 (1992) 98-131; J. A. Fitzmyer, “The ‘Son of God’ Document from Qumran,” *Bib* 74 (1993) 153-74; F. García Martínez, “The Eschatological Figure of 4Q246,” in García Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic: Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran* (STDJ 9; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 162-79; J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 154-72. Collins believes the “son of God” is a messianic figure; Fitzmyer thinks he is a Jewish crown prince.

²⁶ The mistaken notion that 4Q285 depicts a Messiah slain by the Romans has been put to rest by M. G. Abegg Jr., “Messianic Hope and 4Q285: A Reassessment,” *JBL* 113 (1994) 81-91.

him,²⁷ and plays on the whole a relatively minor role (at least so far as the extant materials seem to indicate). He is so closely linked with the High Priest that the two are frequently referred to as the “anointed of Aaron and of Israel” (as seen especially in the *Damascus* document). In most of these passages “anointed” is in the singular, though in one the word is plural (1QS 9:11).²⁸ It is from these passages that a great deal of excitement arose in the early years following the discovery of the Scrolls. Many thought it surprising that the people of Qumran expected two Messiahs. But eventually it was pointed out that there is nothing strange here at all; Qumran’s diarchic messianism simply reflects the diarchism of Israel’s scriptures and history.²⁹ Following the model of David the king and Zadok the priest, it was expected that God would someday raise up an anointed High Priest and an anointed Prince. At that time prophecy will be fulfilled, Israel restored, and the wicked Empire destroyed.

III. “MESSIANIC FIGURES” IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

The messianic expectations of literature in late antiquity did not remain theoretical only; in some instances actual attempts to fulfill these prophecies were undertaken. Our best source for this period of time is Josephus,³⁰ though unfortunately he avoids

²⁷ This claim, which is frequently made or assumed, is disputed.

²⁸ Talmon, “The Concept of *Maṣṣ’iah*,” 105 n. 64. In reference to the passages where “anointed” is singular, Talmon rightly remarks: “the distributive singular here signifies the plural.”

²⁹ See J. J. M. Roberts, “The Old Testament’s Contribution to Messianic Expectations,” and S. Talmon, “The Concept of *Maṣṣ’iah* and Messianism in Early Judaism,” in Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah*, 39-51 and 79-115, respectively. Both scholars rightly emphasize the diarchic (or binary) aspect of Israel’s leadership envisioned in the Old Testament and the Scrolls. See also C. A. Evans, “‘The Two Sons of Oil’: Early Evidence of Messianic Interpretation of Zechariah 4:14 in 4Q254 4 2,” in D. W. Parry and E. Ulrich (eds.), *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (STDJ 30; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 566-75; idem, “Diarchic Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Messianism of Jesus of Nazareth,” in L. H. Schiffman, E. Tov, and J. C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery. Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000) 558-67; idem, “Qumran’s Messiah: How Important is He?” in J. J. Collins and R. Kugler (eds.), *Religion at Qumran* (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 135-49; idem, “The Messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Hess and Carroll R. (eds.), *Israel’s Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 85-101.

³⁰ The principal literature includes M. de Jonge, “The Use of the Word ‘Anointed’ in the Time of Jesus,” *NovT* 8 (1966) 132-48; D. Hill, “Jesus and Josephus’ Messianic

discussion of messianism. All that can be gleaned from him are several biased accounts of the failures of would-be deliverers. However, as jaundiced as the views of Josephus are, his accounts are helpful nonetheless. At one place Josephus hints at the messianic hopes some of his countrymen entertained. In a context in which he discusses the factors that led to the outbreak of war in 66 C.E. Josephus states:

But what more than all else incited them to the war was an ambiguous oracle, likewise found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world. This they understood to mean someone of their own race, and many of their wise men went astray in their interpretation of it. The oracle, however, in reality signified the sovereignty of Vespasian, who was proclaimed Emperor on Jewish soil.³¹ (*J.W.* 6.5.4 §312-314)

To which scriptural oracle did Josephus refer? The two most likely candidates are Gen 49:10 (“the scepter shall not depart from Judah”) and Num 24:17 (“a star [LXX: a[st]ron] shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel”). Of the two, the latter is the most likely. The fact that Josephus tells us in this context that one of the omens that incited the Jewish people to revolt was a star (a[st]ron) in the sky (*J.W.* 6.5.3 §289) suggests that this is so. Moreover, there are several texts from antiquity that either quote or allude to Num 24:17 for support for eschatological and/or messianic ideas (e.g., *T. Judah* 24:1-6; 1QM 11:4-9; Matt 2:1-12; possibly Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 1.52 §290; *De praem. et poen.* 16 §95).

During the rebellion against Rome there were two men in particular who stand out as possible messianic candidates. Josephus tells us that one Menahem (*ca.* 66 C.E.), either the son or the grandson of Judas the Galilean, plundered Herod’s armory at Masada, arming his followers as well as other “brigands,” and then “returned like a king [basileuv]” to Jerusalem, became the leader of the revolution, and directed the siege of the palace.” His followers occupied the Roman barracks and eventually caught and killed Ananias the High Priest. As a result of his accomplishments, Josephus tells us,

Prophets,” in E. Best and R. McL. Wilson (eds.), *Text and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 143-54; R. A. Horsley, “Popular Messianic Movements around the Time of Jesus,” *CBQ* 46 (1984) 47-95; R. A. Horsley and J. S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (New Voices in Biblical Studies; Minneapolis: Winston, 1985; repr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); S. Talmon, “Types of Messianic Expectation at the Turn of the Era,” in Talmon (ed.), *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986) 202-24; T. Rajak, “Hasmonean Kingship and the Invention of Tradition,” in P. Bilde et al. (eds.), *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship* (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 7; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996) 99-115.

³¹ Trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus III* (LCL 210; London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928) 467.

Menahem, believing himself unrivalled, became an “insufferable tyrant [tuvranno].” Finally, insurgents loyal to Eleazar son of Ananias the High Priest rose up against him. Menahem, “arrayed in royal [basilikh/] apparel,” was attacked while in the Temple. Although he initially managed to escape and hide, he was eventually caught, dragged out into the open, tortured, and put to death (*J.W.* 2.17.8–9 §433-448).

The most important leader of the rebellion was Simon bar Giora (Aramaic, arwyg rb = “son of the proselyte”), a man from Gerasa (or Jerash).³² Simon distinguished himself with military prowess and cunning (*J.W.* 2.19.2 §521; 4.6.1 §353; 4.9.4 §510; 4.9.5 §514-520). He drew a large following by “proclaiming liberty for slaves and rewards for the free” (*J.W.* 4.9.3 §508; 4.9.7 §534 [“forty thousand followers”]).³³ His army was “subservient to his command as to a king [basileva]” (*J.W.* 4.9.4 §510). Josephus avers that early on in his career Simon had shown signs of being tyrannical (*J.W.* 2.22.2 §652 [turannei'n]; 4.9.3 §508 [oJ de; turanniw'n]; 5.1.3 §11; 7.2.2 §32 [ejturavnhsen]; 7.8.1 §265 [tuvrannon]). Simon subjugated the whole of Idumea (*J.W.* 4.9.6 §521-528). The ruling priests, in consultation with the Idumeans and many of the inhabitants of the city, decided to invite Simon into Jerusalem to protect the city from John of Gischala (*J.W.* 4.9.11 §570-576). Simon entered the city and took command in the spring of 69 C.E. (*J.W.* 4.9.12 §577). Among the leaders of the rebellion “Simon in particular was regarded with reverence and awe . . . each was quite prepared to take his very own life had he given the order” (*J.W.* 5.7.3 §309). By his authority, coins were minted declaring the “redemption of Zion.”³⁴ Finally defeated and for a time in hiding, Simon, dressed in white tunics and a purple mantle, made a dramatic appearance before the Romans on the very spot where the Temple had stood (*J.W.* 7.1.2 §29). He was placed in chains (*J.W.* 7.2.2 §36), sent to Italy (*J.W.* 7.5.3 §118), put on display as part of the victory celebration in Rome (*J.W.* 7.5.6 §154), and was finally executed (*J.W.* 7.5.6

³² O. Michel, “Studien zu Josephus: Simon bar Giora,” *NTS* 14 (1968) 402-8.

³³ The promise of liberty may have been based in part on an eschatological understanding of the biblical jubilee, as in Lev 25:13 and Isa 61:1-2. These texts are combined in 11QMelchizedek and may have influenced Jesus’ preaching as well (cf. Luke 4:16-30).

³⁴ B. Kanael, “The Historical Background of the Coins ‘Year Four . . . of the Redemption of Zion,’” *BASOR* 129 (1953) 18-20. Kanael argues that Simon bar Giora minted the copper coins whose legend reads: “Year Four of the Redemption of Zion,” in contrast to John of Gischala’s silver coins, minted earlier, whose legend reads: “Year Three of the Freedom of Zion.” He claims further that this difference “throws light on the differences between Simon and John: John strove only for political freedom, while Bar Giora stood at the head of a Messianic movement; hence his coins bear the inscription ‘redemption of Zion’” (p. 20). I doubt that this difference in wording can support the weight of such an inference.

§155).³⁵

Whether or not Menahem or Simon was actually regarded as the answer to Israel's messianic hope is impossible to determine. It is probable that some of their contemporaries thought so, while many others thought not. Not surprisingly, scholars are divided on this question. In my opinion, men like Menahem, Simon, and others were viewed as messianic figures by some of their following, but this form of messianism was probably not of the more esoteric and exalted variety (which is what we moderns often have in mind when we think of Jewish messianism).

Another important figure in late antiquity was Simon ben Kosiba, the leader of the great revolt in 132–135 during the reign of Emperor Hadrian.³⁶ Although initially successful, the revolt was suppressed with heavy losses on both sides. Roman, Christian, and rabbinic stories provide details of varying degrees of historical worth. Most of the rabbinic tradition is pure legend and fancy.

One important rabbinic detail is the tradition where it is said that Rabbi Aqiba recognized Simon as the Messiah (y. *Ta'an.* 4.5 = *Lam. Rab.* 2:2 §4). But Simon is never called "Messiah" in the surviving letters and coins from this period; he is only called "Prince" (אֲדֹנָי). Was Simon regarded by some of his following as Israel's Messiah?

In his first *Apology* Justin Martyr explicitly refers to Simon ben Kosiba. What he says provides important evidence that Simon was indeed regarded by some as Israel's Messiah. The prophetic books, says Justin, "are also in the possession of all Jews throughout the world; but they, though they read, do not understand what is said, but count us foes and enemies; and, like yourselves, they kill and punish us whenever they

³⁵ Still standing in Rome today, not far from the Forum, is the Arch of Titus in which this victory parade is depicted. On one side of the inside of the arch Titus and his chariot and horses are depicted, on the other side of the inside of the arch the Jewish captives, along with the menorah, golden trumpets, and other utensils from the Temple.

³⁶ G. S. Aleksandrov, "The Role of 'Aqiba in the Bar-Kokhba Rebellion," *REJ* 132 (1973) 65-77; P. Schäfer, "R. Aqiva und Bar Kokhba," in Schäfer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (AGJU 15; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 65-121; idem, "Rabbi Aqiva and Bar Kokhba," in W. S. Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Volume II* (BJS 9; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980) 113-30; idem, *Der Bar Kokhba-Aufstand: Studien zum zweiten jüdischen Krieg gegen Rom* (TSAJ 1; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1981); idem, "Hadrian's Policy in Judaea and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: A Reassessment," in P. R. Davies and R. T. White (eds.), *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History* (JSOTSup 100; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 281-303; B. Isaac and A. Oppenheimer, "The Revolt of Bar Kokhba: Ideology and Modern Scholarship," *JJS* 36 (1985) 33-60; Adele Reinhartz, "Rabbinic Perceptions of Simeon bar Kosiba," *JSJ* 20 (1989) 171-94; C. A. Evans, "Was Simon ben Kosiba Recognized as Messiah?" in Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (AGJU 25; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 183-211.

have the power, as you can well believe. For in the Jewish war which lately raged, Barchochebas [barcwcevba"],³⁷ the leader of the revolt of the Jews, gave orders that Christians alone should be led to cruel punishments, unless they should deny Jesus the Christ and blaspheme" (*I Apol.* 31.5-6).³⁸

It seems that Christians' confession of Jesus as Messiah squarely contradicted what was being claimed of Simon ben Kosiba. Hence Jewish Christians were the object of intense pressure. For this reason and others, Peter Schäfer very cautiously concludes that Aqiba may very well have recognized Simon as Messiah.³⁹ However, numismatist Leo Mildenberg rejects a messianic identification for Simon. But he does so, I believe, because of his assumed, but unexamined, definition of Messiah. According to Mildenberg: "Even though this messianic pun [viz. bar Kosiba/bar Kokhba] may have been current during the war, the Jewish fighters and partisans should not be pictured as having actually believed that Shim'on ben Kosiba was the Messiah; the Judaeen Desert documents make clear that the Jews knew their leader was a man like themselves. The creative pun on the leader's name in Aramaic would simply have given the Jews a popular rallying cry for their cause."⁴⁰

This statement immediately raises two questions: (1) What kind of "Messiah" does Mildenberg have in mind? Does he assume that there was a single, widely accepted concept of the Messiah and that this Messiah was not a man like other men?⁴¹ I find this

³⁷ In Justin and Eusebius Bar Kokhba's name appears as Ba ; r Cwcevba " (with or without a space), or simply as Cwcevba " or Coceba ' ". Jerome spells it *Barchochebas* and *Bar-chochabas*.

³⁸ *PG* 6.376-77.

³⁹ P. Schäfer, "R. Aqiva und Bar Kokhba," in Schäfer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (AGJU 15; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 65-121; idem, "Rabbi Aqiva and Bar Kokhba," in W. S. Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Volume II* (BJS 9; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980) 113-30. Less cautious is Reinhartz ("Rabbinic Perceptions," 192) who speaks of "irrefutable evidence for the messianic identification of Bar Kosiba." I believe that the evidence is compelling, but hardly irrefutable.

⁴⁰ L. Mildenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Typos: Monographien zur antiken Numismatik 6; Frankfurt am Main: Sauerländer, 1984) 76. See also idem, "Bar Kokhba Coins and Documents," *HSCP* 84 (1980) 311-35.

⁴¹ This is often the kind of thinking entertained by Christians, who uncritically and anachronistically define Jewish messianism in terms of New Testament christology. New Testament christology represents expressions of Jewish messianism to be sure, but it is not comprehensive. Features of New Testament christology were wholly unacceptable to many Jews, while many Jewish messianic ideas never found their way into the matrix of New Testament christology. For major works sensitive to the pluralism of messianic

thinking very problematic. If Josephus in 69 C.E. could apply Num 24:17 (the “ambiguous oracle”) to General Vespasian—a foreign conqueror of Israel, why could not Aqiba in 133 or 134 C.E. apply this oracle to Simon ben Kosiba—a Torah-observant Jew who hoped to liberate Israel? Simon’s messiahship seems to have been a very earth-bound, David-like rule intended to liberate Israel from Gentile oppressors.⁴² (2) Would an identification of Simon with the star of Num 24:17 be no more than a “popular rallying cry”? On the contrary, would it not imply much more, at least to many of Simon’s followers? Given the messianic interpretation of Num 24:7 at Qumran and in the Targums it seems that calling Simon the “son of the star” would imply that he was indeed regarded as the Messiah (however that is to be defined).

We should hardly be surprised that in the aftermath of the collapse of the Herodian dynasty and the imposition of direct Roman rule, Palestinian Jews began yearning for liberation. This liberation, it was believed by many, could only come when the scion of David appeared. In answer to this yearning some men stepped forward and through charisma, courage, and skill persuaded some (and sometimes many) that they were God’s anointed, ready to drive out the Romans and restore Israel. Their activities (and catastrophic failures) would ultimately shape the messianism inherited and redefined by a messianically-oriented Christianity and a Judaism that increasingly marginalized the messianic hope.

IV. MESSIANIC IDEAS IN CHRISTIANITY AND RABBINIC JUDAISM

It is impossible in the scope of the present essay to do justice to the messianism of the New Testament. The subject is very complicated and the secondary literature is enormous.⁴³ I can only touch on a few points that in my opinion justify placing Jesus

ideas, see Neusner et al. (eds.), *Judaisms and Their Messiahs*; and Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah*.

⁴² This is the view of Schäfer, “Rabbi Aqiva and Bar Kokhba,” 120; and Reinhartz, “Rabbinic Perceptions,” 190

⁴³ The principal literature includes R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (SBT 17; London: SCM Press; Naperville: Allenson, 1970); U. B. Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn in jüdischen Apokalypsen und in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972); O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975); I. H. Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977); C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977); M. Saeboe, “Messianism in Chronicles? Some Remarks to the Old Testament Background of the New Testament Christology,” *HBT* 2 (1980) 85-109; M. de Jonge, “The Earliest Christian Use of *Christos*: Some Suggestions,” *NTS* 32 (1986) 321-43; idem, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988);

fully into the context of Jewish Palestinian messianism. Such contextualization will also clarify important strains of christological development in early Christianity. The following four points need to be made:

1. The essence of Jesus' message is the proclamation of the kingdom, or reign of God (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 11:20). Jesus' message is theocentric and only secondarily, almost incidentally, is it messianic. Jesus is the Messiah of God *because of his task*; he is not assigned the task of proclaiming God's reign *because he is the Messiah*. Christians would eventually come to think in terms of the second alternative, with the result that the actual message of the historical Jesus tended to fade from view. Interest in Jesus himself eventually took the place of the older theocentrism that characterized Jesus' teaching.

The Synoptic Gospels (but not the Johannine Gospel) attest this theocentrism. This is especially so in the case of Mark. Mark's Gospel is a biography in the Jewish sense of narrating the story of God's redemptive work.⁴⁴ In contrast to Hellenistic biography, which emphasizes the virtues of its heroes and heroines, Israelite biography emphasizes God's call of the central character. Israelite biography (as attested in so many narrative books) is interested in the central character's mission, in his achieving his God-given and God-directed mission. The theocentrism of Mark is adjusted in Matthew and Luke, who provide infancy narratives and other details that tell their readers more about Jesus. Here Greco-Roman influence has probably played a role. But even so, it is remarkable how restrained the Synoptic Gospels are with respect to such details. This restraint stands in noticeable contrast to the extracanonical Gospels of the second and third centuries, where the focus is squarely on Jesus. In these writings there is interest in the circumstances leading up to his birth, his adventures in Egypt as an infant, his remarkable powers as a child, and so forth. Special attention is drawn to the powers of Jesus and various unusual

D. H. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (2nd ed., London: SCM Press, 1989); B. Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); A. Chester, "Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures," in M. Hengel and U. Heckel (eds.), *Paulus und das antike Judentum* (WUNT 58; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991) 17-89; R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (London: Chapman; New York: Paulist, 1994); M. Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995); R. Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

⁴⁴ As rightly argued by K. Baltzer, *Die Biographie des Propheten* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975). See also O. H. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten: Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung des deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament, Spätjudentum und Urchristentum* (WMANT 23; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), whose study provides the backdrop against which the "prophet's biography" can be properly understood.

features. The whole point of his mission and message has been swallowed up in unbridled speculation about the figure himself.

In contrast to these later, secondary tendencies, the historical Jesus acted under the impulse of him who sent him. Jesus evidently appealed to Isaiah for his message. The message itself comes from Isa 40:9 and 52:7, where in the Aramaic the text is paraphrased to read: “The kingdom of your God is revealed.” Isaiah’s “gospel” (ܠܟܒ = *eujagevliion*) is understood to be the revelation of the kingdom of God. This is precisely what Jesus proclaimed: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). The dictional and thematic coherence between Jesus’ proclamation and the Aramaic paraphrase has been adequately clarified and defended in studies by Bruce Chilton.⁴⁵

2. Messianism may not have been the concern of the historical Jesus, but it is quite wrong to assert that Jesus had no messianic consciousness. As stressed above, the whole point of his ministry was not himself but the message of the reign of God. He who proclaimed the kingdom had to be called and had to have proper authority. Jesus also appealed to Isaiah for clarification of why he had authority to proclaim the reign of God. In this appeal we find compelling evidence of a messianic self-understanding.

As has been argued, Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom draws upon passages from Isaiah, but its opening words, “The Lord has anointed me to proclaim the gospel . . . ,” clarify Jesus’ self-understanding: He has been anointed by God’s Spirit to proclaim God’s gospel. Jesus is this “anointed” one (which in the Aramaic is specifically identified in prophetic terms), sent by God to proclaim the gospel.

Jesus’ messianic self-awareness is attested in an especially important passage, that involving his reply to the imprisoned John the Baptist (Matt 11:5 = Luke 7:22). It is important not only for what it reveals but because it cannot easily be set aside as a creation of the early Church. No plausible explanation has been given for why Christians would invent a conversation between Jesus and John, where the latter openly expresses doubt about the former’s identity and mission. Jesus implies that he is indeed the “Coming One” and that this is proven by the things taking place in his ministry: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” As suggested by 4Q521 (see above discussion), these allusions to various passages from Isaiah, including Isa 61:1-2, were understood as the works of the Messiah. Indeed, Matthew himself

⁴⁵ B. D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus’ Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (GNS 8; Wilmington: Glazier, 1984); idem, “The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion,” in B. D. Chilton and C. A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (NTTS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 255-80.

appears to have been aware of this interpretive tradition, for he editorially prefaces the exchange between John and Jesus with the words: “Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ . . .” (Matt 11:2a).

The upshot of this is that Jesus’ kingdom proclamation and messianic self-understanding are inextricably intertwined. It simply will not do to try to separate out an authentic Jesus who proclaims the kingdom of God from an inauthentic Jesus who understood himself as duly anointed of God’s Spirit and so qualified to do the proclaiming.⁴⁶ Both are authentic and only left in combination can they be properly understood.

Consistent too with Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and his messianic self-understanding is his frequent usage of the curious self-reference “the son of man.” This epithet is not titular or technical, either in Daniel 7, whence it is derived, or on the lips of Jesus. It may later have taken on titular, technical, even messianic meaning in later Christian writings (and in the *Similitudes of Enoch* as well), but not with Jesus. Jesus’ consistent use of the definite article (“the son of man,” as opposed to the indefinite “son of man”) lends the epithet specificity, as Bruce Chilton has rightly argued,⁴⁷ pointing us to the “son of man” in Dan 7:13-14. This figure received from God authority and kingdom, which is why Jesus can say that as son of man he has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10) or that the son of man is lord even of the sabbath (Mark 2:28).

But there is another factor that strongly supports the probability of Jesus’ messianic self-identity. Everywhere in early Christian literature Jesus is called the Messiah (or, in Greek, Christ).⁴⁸ There is no doctrine of Jesus in which Jesus is understood in non-messianic terms. Even the Ebionites, who rejected the divinity of Jesus, viewed him as Israel’s Messiah and as the fulfillment of messianic prophecies. Only certain Gnostics in the second century and later denied Jesus’ messianic identity,⁴⁹ but these denials were

⁴⁶ Herein lies the principal flaw in the North American Jesus Seminar’s portrait of a non-messianic Jesus who proclaims the kingdom (by which is meant an egalitarian community). This portrait does justice neither to the sources nor to Jewish ideas, in the light of which Jesus’ message and activities should be seen.

⁴⁷ B. Chilton, “[a]vna rb: Human and Heavenly,” in J. Neusner (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*. New Series. Volume Four: *Religious and Theological Studies* (SFSHJ 81; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 97-114.

⁴⁸ On this point, which surprisingly seems rarely to impress itself on New Testament interpreters, see Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology*, 1-72.

⁴⁹ The earliest, potentially Christian, denial of Jesus’ messiahship is found in 1 John 2:22: “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” However, it is not certain that the “liar” in mind here is in fact Gnostic; this polemic may have been directed against the synagogue which had categorically rejected Christian claims regarding Jesus (as seen quite clearly in the Gospel of John).

rooted in dogma, not primitive historical tradition.

This early, widespread recognition of Jesus, by his followers, as Israel's Messiah can most plausibly be explained as owing its origin to Jesus and his disciples, not to a post-Easter faith superimposed upon an otherwise non-messianic dominical tradition. It would be almost impossible to explain the lack of diversity in opinion on the identity of Jesus if his messiahship did not in fact derive from the pre-Easter ministry.

3. With the early Church firmly convinced not only of Jesus' messianic status, but of the decisiveness of his ministry, death, and resurrection, early Christians began applying to Jesus every title, category, and attribute that had to do with messianism and related ideas of agents of salvation. Jesus became King, Prophet, and Priest (notably in the book of Hebrews). Like a magnet that attracts iron, every element, every virtue, and every prophecy that could in some way be attributed to Jesus' life and ministry were utilized. Out of this amalgam emerged a complex Christology in which Jesus the Church's Messiah was exalted to a degree that, so far as we know, was unprecedented in Jewish traditions.

Jesus became *the* Messiah, in the light of which scholars have in the past uncritically and anachronistically read Jewish-messianism back into pre-Christian sources. The supernatural dimension of Christian Christology has in fact often obscured our understanding of pre-Christian Jewish messianism. This problem is analogous to the tendency among some Jewish scholars to define early Jewish messianism in the light of the later exalted, surreal messianism of the Talmud.

4. Christology inevitably became the central concept of Christian theology. Jesus' original message—the reign of God—was either shoved aside or significantly redefined (e.g., in terms of the Church, or the reign of Christ). It is at this point, perhaps more than at any other (such as the liberal inclusion of Gentiles), that marked Christianity as significantly different from the forms and expressions of Judaism in late antiquity. The Christo-centricism of Christianity meant that Christianity simply could not continue as a “denomination” within the broad context of a pluralistic Judaism. On these terms, a parting of the ways was unavoidable.⁵⁰

This leads us to a brief discussion of messianism in rabbinic Judaism. There is again a significant amount of secondary literature, though little of it is critical.⁵¹ Two studies

⁵⁰ On this topic, see J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991). Also the more scholarly collection of studies edited by Dunn, *Jews and Christians: The Partings of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (WUNT 66; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1992).

⁵¹ Some of this literature includes J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel: From Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah* (New York: Macmillan, 1955); G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (repr. New York: Schocken Books, 1971); S. H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic*

should be mentioned. A brief introductory essay by William Scott Green and a monograph by Jacob Neusner have broken new ground,⁵² from which hopefully fresh re-assessments will emerge. Green's essay is especially helpful in identifying uncritical assumptions about monolithic and pervasive messianism in Judaism in late antiquity, while Neusner's study breaks down this artificial synthesis, laying bare the distinctive tendencies of the various rabbinic writings, from the Mishnah to the Babylonian Talmud and later anthologies. Both Green and Neusner underscore the relatively minor importance messianism played in Jewish life and thought. Judaism of late antiquity should not be seen as centered on messianism.

But messianism in Judaism did not simply vanish; it perdured, but with different emphases. In contrast to some of the messianism reviewed above, in rabbinic literature, messianism has become safely "other-wordly" and so offers no threat to the Roman and later Byzantine political systems. This is the principal difference between rabbinic messianism and those various forms of messianism held by individuals and groups in the New Testament period and earlier. Their messianic expectations and agenda envisioned dramatic changes in the here-and-now, with disturbing implications for existing political and social structures. The Jewish messianism of the intertestamental period and the first two centuries of the Common Era posed a real threat to the Roman order. The catastrophic rebellions that occurred in three successive generations (66–70 C.E., 115–116 C.E., and 132–135 C.E.) well illustrate the narrow gap between prophetic expectation and militant activism.

Against such a backdrop it is not difficult to understand why the Roman authorities stationed in Palestine, likely acting after consultation with Jewish religious authorities, responded with deadly retaliation against what to us moderns sounds like harmless religious extremism. The attacks against Theudas, who promised to part the waters of the Jordan River, and the anonymous Egyptian Jew, who promised to bring down the walls

Interpretation. The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum (MHUC 2; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974); J. Neusner, *Messiah in Context: Israel's History and Destiny in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); W. S. Green, "Messianism in Judaism: Rethinking the Question," in Neusner et al. (eds.), *Judaisms and Their Messiahs*, 1-13; C. A. Evans, "Mishna and Messiah 'in Context': Some Comments on Jacob Neusner's Proposals," *JBL* 112 (1993) 267-89 [also see Neusner's reply, "The Mishna in Philosophical Context and Out of Canonical Bounds," 291-304]; R. Kimelman, "The Messiah of the Amidah: A Study in Comparative Messianism," *JBL* 116 (1997) 313-24; M. Pickup, "The Emergence of the Suffering Messiah in Rabbinic Literature," in J. Neusner (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*. New Series Volume 11 (SFSHJ 154; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 143-62.

⁵² I have in mind Green's "Messianism in Judaism: Rethinking the Question" and Neusner's *Messiah in Context* (see the preceding note).

of Jerusalem, did not arise out of misunderstanding and so cannot be regarded as over-reactions. On the contrary, the Romans understood very well the expectations and intentions of these and other would-be deliverers.

In the aftermath of the great wars rabbinic and Christian messianism became more theoretical, more removed from everyday life. Someday Messiah will come, but that will be at the end of time. Admonitions to be prepared carried with them ethical and ministerial obligations. They were not calls to arms. It is thus not strange that for Judaism messianism receded to the periphery. It remained, for the Jewish people had not lost interest in eschatology, but it no longer incited action (with a few isolated instances in the fifth and later centuries).⁵³

Of course, given Christianity's christological focus, messianism could hardly become marginalized. But its character nevertheless underwent important changes. Expectations of Jesus' imminent return gave way to permanence and institutionalism. In mainstream Christianity, as in mainstream Judaism, this world was affirmed. Both Judaism and Christianity have matured. Of course, neither faith has abandoned messianism—and they should not, for ultimately messianism is a reminder of the world's accountability to God.

With the notable exceptions of certain sects (e.g., the Lubavitchers and the Branch Davidians), Judaism and Christianity have transformed their respective understandings of messianism. The emphasis now falls less on eschatology and less on apocalyptic; rather it falls more on God himself. Curiously enough, the tendencies today in some ways follow more closely the original thrust of Jesus' message: the powerful, transforming presence of God. At this point Judaism and Christianity have access to a fruitful common ground.

⁵³ Following the defeat of Simon in 135 C.E. it would be three centuries before the reappearance of messianic fervor. Based on various calculations it was believed that Messiah would come either in 440 C.E. (cf. *b. Sanh.* 97b) or in 471 C.E. (cf. *b. >Abod. Zar.* 9b). Other dates were suggested. Answering this expectation, one "Moses of Crete" (ca. 448 C.E.) promised to lead the Jewish people through the sea, dry-shod, from Crete to Palestine. At his command many of his followers threw themselves into the Mediterranean. Some drowned; others were rescued. Moses himself disappeared (cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.38; 12.33). Evidently Moses typology had continued to play an important role in shaping restoration hopes. A variety of other pseudo-messiahs appeared in the Islamic period (especially in the eighth century), during the later crusades (especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), and even as late as the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries (cf. *Jewish Encyclopedia* 10.252-55).