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An Historical Kaleidoscope

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Messianic Prophecy And Messianism

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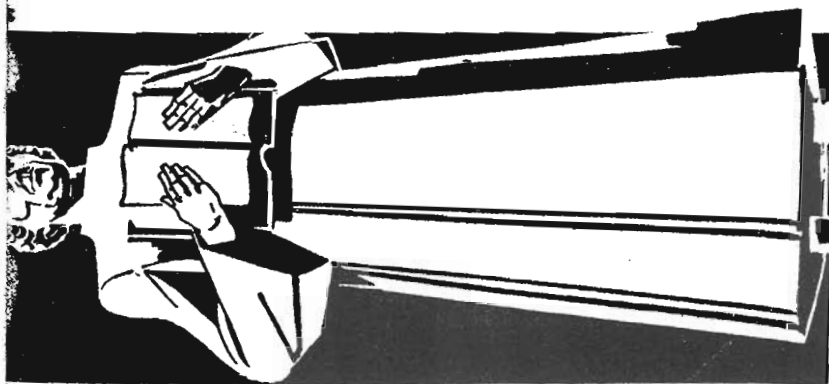
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Messianic Prophecy and Messianism

RAYMOND F. SURBURG

THE TERM "MESSIANIC PROPHECY" is being avoided by most recent Bible dictionaries and articles dealing with the subject of the Messiah in the Old Testament and the term "Messianism" is being substituted.¹ The Old Testament term "Messiah" is the simple reproduction of the Hebrew original *Mashiach*, which means "anointed." The Septuagint and the Greek New Testament both translate the Hebrew *Mashiach* by the term *Christos*, with the same meaning. In the English translations of the Old Testament *Mashiach* is usually rendered by the word "anointed." The English word Messiah is found only twice in the King James Version (Dan. 9:25, 26); "Messias," the Greek form, also appears twice (John 1:41; 4:25). In the Old Testament the reader will find "the anointed of the Lord" (Lamen. 4:20), "His anointed," (Ps. 2:2), "Mine anointed" (1 Sam. 2:35), "the Lord's anointed" (1 and 2 Sam.). These might have been translated as "the Messiah of the Lord," "His Messiah," "the Lord's Messiah." Our New Testament employs *Christos*, rather than the term "anointed." In Old Testament times the term "anointed" was applied to prophets, priests and kings. Even non-Hebrews were so designated because God had chosen them for a particular task, such as Cyrus (Is. 45:1). The high priest of Israel (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16), the messianic Prince (Daniel 9:25), and the patriarchs (Ps. 105:15) were also called "the anointed."

G. T. Manley claims that "the Messianic hope, which is born very early in the story of the human race, is represented throughout the whole Old Testament as something which had its source in God. The hope is given to man. Hence the messianic references of the Old Testament Scriptures present a very wide field of divine redeeming activity."² Messianism as a rule portrays the Messianic idea as a development of the people which has its beginning no earlier than the time of David, and not as a part of God's redemptive activity for man.

The New Testament describes the origin of the coming of the Messiah as something that was foreordained in eternity, long before the universe and the earth were created. The death of Jesus, through whose shed blood men are cleansed, according to Peter "was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:19, 20). The fall of man was foreseen by the Triune God and when Eve and Adam fell, God in His mercy announced to our first parents that a person would come from Eve's offspring who would crush the Tempter's head.

Roman Catholic and Protestant writers (representing many different denominations and churches) have written books in the past dealing with Messianic prophecy and all begin their presentations with Genesis 3:15, known as "the First Gospel."³ The prediction that someday a man from the seed of Eve would bruise and crush the head of the Serpent (used by the Devil) becomes more explicit as the centuries march on. Abraham was told that through his seed (He-

brew, "zerah") the nations of the earth would be blessed. According to the interpretation of Paul in Galatians 3:16 the word "seed" does not refer to many but to one, "and to your offspring," which is Christ. In Genesis 49 Jacob predicted "that out of Judah would come a ruler, unto whom the gathering of the people would be" (v. 10). Balaam, a contemporary of Moses, in his fourth oracle announced the coming of a king, who would be victorious over his enemies (Num. 24:18 ff.). In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses predicted the coming of a greater prophet than he was, to whom the people would listen. In 1 Samuel 2:10 Hannah spoke about the Lord's *Mashiach*, the Anointed, at a time when the kingship of David was still decades away. At the end of the Song of Hannah, she exclaimed: "Yahweh will judge the ends of the earth; and exalt the power of his anointed." In 2 Samuel 7:12-17 Yahweh gave David a remarkable prophecy about the future of the latter's dynasty, predicting the coming of David's greater Son, the Messiah. (Passages from the Davidic covenant are cited by various New Testament writers as having had Christ in mind).

The writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Micah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and a number of Psalms were all recognized as containing Messianic prophecies. The stay of Jonah in the great fish's stomach was a type of Christ's burial and resurrection.

Luther in his writings believed that Christ was found in the Old Testament beginning with Genesis 3:15 and ending with prophecies in Malachi 1, 3 and 4. It was the conviction of the authors of the Formula of Concord that Law and Gospel were teachings that went back to the garden of Eden. Thus in Article V of the Formula of Concord it is written:

Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction. The descendants of the holy patriarchs, like the patriarchs constantly reminded themselves not only how man in the beginning was created righteous and holy by God and through deceit of the serpent transgressed God's laws, became a sinner, corrupted himself and all his descendants, and plunged them into death and eternal damnation, but also revived their courage and comforted themselves, with the proclamation of the woman's seed, who would bruise the serpent's head; likewise, of the seed of Abraham, by whom all nations should be blessed; likewise, of David's son, who should restore the kingdom of Israel to be a light to the nations, 'who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and with his stripes we are healed.'⁴

In this passage the confessors refer to Gen. 3:15; 22:18; 28:14; Ps. 110:1; Is. 40:10; 49:6 and Is. 53:5 and interpret them as Messianic.

I.

THE DECLINE OF MESSIANIC PROPHECY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Today an inadequate idea of the scope and emphasis of the Messianic message of the Old Testament is generally prevalent. Pre-

dictions about the person, work and kingdom of God's Messiah are of necessity prophetic in character. Since in the estimation of some, prophecy is restricted to the sixteen canonical books of the Major and Minor Prophets, all predictive statements about the coming of the Messiah are limited to these books, thus eliminating many important prophecies in the earlier historical books of the Old Testament. Others suppose that Messianic prophecy is merely a matter of sporadic and emotional utterance, without any intimate relation to the comprehensive literature and vital thought of Israel.

Already in 1926 Professor Edward Mack wrote about the dearth of literature in the twentieth century concerning Messianic prophecy:

In recent years the conflict of opinion over the literary and historical problems of the Old Testament has diverted attention from the real content of this most important record of ancient religion. Compared with the mass of this controversial and merely propaedeutic literature, the amount of material available for study from modern writers is meager. The inquiring reader finds few text-books covering the field, and in his quest must glean here and there from introduction and interpretative works. Strangely enough, modern Old Testament theologies contain scant purely Messianic discussion.⁵

Wilbur M. Smith, in his introduction to Aaron Kligerman's *Messianic Prophecy in the Old Testament* stated:

During the nineteenth century, the Christian Church was blessed with a number of great works on the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, by such scholars as Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, Kurtz, and Riehm, in Germany; and R. Payne Smith, David Baron, Edersheim, and Saphir, in England, the last three of which were Christian Jews. In the twentieth century, however, at least until the last few years, the literature on Messianic prophecy, outside strictly academic circles, has been very thin—ephemeral contributions which were but inadequate, disconnected collections of extracts from the writers of the preceding century, with expository comments of no particular importance.⁶

One of the sad developments of twentieth century critical biblical scholarship has been the surrender of the idea that in the Old Testament God the Holy Spirit made the fact of the necessity of Christ as Redeemer known to the saints of the old dispensation. Dr. Charles Augustus Briggs, who was involved in a heresy trial in the Presbyterian Church and forced to resign because of promoting higher criticism, wrote a book on Messianic Prophecy. In the beginning of this volume he stated:

Messianic Prophecy is the most important of all themes, for it is the ideal of redemption given by the Creator to our race at the beginning of its history, and it ever abides as the goal of humanity until the Divine plan has been accomplished.⁷

Modern Protestant scholarship which followed the leading of Dr. Briggs in the adoption of a critical approach of the Scriptures has now reached a point where Old Testament scholars deny that there are any clear predictions of Messianic prophecy in the Old

Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament teachings about the Messiah are not presented as a matter of revelation but as a result of insights Jewish writers had throughout the preChristian centuries which led especially to beliefs about a personal Messiah in the two centuries before the birth of Christ. The brief article by the former Professor Edwin Lewis of Drew Theological Seminary in *Harper's Bible Dictionary* treating of the Messiah portrays this view. Genesis 12:3 which states that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the world should be blessed, interpreted by Paul as a prediction of the fact that through Christ men would be justified by faith and thus incorporated into the body of Christ (Galatians 3:8), is understood merely as setting forth an expectancy of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus Professor Lewis described the beginning and development of what is commonly known as "Messianism":

The Old Testament is the story of the growth of this expectancy, and of changes in the way it was understood. One form limited the promise to the physical line of Abraham: 'the chosen people' were 'the sons of Abraham.' With the emergence of Saul as the first Hebrew king, the national and political conception was quickened (I Sam. 8:1-12:55). The brilliance of the reign of David, Saul's successor, and his own personal character, set the pattern of Messianic thought for later centuries (II Sam. 7:1-29). The conviction grew that the Kingdom of God, in which the Abrahamic covenant would be consummated, would be a kingdom like that of David, and its ruler would be 'a son of David,' a king like David, only greater. (Is. 9:2-7; Jer. 23:5-8; Ezek. 34:20-31; cf. Ps. 89:3, 19-37, 132:1-18).⁸

After the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. the southern kingdom of Judah was left alone to carry on the Davidic tradition and hope. The thought grew that if the Abrahamic promise was to be realized, some person would need to deliver God's people from their enemies. So Lewis states great importance was attached to the word "save" in the Old Testament, especially as used in the Psalms (28:9; 69:35; 72:13f; 106:47), and in Isaiah (25:9; 33:22; 35:4; 37:20; 63:1-5; cf. Jer. 42:11). The Israelites looked for a deliverer from their "enemies, threatening worldly powers. Sometimes God is represented as effecting this deliverance; sometimes it will be God's anointed, a veritable Messiah" (Ps. 72).⁹

According to Lewis with the prophets there grew up the idea that God is not merely the God of Israel but of all peoples. Jahweh's concern was for all people. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the virtual destruction of the Jewish state, the idea arose, sponsored already by Jeremiah, that the Abrahamic hope would be fulfilled in a religious community and not in a political organization. God was going to establish a brotherhood in which the "new covenant" would be written on the hearts of every man (Jer. 31:31-34). This idea was further fostered by the Exile in Babylonia under priestly influence. During the exilic period two Messianic concepts developed side by side. One looked for a restoration of the Israelite nation, which found its chief mark in the observance of the "Holiness Code" (Lev. 17-28), a product allegedly of the Exile. In this con-

ception there was practically no place for a personal Messiah; the closest approach to the idea of a Messiah was the "prince" in Ezek. (44:3; 45:7; 46:2-18; 48:21f). Ezra and Nehemiah tried to promote the thought of a Messianic ritualistic people of God, who adhered and were loyal to the "Law."¹⁰

According to Lewis during the Exile a more spiritual concept was also fostered; a number of the psalms emphasize the necessity of spiritual deliverance. The prophet known by critics as the Second Isaiah gave his fellow religionists glowing descriptions of a return from captivity but also wrote four famous servant passages (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). In these "the Servant" is described as a sufferer. Modern critical scholarship does not identify the Suffering Servant with Jesus Christ, but with a "purified Israel" or with the idea of "a remnant of Israel." This Israel will be a community not after the flesh but after the spirit, and would extend the benefits of the true Israel to all mankind through his own (the servant) sacrificial and self-forgetting love (53:10-12).¹¹

The priestly and particularistic conception prevailed following the era of Ezra-Nehemiah. Yet there were some who held to the spiritual conception. In the Deutero-Zechariah (chs. 9-14) there is a marked emphasis on a national restoration, with "Jerusalem conceived as the center of the world." Zech. 9:9 states that "thy king cometh unto thee" but in the text verse the reader is told that He will create universal peace and "that his dominion shall be from sea to sea." In the second century B.C. (190 B.C.) Daniel teaches that one called "a Son of Man" will be granted "an everlasting kingdom," one embracing "all peoples and languages" (7:13, 14).¹²

In the apocalyptic literature of the two preChristian centuries the Messiah is often associated with "the Day of the Lord." Sometimes the apocalyptic writers depict the Messiah as leading the armies of heaven; other times he is portrayed as Judge; and still other writers depict the Messiah as the ruler of a kingdom that follows resurrection and judgment. In the apocalyptic writings the Messiah is always depicted, so Lewis contends, as the instrument of God for the deliverance of His people. It is God who provides the Deliverer, the Messiah, who achieves deliverance. New Testament critical scholars claim that such ideas were current in the first century A.D. The Zealots were convinced that the Messiah would be a political deliverer who would achieve national deliverance by force. The Pharisees, on the other hand, held that the Messiah would appear in God's appointed time and would be a "Son of David," one who would fulfill the Law, which they revered. The Apocalyptic form of the Messianic hope was very prevalent and according to Lewis "strongly influenced early Christianity."¹³

Lewis stated about Jesus' belief of being the Messiah that the Nazarene appropriated this concept to Himself, although Jesus did not know in what sense He was the Messiah. His Messiahship was revealed to Him at the Baptism. In the subsequent Temptation in the wilderness He wrestled with this matter as to what constituted His Messiahship.¹⁴

Professor Otto A. Pieper of Princeton Theological Seminary in

an article dealing with the developments in the field of Biblical scholarship in the twentieth century made the following assertion:

In the field of exegesis the critical method has led to one-sided interest in textual, philological, and historical problems. Exposition has confined itself primarily to the Prophets and Psalms; in the works of Duhm, Steuernagel, G. A. Smith, Eissfeldt, Hans Schmidt and Hoelscher the prophets have been considered as the representatives of a superior morality, while the element of messianic prediction has been, as a rule, disregarded. The traditional view was upheld by Keil, Delitzsch, and Riehm, and has been revived by Hebert, T. H. Robinson and W. Fischer.¹⁵

According to Professor Dentan of Yale Divinity School the concept of the Messiah was derived ultimately from ancient Near Eastern ideas of kingship, which, he claims, were more or less naturalized in Israel during the Davidic dynasty. "To the world of the ancient Near East, the king was a divine or semi-divine figure from whom radiated powers which made for prosperity in peace and victory in war. Since these grandiose ideas of kingship were constantly being disappointed by the actual kings of David's line, it was only natural that they should be transferred to an ideal king of the future and by the time the monarchy came to an end in 586 B.C. this figure had probably already become a fixed feature of Hebrew eschatological expectation."¹⁶

Thus according to Dentan, when it was no longer feasible for the Jews in the exilic and postexilic periods to dream of political action, they compensated for their disappointment by centering their hope completely on the idea that God would intervene in the affairs of men and set up His eternal rule. It was ideas like these which set the background for a tremendous growth of Messianic hopes, which took place just before the beginning of the Christian era.¹⁷ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* in its article on the "Messiah" knows of no Messianic hope prior to the Davidic days. It was especially in the later monarchy when the political fortunes of Judaism were on the wane, that prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah bolstered the faith of their coreligionists by depicting for them the coming of a future king of the house of David who would be glorious, wise and who would provide security for his people.¹⁸

E. F. Scott, a liberal New Testament scholar, stated in his book, *The Kingdom and the Messiah* that it always had been an article of Christian belief that the Old Testament Scriptures were inspired throughout by the hope of the Messiah. This belief, which he claims grew naturally out of the apologetics of the early Christian Church passed over into the ordinary theology of the Church.¹⁹ "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Scott and many Old and New Testament critical scholars claim that while Christ is the fulfillment of the religion of Israel and although the student can trace an unconscious anticipation in its earlier history, this larger witness which the Old Testament bears to Jesus Christ must not be confused with a specific hope in a Messiah. Thus he wrote: "When we examine the Old Testament according to strict historical methods, we are compelled to assign an altogether secondary place to the Messianic idea.

It originated with the prophets, but only assumed its characteristic form in later Judaism." His position was stated by him one page later in the words:

When we thus exclude from Messianic prophecy all that is fanciful and extraneous, we find that it recedes within narrow limits. So far from constituting the chief theme of Scripture, it holds a subordinate and almost incidental place. The dominant conception of the Old Testament writers is that of the kingdom which is to be established in the latter days. In their thought of this kingdom they were influenced by the existing historical conditions; and associated the restored Israel with the house of David.²⁰

According to Dr. Scott the Book of Psalms was the great repository of Messianic texts, a position that was countenanced by current Jewish theology. When Jesus used psalm passages to support his Messiahship he was simply falling back upon "the scribal interpretation." The interpretation which found the Messiah foretold in various psalms like the 2, 16, 22, 45, 72, 110 was erroneous because it amounted to eisegesis, when a later theory was read into them, giving them a meaning that formed no part of the original intention of the author.

Critical scholarship has propounded still other divergent views about the source of the Messianic hope in Israel. According to the school of Wellhausen (P. Volz, K. Marti, W. Nowack, A. von Gall) Israelite Messianism is a postexilic phenomenon, which was influenced by teachings found in the Persian religion.²¹ In Zoroastrianism there is the doctrine of world renewal, the hope of a redeemer who would achieve salvation for the people by the purification of the world, the annihilation of evil, and the resurrection of the dead. This hope of a Savior arose in the postexilic period of Judaism. Sigmund Mowinckel conceives of the Messiah as an eschatological figure, which according to this Scandinavian scholar was unrelated to the hope that men in Israel associated with the kingship. Mowinckel proposed that the Messianic hope developed only after the fall of the Davidic dynasty in 587 B.C.

By contrast two outstanding form-critical scholars, H. Gunkel and H. Gressmann, believe that Israelite Messianism is older than the time of Amos (ca. 750 B.C.). Like Mowinckel they also endeavored to find the source for the Messianic concept outside of Israel. They found it in Urzeit, the ancient Oriental myths about a primeval king, whose return was expected at the time of the end of the world. They asserted that "Endzeit ist Urzeit." The texts given in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (pp. 441-452) do not give evidence that the Mesopotamians were expecting an eschatological Savior, as alleged by Gunkel and Gressmann. The texts in ANET are not predictions or prophecies about a future prince who will bring salvation, but to give the evaluation of J. T. Nelis are "either predictions of the successes of the reigning prince, or warnings addressed to him, or good wishes expressed in prophetic style, to a new king that he may be victorious over his enemies and may further the peace and welfare of his people, expressions, therefore, of the hope that conditions will be better

under the new king than they were under the other, or, on the other hand, these texts are mere *vaticinia post eventum*, pseudo-predictions of events which have already taken place and thus likewise concerned with historical kings."²²

Another school of thought looks for the root of Messianism in ancient Oriental ideology of the king. G. Widengren, I. Engnell, A. R. Johnson, and others regard the king as the son or incarnation of a god, or even identified him with a god, and each year in the ritual the king's son was subjected to a rite of humiliation and suffering, which was supposed to be a dramatic representation of the conflict between deity and the forces of chaos and signified the renewal of the vital energy of the universe. The idea of divine sonship is said to have been adopted by Israel writers in their concept of the Royal Psalms (Ps. 2:7; 10:3) also by Isaiah in his description of the king's son in 9:5: "Unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and he shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace." The humiliation of the king is supposed to have been taken over by the Ebed Yahweh Oracles in Isaiah, while the idea of the king as an actualization of the primeval king, which is identified with the *Urmensch*, was revived in Israel in the figure of the Son of Man (so Bentzen). Some scholars have questioned the correctness of Widengren's portrayal of the king ideology. That in Israel the belief in the recurring periodic renewal of the energies of the earth was held is pure speculation, there is no evidence whatever for this assumption.

E. Sellin, followed by W. Eichrodt, W. Caspari, L. Blecker and L. Dürr, begins Israel's Messianic hopes with the Mt. Sinai revelation. This group believes that when Yahweh made a covenant with His people, the Hebrews, He thereby gave assurance that in the future He would intervene time and again in the fortunes of His people. Since Yahweh was indivisible in His nature, He would accomplish this intervention through a great personage, called the Messiah. In the image of this Messiah this group of German scholars saw a projection of the concept of the *Urmensch* into the eschatological future, traces of which are according to Sellin, found in such passages as Dan. 7:13f.; Job 15:7; Is. 9:5; Micah 5:1; Num. 24:17.²³

In the centuries before the birth of Christ there is evident in the pseudepigrapha the belief in the coming of the Messiah. The Qumran writings clearly indicate the belief in the coming of a Messiah; some interpreters of the Qumranic literature believe that two different Messiahs were expected by the Qumranite sect, a kingly one, and a priestly one.²⁴ From the Gospels it becomes very apparent that the Jews were looking forward to the Messiah. From Matthew 2:6 it is clear that the scribes consulted by Herod believed that Bethlehem was to be the Messiah's birthplace as foretold by Micah 5:2. John the Baptist was no doubt referring to the Messiah when the former announced to the Pharisees and Sadducees: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." The angel Gabriel told Mary about the Holy One to be conceived in her womb: "He will be great, and

will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of David forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Here the archangel Gabriel is referring to the promise given to David in the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7:12-17.

Zacharias in the Benedictus asserted that "the Lord God of Israel has raised up a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies . . . to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy oath which he swore to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:69-73). Here Zacharias is referring to Genesis 12:3: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and not as the RSV and other modern translations have it: "In thy seed shall all the nations bless themselves." In Luke 3:15 the reader is apprised of the fact that some people believed that John the Baptist was the Messiah. When Andrew found his brother Peter he said to him "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). Philip finds Nathaniel and says to him: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." In John 4 the Samaritan woman is reported as saying: "I know that the Messiah is coming (he who is called the Christ), when he comes he will show us all things." The Samaritans it should be remembered only accepted the Torah of Moses as their Scriptures, and yet on the basis of the Pentateuch these people found the Messiah foretold. After having accepted the Messiah, the Samaritan woman returned to her village and said to the people: "Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (4:29)

II.

THE NEW TESTAMENT VIEW OF MESSIANIC PROPHECY

The conviction held by the Early Christian Church, the Medieval Church, the Church of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods that numerous prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures regarding the birth, coming, nature, ministry of Jesus of Nazareth were based upon the clear light thrown upon ancient prophecies by the New Testament. It will be instructive to examine the attitude of the preachers and writers of the New Testament toward the Messianic passages in the New Testament. Thus Professor Mack contended about this interpretative procedure: "The Christian student with his confidence in the authority and accuracy of the New Testament, has the right to begin his argument with it; and more than this, it is his bounden duty to do so."²⁵ The New Testament provides a good guide for a study of Old Testament prophecy for the following reasons: 1. The New Testament writings come out of an epoch that was close to O. T. days, by men, all of whom with the possible exception of Luke were Jews. As members of the Jewish faith they should have possessed a good knowledge of its traditions and an understanding of the hopes and aspirations of their nation. 2. Like a telescope, the New Testament brings the promises of the Old Testament closer to us, it makes their outline clear and real. 3. The New Testament claims to be the true interpretation of the Old

Testament. When the Samaritan woman shifted the topic of conversation about the nature of Old Testament hope to the subject of the Messiah, Jesus said to her: "I that speak to thee am He." When John the Baptist asked whether Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, Jesus sent back the answer: "I am He who is fulfilling the Messianic promises of Isaiah" (Matt. 11). Paul, in describing the problem of the Jew in his day, claimed that in Jesus "the veil is done away" (II Cor. 3).

Christ and His apostles had a great reverence and respect for the Old Testament Scriptures. To them the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Old Testament canon were "The Scriptures."

1. *The Method of John the Apostle*

In Revelation 19:10 we read: "the witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The witness to Jesus by angels, apostles, and martyrs found in Revelation is the same witness as the witness of prophecy. In comment on this verse Dr. Lenski wrote: "Some restrict this ('The prophecy') to the prophecy contained in these visions of Revelation, but the substance is that of all Scriptures."^{25a}

2. *The Method of Philip the Evangelist*

No passage of the New Testament is more helpful in showing us how New Testament Christians interpreted the Old Testament than the episode involving Philip, who was sent by the Holy Spirit to convert the Prime Minister of Candace, Queen of Abyssinia. He had attended one of the great festivals of Judaism in Jerusalem. The festival visitor had procured a copy of the Prophets, which he was reading on his way home to Africa. Philip the Evangelist, led by the Spirit of God, came near to Gaza, as he was reading the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. When Philip had joined him and heard him reading the Isaian passage, asked the African Prime Minister if he understood what he read? They then read the chapter together; coming to verses 7 and 8, Philip was asked: "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" These were the verses of the Great Servant passage that spoke of the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Luke reports Philip's answer as follows: "Starting from this very passage, he told him the Good News about Jesus" (v. 35). If this was not truly speaking of the suffering, death, resurrection of God's Messiah, then Philip was guilty of reading a meaning into the chapter it was not intended to have.

3. *The Method of Paul*

Paul had a great influence on the New Testament Scriptures. Fifteen out of twenty-seven writings shows his influence. This includes the two books by his friend and companion, Luke the physician. Paul made liberal use of the Old Testament. His epistles are saturated with the Old Testament, with its doctrines, its ideals, and its phrases. As one Old Testament scholar has written: "His letters might be called interpretations of the Old Testament in terms of Jesus Christ, even though he wrote chiefly to Gentiles." Frequently Paul appealed to Messianic prophecies in order to present Christ as the Savior of mankind. He believed in the inspiration of the entire Old Testament. "For all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the man who serves God may be

fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good work" (*Good News for Modern Man*). In describing the religious training Timothy had received from Lois and Eunice, Paul wrote to Timothy: "For you know who your teachers were, and you know that ever since you were a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." These words clearly enunciate the truth that the Old Testament Scriptures enabled the reader to come to faith in Christ Jesus. If there are no direct predictions about the Messiah, how could the Old Testament Scriptures then lead to salvation in Christ Jesus?

In many places Paul, who claimed to be an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ, appealed to its prophecies as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Only a few of the many passages will be cited here to support the Christological hermeneutics of the Old Testament by Paul. In Acts 13: 13-41 Luke has given an epitome of a Pauline sermon at Antioch in Pisidia. To the people in the Pisidian synagogue, Paul said: "We declare unto you good tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again, as it also is written in the second psalm." In this sermon Paul quoted both from the Second and Sixteenth Psalms and interpreted them as containing prophecies about Christ. Yet today modern scholarship will not recognize Paul's interpretations.

Toward the end of his Caesarean captivity Paul appeared before Festus and King Agrippa. The latter had been raised as a Jew and was trained in the Scriptures. Since Agrippa was considered learned in the Law, Paul could appeal on common ground. And these are the remarkable words of Paul: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, and saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26: 22-23).

Another good illustration of Paul's interpretative methodology of finding Christ foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures, occurred when he came to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. In that city, in the synagogue, Paul preached. "And Paul, as his custom was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that (said he) this Jesus, whom I preached unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:2-3).

Paul began his great letter to the Romans in this way: "From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, and an apostle chosen and called by God to preach his Good News. The Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets, and written in the Holy Scriptures. It is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God, by being raised from the dead," (vv. 1-4). These words clearly testify to Paul's belief that Christ's divinity and humanity were foretold in the Holy Scriptures (The Old Testament). The plan of salvation as set forth in the

euangellion was foreknown because it had been revealed to the writers of the Old Testament books.

In the last chapter of Acts Paul is portrayed as being in Rome, where the Jews were allowed to visit Paul. One day a confrontation took place between Paul and a large number of Jews. Luke reports: "From morning till night he explained (to them) and gave them his message about the kingdom of God. He tried to convince them about Jesus by quoting from the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets" (v. 23).

In setting forth the essentials of the Gospel that Paul had proclaimed to the Corinthians, he asserted in chapter 15 of his first letter: "I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as is written in the Scriptures; and that he was buried and raised to life on the third day, as is written in the Scriptures." (vv. 3-4)

4. *The Method of Peter*

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke has provided us with samples of the preaching of Peter, primus among the apostles. Peter's sermon at Pentecost, the first Gospel sermon, was based entirely on prophecies of the Old Testament: first, the outpouring of the Spirit, as foretold by Joel; then the resurrection of Christ, from the sixteenth Psalm; and finally His exaltation to power at the right hand of God, as prophesied by David in Psalm 110.

In the second sermon of Peter, Acts 3, the apostle made his appeal in a similar way, calling upon his hearers to accept Jesus as the promised Christ of the Old Testament: "Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled." (v. 18) When Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin for healing the lame man, Peter full of the Holy Spirit, said to the leaders and elders: "Then you should all know, that all the people of Israel should know, that this man stands here before you completely well by the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth—whom you crucified and God raised from death. Jesus is the one of whom the scripture says, 'The stone that you builders despised, turned out to be the most important stone.' Salvation is to be found through him alone for there is no one else in all the world whose name God has given to men, by whom we can be saved." (Acts 4: 10-12)

When Peter and John returned from their examination before the Jewish leaders, the group of believers prayed in unison: "Master and Creator of heaven and earth, and sea, and all that is in them. By the means of the Holy Spirit you spoke through our ancestor David, your servant, when he said:

'Why were the Gentiles furious,

Why did the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth prepared themselves,

Against the Lord and his Messiah'." (Acts 3: 24-26).

In his Pentecost sermon to the Gentiles in the house of the centurion Cornelius, Peter said: "And he commanded us to preach the gospel to the people, and to testify that he is the one whom God has appointed Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets spoke

about him, saying that everyone who believes in him will have his sins forgiven through the power of his name" (Acts 10:42-43).

In his first letter to the congregations of Asia Minor in writing about the wonderful salvation which had been made available to the believers through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter states: "It was about this salvation that the prophets made careful search and investigation; they were the ones who prophesied the blessings that God would give you. They tried to find out when the time would be and how it would come; for the Spirit of Christ in them pointed to this time in predicting the sufferings that Christ would have to endure, and the glory that should follow. God revealed to these prophets that their work was not for their own benefit, but for yours, as they spoke about the truths, which you have now heard. The messengers of the Good News, who spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, told you these truths," (ch. 1:10-12).

5. *The Appeal of Christ to Prophecy*

The foregoing array of New Testament passages by various New Testament individuals should have been impressive to support the contention that the coming of the *Mashiah*, the Christos, was foretold by God centuries before God's Anointed One's appearance. There is still a more impressive type of evidence, and that is the use of prophecy by Christ Himself. "The use of prophecy by Christ Himself is the most remarkable part of the New Testament claim to be the fulfillment of the Old. Christ was continually quoting Old Testament promises as fulfilled in Himself."²⁵¹

To the leaders of the Jewish people Jesus said one day in controversy with them: "You study the Scriptures because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And they themselves speak about me" (John 5:39). How could Jesus make such a statement if his hearers did not believe that the Old Testament Scriptures contained specific statements about the Messiah? And Jesus claimed to fulfill the prophecies about the coming of the Messiah.

When Jesus visited Nazareth after his baptism, he attended the synagogue as was his custom. He read to them from the scroll of the prophets; he read the passage from the beginning of Isaiah 61. After reading the lesson from the Haphtorah, with the eyes of the multitudes fixed on him, he spoke these momentous words: "This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears." His hearers understood full well what Jesus was claiming by this statement, namely, that He was the *Mashiach*, the Anointed One, the Servant of the Lord, who was the most imposing figure of the Old Testament prophecy.

Again when John the Baptist was in prison toward the end of his life, he sent two disciples to Jesus with the question: "Art thou He that should come, or must we wait for another?" The answer of Jesus was to quote words that spoke of the Christ in chapters 35 and 61 of Isaiah.

Especially important are the words of Jesus, as reported by Luke in chapter 24 of his Gospel, where on Easter afternoon Jesus opened the eyes of Cleophas and his friend to see the Lord but also gave them proof of His Messiahship from the Old Testament when he said: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets

have spoken; ought not the Messiah to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses, and all the prophets, he interpreted unto them in all the Scriptures, *the things concerning Himself*" (v. 26). Later that evening, coming to the Eleven in Jerusalem, He reminded them how often He had showed in the Old Testament the very things which had happened to Him: "These are the words which I spoke unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me. Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44).

III.

Messianic Prophecy in Lutheranism in the Twentieth Century

In 1935 The Parish and Church School Board of The Lutheran Church in America published *The Old Testament—A Study*, by Professor Herbert C. Alleman. In discussing the Old Testament, Alleman quoted Kirkpatrick to the effect: "Prophecy was no premature unrolling of the future. . . . But from first to last it pointed forward to a great divine purpose slowly being evolved in the course of the ages, to 'some far off divine event,' towards which the history of Israel and the history of the world were moving."²⁶ He claims that no reader can come to the Old Testament without feeling that the history is not complete. In the course of time the Hebrews came to believe in a personal Messiah. It was only through a personal Messiah that God's reign on earth could be realized. "As a child he was to be the gift of God 'Immanuel-God With Us' (Is. 7:14); of the house of David (Is. 11:1); one upon whom would rest the Spirit of Jehovah (Is. 11:2-5); a prince out of Bethlehem (Mi. 5:2); one to whom the nations would come to learn righteousness."²⁷ Alleman seems to begin his discussion of the Messiah with the passages in Isaiah but says not one word about any promises prior to the eighth century B.C. He claims that the classic words of Isaiah have become the description of the mission of Jesus. Nowhere does he, however, state that the Old Testament writers foretold the Messianic days by direct prophecies.

In 1948 *Old Testament Commentary* Professor Alleman and Professor T. W. Kretzschmann wrote the article on "The Messiah in the Old Testament Scriptures."²⁸ This is much more complete and satisfactory than the brief discussion in the book for Sunday School and Bible Class teachers. Regarding Gen. 3:15, the protevangelium, these two scholars wrote: "The word Messiah does not occur here, but the idea is clearly implied. This verse has been known in Christian theology as the *protevangeli*, or the first announcement of the gospel of redemption. Protestant theology generally has taken the passage as a promise to mankind of victory over Satan in the headship of Jesus. The older theology may have erred in the particularism of its conception of prophecy, but it did not err in the general conception of victory over sin which is here announced. The New Testament writers took the verse as an adumbration victory (cf. Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; I John 3:8). The theme of our Bible is salvation, and

it is one of the high touches of its art that theme should be announced in the story of our first catastrophe."²⁹

These same professors close their article on the Messiah by showing from John 5:45-46; Luke 24:27; Luke 24:44 that Jesus claimed that many prophecies of the three major divisions of the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled in His life, especially His death and resurrection. Despite the clear assertions of Jesus Christ, Alleman and Kretzschmann state: "It is not to be understood that the Old Testament forecasts of God's purpose of salvation were always literal predictions." We agree with these two scholars that "Jesus Christ is the key to the Old Testament. It is by His testimony that we know that He is the Messiah."³⁰

Whether this is still the position of Old Testament scholars at LCA seminaries is questionable.

In 1937, Augsburg Publishing House published a volume by Byron C. Nelson entitled, *On the Way to Emmaus*, in which Nelson sets forth the divine-human Christ as revealed in the prophecies of the Old Testament.³¹ The former position of this large Lutheran body, now a part of TALC, may also be seen in R. A. Ofstedal's *God's Plan in Prophecy*.³² It would seem that literature appearing between 1960 and 1970 by members of TALC shows a shift toward rejecting direct Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. One of the most startling statements read by the essayist is that of Professor Quanbeck, who in an essay read at a Lutheran professors' conference in 1962 asserted:

The primary manifestation of the Word of God is Jesus Christ but the Word comes to man also in the Scriptures and in the Church's proclamation. To see Christ as the content of God's address is to find the perspective for interpreting the entire Bible. This perspective is not to be arbitrarily imposed upon in a capricious application of allegorical methods. It is rather the recognition that the Old Testament, for example, contains a number of theologies, but that from these theologies our Lord selects one and gives it his sanction. It is entirely possible to derive from the Old Testament a theology of achievement which understands religion as character development. It is also possible to insist that the Servant passages of Isaiah refer to the nation and not to an individual. But Jesus interprets the Old Testament as a message of God's gift of life and the Servant songs as finding their fulfillment in his own person and career. Nothing in the Old Testament itself compels a scholar to come to christological interpretation of these passages, as the flourishing of Jewish Biblical interpretation today shows. He who accepts Jesus as Messiah, however, accedes to the tremendous claims that Jesus made for himself, and these involve a comprehensive interpretation of the Old Testament.³³

If all these assertions are permissible from the standpoint of Lutheran confessional theology, what happens to Christ's own declaration: "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the father but by me." Why did Jesus denounce the leadership of the Jewish people in the great woe Chapter, Matthew 23? Was Peter mistaken

when before the Jewish leaders he claimed: "Neither is there salvation in any other or any other name given under heaven among men by which we can be saved?" (Acts 4:12) Surely, Peter was not presenting the Jewish leaders with a group of options.

In 1969 Augsburg Publishing House made available in an English translation Claus Westermann's *Das Alte Testament und Jesus Christus*.³⁴ In the opening chapter of this small booklet Westermann totally rejects the methodology of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions and of many older Lutheran exegetes. Finding in isolated texts such as Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14, predictions of the Virgin Birth and birth of the Messiah is wrong, for to quote Westermann "such interpretation based on comparison of isolated texts brings a strong factor of unreliability into the attempt to determine the Old Testament's relation to the message about Christ." On page 34 of the English translation Westermann states that during the history of Christianity the messianic prophecies have come to be considered by far the most specific and least ambiguous promises of Christ. However, asserts the German scholar, "when one examines the texts of these promises line for line; this is certainly not the case, for the divine activity mediated by this Savior-King was not deliverance, but blessings."³⁵

He claims that the servant of God passages are much closer to Jesus of Nazareth than are the messianic prophecies.

In his essay, "Prophecy and Fulfillment," Rudolph Bultmann discusses the manner in which the New Testament writers understood the Old Testament. Thus he wrote:

The primitive community lived in the conviction that the prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in its time, that is, the appearance of Jesus Christ, in his death and Resurrection, and in the same way in its own existence and destinies; or, insofar as the fulfillment still remains outstanding, that they will shortly be fulfilled in the *parousia* of Christ.³⁶

"According to the conception which prevails in the New Testament and in the tradition of the church, prophecy is understood to be the forecasting of a future happening, and fulfillment is the occurrence of what has been forecast. And if prophecy is authorized by God, it is to a certain extent a promise of God's, which finds its fulfillment in what happened later."^{36a}

Bultmann claims that two truths are self-evident from the New Testament 1) that the future of which the Old Testament speaks in its prophecies of the *eschaton* is the Messianic age, which has been fulfilled in the Christian community; 2) The Old Testament does not contain prophecy in those passages that are prophecies in the common sense but the Old Testament is a book of prophecy as a whole, for as St. Paul says: "For whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:40).

Bultmann then proceeds to show that the New Testament writers were guilty of faulty heremeneutics and comes to the conclusion that the arguments of the New Testament writers are erroneous when they found happenings in Jesus' life foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Bultmann, a nominal Lutheran, has therefore given us another example of the rejection of the belief of the Messiah in the Old Testament. However, in the final analysis it therefore comes down to this: does a Christian theologian accept the interpretations of God's Word or does he place human wisdom and human knowledge over that of God?

A Lutheran, Mowinckel, belonging to the Uppsala School of Sweden, has written a book that dealt with Messianic prophecy and that since 1958 has become available under the title, *He that Cometh*.³⁷ In many respects this is a very scholarly book. However, it is a good example of what is meant by the advocacy of Messianism. According to Mowinckel the Christian Church, following the lead of the New Testament, has wrongly interpreted many Old Testament passages as treating of the Messiah and the Messianic kingdom. The use of the historical-critical method makes impossible interpreting Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 49:10 and many other passages as predictive of the Messiah.³⁸ For S. Mowinckel the Messiah was a purely eschatological figure, quite unconnected with the hopes which were cherished about the historical kings of Judah and he was of the opinion that the true Messiah received its genuine form only after the fall of the Davidic dynasty.

The Lutheran Claus Westermann, a German Old Testament scholar, does not follow the traditional Lutheran position on Messianic prophecy. In his *Handbook of the Old Testament* he has just five references to the Messiah and proceeds in two of them to reject the Messianic interpretation.³⁹ All Psalms, identified as Messianic by the New Testament, are said not originally to have permitted that interpretation, but was later read into the Royal Psalms.

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FOOTNOTES

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