

Advent: Learning to Wait... Together

SESSION 1: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2020

PRESENTER: DR. MURRAY WATSON

O come, O come Em - man - u - el, And
O come, Thou Rod of Jes - se, free, Thine
O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer, Our

ran - som cap - tive Is - ra - el, That
own from Sa - tan's ty - ran - ny, From
spi - rits by Thine a - dvent here, Dis -

mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here, Un -
depths of Hell Thy peo - ple save, And
spere the gloo - my clouds of night, And

til the Son of God ap - pear. Re -
give them vic - r'y o - 'er the grace.
death's dark sha - dows put to flight.

joice, re - joice! Em - man - u - el, shall

come to Thee, O Is - re - el!

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is a chant setting of the “O Antiphons,” Biblically-rooted titles of Jesus which accompany the Canticle of Mary (=the Magnificat) at Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours, in the last week of Advent, leading up to Christmas. The antiphons are believed to go back to monastic liturgies in the 8th or 9th century, and the first letters of the titles in Latin can be formed into an acrostic that spells out the Latin phrase ERO CRAS (“I will come tomorrow”), highlighting the hope of Jesus’ coming.

Some starting points ...



Christianity is a profoundly *messianic* religion: its founder and central figure, Jesus, is called “the Christ” (Greek *Χριστός*, *Christos*), “Anointed One,” which is a literal translation of the Hebrew term *מָשִׁיחַ*, *mashiah* (anglicized as “Messiah”). At the heart of Christian faith is the proclamation that Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, and the Son of God, equal to (and inseparable from) God the Father.

This understanding is rooted in the events of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, which are understood by Christians as the “fulfillment” of prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures (especially in the Prophet Isaiah and in the Psalms). There are several dozen texts from the Hebrew Scriptures (some scholars enumerate 300+) that are quoted, or alluded to, in the New Testament; whether we realize it or not, the New Testament is constantly citing (and relying upon) the Scriptures of Israel. Some editions of the Bible make those citations/allusions more easily visible (such as the French Jerusalem Bible, below, in the small print in the right margin):

votre Père céleste sait que vous avez besoin de tout cela. ³³ Cherchez d’abord son Royaume et sa justice, et tout cela vous sera donné par surcroît. ³⁴ Ne vous inquiétez donc pas du lendemain ; demain s’inquiétera de lui-même. À chaque jour suffit sa peine.

Is 51 1
Rm 14 17
Ps 37 4, 25
Sg 7 11
Jc 4 13-14
Ex 16 19

Ne pas juger.

7 ¹ « Ne jugez pas, afin de n’être pas jugés ^b ; ² car, du jugement dont vous jugez on vous jugera, et de la mesure dont vous mesurez on mesurera pour vous. ³ Qu’as-tu à regarder la paille qui est dans l’œil de ton frère ? Et la poutre qui est dans ton œil à toi, tu ne la remarques pas ! ⁴ Ou bien comment vas-tu dire à ton frère : “Laisse-moi ôter la paille de ton œil”, et voilà que la poutre est dans ton œil ! ⁵ Hypocrite, ôte d’abord la poutre de ton œil, et alors tu verras clair pour ôter la paille de l’œil de ton frère.

|| Lc 6 37-42
Rm 2 1-2
1 Co 4 5
Jc 4 11s ;
5 9
|| Mc 4 24
Jn 8 7

Ne pas profaner les choses saintes.

⁶ « Ne donnez pas aux chiens ce qui est sacré ^c, ne jetez pas vos perles devant les porcs, de crainte qu’ils ne les piétinent, puis se retournent contre vous pour vous déchirer.

Dr 23 19 ; Ps 22
16, 20 ; Ph 3 2 ;
2 P 2 22 ;
Ap 22 15
Ex 29 33 ; Lv 22
10 ; Tb 4 17 ;
Pr 23 9 ; Si 22
9-10
|| Lc 11 9-13

Efficacité de la prière.

⁷ « Demandez et l’on vous donnera ; cherchez et vous trouverez ; frappez et l’on vous ouvrira. ⁸ Car quiconque demande reçoit ; qui cherche trouve ; et à qui frappe on ouvrira. ⁹ Quel est d’entre vous l’homme auquel son fils demandera du pain, et qui lui remettra

Mt 18 19 ; Mc 11
24 ; Lc 18 1-8 ;
Jn 14 13 ; Jc 15+
Dr 4 29+ ;
Pr 8 17 ; Jr 29 13s

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (3)

The partial list below is from *The Greek New Testament*, 4th revised edition, 1994):

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------|---------|-------------|------|----------|----------|-------------|
| MATTHEW | | 4.4 | Dt 8.3 | 5.27 | Dt 5.18 | 8.17 | Is 53.4 |
| 1.23a | Is 7.14 LXX | 4.6 | Ps 91.11-12 | 5.31 | Dt 24.1 | 9.13 | Ho 6.6 |
| 1.23b | Is 8.8,10 LXX | 4.7 | Dt 6.16 | 5.33 | Lv 19.12 | 10.35-36 | Mic 7.6 |
| 2.6 | Mic 5.2 | 4.10 | Dt 6.13 | | Nu 30.2 | 11.10 | Mal 3.1 |
| 2.15 | Ho 11.1 | 4.15-16 | Is 9.1-2 | 5.38 | Ex 21.24 | 12.7 | Ho 6.6 |
| 2.18 | Jr 31.15 | 5.21 | Ex 20.13 | | Lv 24.20 | 12.18-20 | Is 42.1-3 |
| 3.3 | Is 40.3 LXX | | Dt 5.17 | 5.43 | Dt 19.21 | 12.21 | Is 42.4 LXX |
| | | 5.27 | Ex 20.14 | | Lv 19.18 | 12.40 | Jon 1.17 |

| | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| MATTHEW (cont.) | | MARK | |
| 13.14-15 | Is 6.9-10 LXX | 1.2 | Mal 3.1 |
| 13.35 | Ps 78.2 | 1.3 | Is 40.3 LXX |
| 15.4a | Ex 20.12 | 4.12 | Is 6.9-10 LXX |
| | Dt 5.16 | 7.6-7 | Is 29.13 LXX |
| 15.4b | Ex 21.17 | 7.10a | Ex 20.12 |
| 15.8-9 | Is 29.13 LXX | | Dt 5.16 |
| 18.16 | Dt 19.15 | 7.10b | Ex 21.17 |
| 19.4 | Gn 1.27 | 10.4 | Dt 24.1,3 |
| | 5.2 | 10.6 | Gn 1.27 |
| 19.5 | Gn 2.24 | | 5.2 |
| 19.7 | Dt 24.1 | 10.7-8 | Gn 2.24 |
| 19.18-19 | Ex 20.12-16 | 10.19 | Ex 20.12-16 |
| | Dt 5.16-20 | | Dt 5.16-20 |
| 19.19 | Lv 19.18 | 11.9-10 | Ps 118.25-26 |
| 21.5 | Is 62.11 | 11.17 | Is 56.7 |
| | Zch 9.9 | 12.10-11 | Ps 118.22-23 |
| 21.9 | Ps 118.25-26 | 12.19 | Dt 25.5 |
| 21.13 | Is 56.7 | 12.26 | Ex 3.6,15 |
| 21.16 | Ps 8.3 LXX | 12.29-30 | Dt 6.4-5 |
| 21.42 | Ps 118.22-23 | 12.31 | Lv 19.18 |
| 22.24 | Dt 25.5 | 12.32a | Dt 6.4 |
| 22.32 | Ex 3.6,15 | 12.32b | Dt 4.35 |
| 22.37 | Dt 6.5 | | Is 45.21 |
| 22.39 | Lv 19.18 | 12.33a | Dt 6.5 |
| 22.44 | Ps 110.1 | 12.33b | Lv 19.18 |
| 23.39 | Ps 118.26 | 12.36 | Ps 110.1 |
| 24.30 | Dn 7.13 | 13.26 | Dn 7.13 |
| 26.31 | Zch 13.7 | | |
| 26.64a | Ps 110.1 | | |
| 26.64b | Dn 7.13 | | |
| 27.9-10 | Zch 11.12-13 | | |
| 27.46 | Ps 22.1 | | |

Many Christians assume that this list of “fulfilled messianic prophecies” corresponds to THE list of “messianic texts” that every first-century Jew would have been familiar with, and that this list was more or less unanimously accepted by all Jews in that period. For this reason, Christianity has traditionally accused Jews of *wilfully ignoring* these texts, all of which Jesus is said to have fulfilled, thus irrefutably “proving” his credentials as the Messiah. The standard Christian view, therefore, has either been that Jews are honestly misled or uninformed (i.e., that they don’t know or understand their own Scriptures), or they simply (and culpably) *refuse to accept* what seems clear—that Jesus “checks all the boxes” for the awaited Messiah. Christians have, therefore, often believed that Jewish people deliberately refuse to acknowledge what seems very obvious to many Christians: that Jesus is the Messiah. This has led to many Christian organizations (both then and now) working to convince Jews (either gently or aggressively) of the error of their ways¹ and has, in many ages of Christian history, contributed to widespread Christian hatred and hostility toward Jews, and violence (verbal or physical) directed against them, their communities and their institutions. So the question of messianism, and of how we understand Scriptural texts, is absolutely central to any real dialogue between Jews and Christians; ultimately, it is unavoidable. As Gershom Scholem wrote back in 1970: “Any discussion of the problems relating to Messianism is a delicate matter, for it is here that the essential conflict between Judaism and Christianity has developed and continues to exist” (*The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*)

Certainly, Judaism is a faith that, in much of its long history, has had a strongly messianic component (especially acute in times of persecution and suffering). The great 12th-century Jewish sage and Bible interpreter Moses

¹ For example, the Evangelical “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jewish” movements, as well as the Anglican “Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People” (formerly the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews), and numerous Christian mission groups and apostolates dedicated to converting Jews to Christianity.

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (4)

Maimonides (the “Rambam”) enumerated, among the 13 articles which he considered constitutive of Jewish faith, belief in the future coming of the Messiah as one of the non-negotiables of Judaism:

“We believe and affirm that the Messiah will come. One should not think he is detained. [Rather,] ‘If he should tarry, await him’ (*Habakkuk* 2:3) ... He who doubts or belittles [the Messiah’s arrival] denies [the authority of the Torah, which explicitly promises his arrival].”

“I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and although he may tarry, nevertheless, I wait every day for him to come.”

Jewish messianic hopes have surged and waned throughout the centuries (including a number of self-proclaimed messiahs in the decades around the time of Jesus)². After the messianic claims made for the famous second-century revolutionary-king Simeon Bar-Kochba led to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 135 CE, messianism fell out of favour with many of the great rabbinic sages for centuries. Many leading Jews became extremely skeptical about messianic speculation and claims; in response to the claims of the esteemed Rabbi Akiva in support of Bar-Kochba [“son of a star”], his contemporary, Rabbi Yochanan, is said to have replied: “Akiva, grass will be growing from your cheekbones [i.e., you will be long dead and in your grave], and the King-Messiah still will not have come” (Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Ta’anit* 68b) ... Nevertheless there is an undeniable messianic current in Judaism which surfaces at various times and places. Many religious Jews continue to believe in the future coming of a Messiah figure (or the arrival of a “messianic age” of peace and fulfillment). **But there is no single “Jewish interpretation” shared by everyone, either in the past or today**—and, sadly, many Jewish messianic hopes have been crushed. For some devout Jews, the Holocaust destroyed their faith in the Messiah, who had not come in the time of his people’s worst suffering and need. Others view the establishment of the State of Israel as the start of a “messianic time”.

Christianity affirms that, Jesus—risen from the dead and ascended into heaven—will one day return again in messianic glory, to judge the living and the dead³, and the New Testament exhorts Christians to constantly be on their watch, since that Second (and final) Coming would occur at any moment, and will come unexpectedly:

Matthew 25:13

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour

1 Thessalonians 5:2

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night

In that sense, traditional Judaism and Christianity are both religions with “their eyes on the horizon,” looking ahead to the arrival (or return?) of the Messiah. Since eager anticipation of Jesus’ glorious return is a central theme of Advent⁴, Advent is a season that allows for some rich conversation between Jews and Christians about their hopes for the future—where they are *similar* (or *the same*), and where they are *different*. In many ways, it is one of the seasons in which Jews and Christians would seem to have a great deal to say to each other—and to *listen* to each other.

Martin Buber (distinguished German-Israeli Jewish philosopher and theologian, 1878-1975): “What is the difference between Jews and Christians? ... We all await the Messiah. You Christians believe that He has already come and gone, while we Jews do not. I, therefore, propose we await him together.”

² To read more about the history of Jewish messianic movements: Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ As the fourth-century Nicene Creed says: “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end”.

⁴ “Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.” (Vatican *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, 1969)

What background and context are necessary (from a Christian perspective) for this conversation to happen in a respectful, informed and fruitful way, that builds up relations of dialogue and friendship, rather than driving our two faiths further apart?

We Christians need to appreciate that there is not (and never was) a single, universally-accepted “Jewish view” about the Messiah, which all Jews would recognize and acknowledge.

Judaism has always been a notoriously *pluralistic* and *diverse* community, with various movements, currents, parties or ways of thinking. In the first-century world, this included the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Essenes, the *Sicarii*, the Nazarenes (many of whom would later become the Christians), the *Therapeutae*, etc. Although they shared a large pool of beliefs and understandings, they disagreed vehemently about many major issues, including the list of books inspired by God, the possibility of resurrection, the role of extra-biblical interpretive traditions, the existence of angels, and the role of freewill in human life (not to mention very different *political* views, and even differing religious calendars!). Jews lived in very different settings (the Holy Land, Turkey, Italy, Greece, Iraq, North Africa, etc.) and spoke several different languages. They did not all accept the authority of the same religious leaders and interpreters; an old Jewish proverb says: “Two Jews, three opinions”!

Christians often fail to take into account the considerable theological variety in Judaism, and the range of “Judaisms” (as Dr Jacob Neusner called it) that existed; there was not a single, monolithic, uniform Judaism that all Jews of that time subscribed to (and the same is at least as true today!)

These differences were particularly noticeable in questions about the Messiah(s) ... for example, it seems that the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Essenes?) believed in *two* Messiahs (one, a *priestly* Messiah from the lineage of Moses’ brother Aaron, and one, a *royal* Messiah from the lineage of King David, the “Messiah of Israel”):

... during the time of ungodliness until the appearance of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel (*Damascus Document* 12:23)

... they shall be governed by the first ordinances in which the members of the community began their instruction, until the coming of the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel (*Community Rule* 9:10-11)

While we have limited information about the messianic beliefs of many ancient Jewish groups, the differences that we *do* know about mean that we can safely assume that there would have been just as many disagreements and feuds on a topic as important as the Messiah.

The statement frequently found in Christian writing and preaching—that “the Jews did not accept Jesus because he didn’t conform to the idea they had of the Messiah” is obviously an oversimplification of a very complex landscape, and is, at best, only *partially* true. And yet we have all encountered statements like these:

“The Jewish people expected a political leader. A strong warrior king, a Messiah to free the Hebrew people from Rome. Of everything expected about the coming of the Messiah, only one came true. Christ was to be born of the house of David.” (*“Amen, I Say to You”: Sunday Homilies for Cycles A, B, and C*)

“The Jewish people had nothing but erroneous speculations regarding Jesus’ identity, and Jesus had come to be ... the Messiah, yet a messiah entirely different than any of them thought ... The Jews expected a political conqueror, not a suffering servant. They awaited the messianic destruction of the Romans.” (Grant Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*)

“... how radically different Jesus was from the popular first-century Jewish expectation of the long-awaited Messiah: the Jewish people looked for a powerful political leader; instead Jesus arrived as the humble servant-king. Jesus was a very different kind of Messiah — far from the swash-buckling, conquering hero the Jews were expecting and hoping for ... As far as Jesus’ contemporaries were concerned, God’s liberation was a military liberation.” (Steve Chalke, *Intelligent Church*)

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (6)

What would be the qualifications of the Messiah? How would he be recognized when he came?

“Messianic texts” is a slippery category, since very few Bible verses explicitly link to the idea of the Messiah, and these passages were only identified through a process of interpretation that is somewhat subjective and not easily verifiable by outsiders. There are many implicit assumptions that are woven into the question of what qualifies as a “messianic” text, and what does not.

The New Testament provides perhaps 25-30 main “messianic fulfillment” texts that are referred to Jesus (for details, see the chart at the end of this package). However ... we need to know that these were *just a small sub-set* of the “messianic” texts that were applied by various different Jewish groups in the centuries around the time of Jesus (i.e., those in the New Testament are not “THE List” that all Jews would have agreed on).

In his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, the Jewish scholar-turned-Christian Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) includes a fascinating appendix which lists 456 Biblical passages that are cited in ancient Jewish texts as referring to the Messiah (75 from the Pentateuch, 243 from the Prophets, and 138 from the Writings). It’s important for Christians to understand that there are many other potentially “messianic” verses or passages that were *not* included in the New Testament, because Jesus did not seem to have fulfilled them during his lifetime (many Christians believe that those texts will be fulfilled by Jesus at his Second Coming). Many of these are texts referring to “that day” or “at the end of days”. For example:

Joel 3:17-20 ¹⁷ So you shall know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it. ¹⁸ In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Wadi Shittim [the Streambed of the Acacias] ⁹ Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood. ²⁰ But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.

Amos 9:13¹³ “Be sure of this, the time is coming,” says the LORD, “when the plowman will catch up to the reaper and the one who stomps the grapes will overtake the planter. Juice will run down the slopes, it will flow down all the hillsides.

Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-3: “It shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of God’s house shall be set over all other mountains and lifted high above the hills; and all nations shall come streaming to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to God’s mountain, to the house of Israel’s God. He (the Messiah) will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For the Torah shall go forth out of Zion, and God’s word from Jerusalem. And he (the Messiah) will judge between nations and decide between peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither will they practice war anymore.”

Zechariah 14:9: “God will be King over all the earth; on that day God will be One and His Name One.”

For this reason, debates between Jews and Christians on the basis of messianic texts often result in an impasse; for every passage a Christian points to that Jesus is said to have fulfilled, a knowledgeable Jew will point to others (equally valid and plausible) which Jesus *did not* fulfil. Using these texts as part of a Christian apologetic or missionary approach may have some usefulness, but it also has significant limitations and drawbacks, which Christians need to acknowledge honestly.

Many of the “messianic” texts identified by Jewish sages would leave Christians scratching their heads, because they do not in any way agree with the usual Christian understandings of the Messiah (or they rely on Hebrew linguistic connections that most Christians would not be able to grasp).

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (7)

As Christians, we need to be aware that there is an ancient Jewish tradition of reading certain biblical texts with reference to the Messiah, even if there is no obvious surface reference. Certain expressions and terms came to be understood by many Jews as “codewords” for the Messiah. We see this especially in some of the Targums (Aramaic interpretive translations/paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible, which began slightly before the time of Jesus and continued for several centuries). Several of these Targums have a strongly “messianic” leaning, and tend to incorporate interpretations that were current at that time; these traditions are also preserved in some other Jewish literature, such as the Talmuds:

Genesis 49:10

Hebrew text: The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him [or, ‘until Shiloh comes’⁵]; and the obedience of the peoples is his.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Neither kings nor rulers shall cease from the house of Judah, nor scribes teaching the Law from his seed, until the time that *the King Messiah* shall come, the youngest of his sons, and on account of him shall the peoples all flow together. How beautiful is *the King, the Messiah* who will arise from the house of Judah! He has girded his loins, and descended to prepare for battle against his adversaries, slaying kings and rulers; nor is there any king or ruler who shall stand before him.

“The Lord’s Branch”=The Messiah

Isaiah 4:2 On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.

Targum Isaiah: At that time, *the Messiah of the Lord* shall be for joy and for glory.

Jeremiah 23:5 The days are surely 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.

Targum Jeremiah: The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up unto David *a righteous Messiah*, and he shall reign as King and understand.

Psalms 21

Hebrew text: ¹ In your strength the king rejoices, O LORD, and in your help how greatly he exults!

⁷ For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.

Targum of Psalms:

¹ O LORD, in your strength the *King Messiah* will rejoice, and how greatly will he exult in your redemption!

⁷ Because the *King Messiah* hopes in the LORD, and through the favor of the Most High he is not shaken.

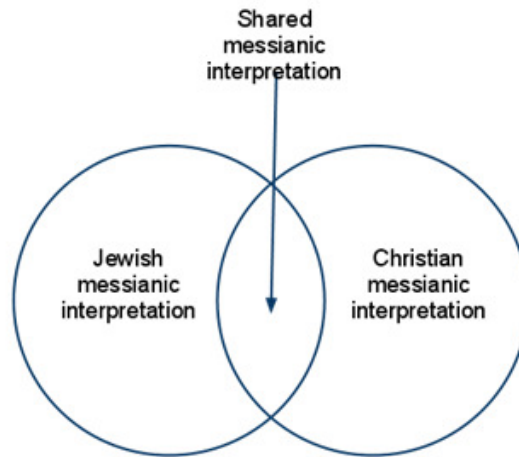
Psalms 72

Hebrew text: ¹⁷ His name shall endure forever, and shall continue before the sun!

Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b: The name of the Messiah shall endure for ever, and [has existed] before the sun! ⁶... His name shall endure for ever; before the sun ever was, his name is Yinnon [interpreted by most translations as a verb, “his name *will endure*”, but taken here as a proper name: “His name is Yinnon”]

⁵ “The Hebrew form שִׁלּוֹה (*shiloh*) is a major interpretive problem. There are at least four major options (with many variations and less likely alternatives): (1) Some prefer to leave the text as it is, reading ‘Shiloh’ and understanding it as the place where the ark rested for a while in the time of the Judges. (2) By repointing the text others arrive at the translation ‘until the [or ‘his’] ruler comes,’ a reference to a Davidic ruler or the Messiah. (3) Another possibility that does not require emendation of the consonantal text, but only repointing, is ‘until tribute is brought to him’ (so NEB, JPS, NRSV), which has the advantage of providing good parallelism with the following line, ‘the nations will obey him.’ (4) The interpretation followed in the present translation, ‘to whom it [belongs]’ (so RSV, NIV, REB), is based on the ancient versions. Again, this would refer to the Davidic dynasty or, ultimately, to the Messiah.” (NET Bible notes)

⁶ The name of the Messiah is listed by some ancient rabbinic sources as one of the seven things which God created before the creation of the world.



The language of the Bible you use matters

Traditionally, the reference point for Jewish Biblical interpretation has been the Torah as written in Hebrew (with a few bits in Aramaic!). However, two centuries before Jesus, Greek-speaking Jews had already begun to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek (→ the Septuagint, abbreviated “LXX”), a version that was later abandoned by mainstream Judaism. For many late-first-century (Greek-speaking) Christians (and many Jews from outside the Land of Israel), the Septuagint was the Bible they knew best. What isn’t always obvious in New Testament translations is that its quotations from the Hebrew Bible sometimes draw on the traditional *Hebrew* version, and sometimes draw upon the *Greek* Septuagint (see the list at the top of page 3, where some verses are marked “LXX”). Some of these quotes rely entirely upon expressions in Greek which sometimes do not exactly correspond to the Hebrew. Probably the most famous and controversial is the text from Isaiah 7:14 which, in the King James Version, reads: “Behold, *a virgin shall conceive*, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”. This reflects an awareness of the Greek LXX, which uses the term *parthénos* (παρθένος, “virgin”) here; this is the essence of the miraculous birth celebrated at Christmas. However, as many Jewish scholars have pointed out, the underlying Hebrew term, ‘*almah* (עַלְמָה) means simply a young woman of marriageable age (whose pregnancy would not be considered anything miraculous or supernatural). The Greek is more specific than the Hebrew: which version is to be considered authoritative? Christians have traditionally privileged the Septuagint, because it makes the theological point more easily. Many Jews argue that the Christian argument is reading into the text something that is not there in the original.

Today, many contemporary translations lean more in the direction of the Hebrew here:

JPS Tanakh: “Behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”

NRSV: “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel”

New Jerusalem Bible: “The young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.”

(... while retaining the LXX’s “virgin” translation in the New Testament passages that quote it, such as Matthew 1:23).

The language of our Bible matters in these discussions!

Today, instead of arguing about “messianic” Bible verses (and whether Jews or Christians are “right” about them!), many Jews and Christians realize that we will probably never arrive at interpretations that both groups can agree on—and yet we also realize that each of our traditions can shed important light on the meaning (or at least the *potential meanings*) in some of these texts. By respectfully studying and learning together, we have come to realize that there is not *one single, exclusive* interpretation of any Biblical text

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (9)

(the ancient rabbis often said that the Torah speaks with 70 different tongues [interpretations]). By exploring our traditions of interpretation, in company with each other, we can open ourselves to new perspectives, and can arrive at a more humble (and richer!) appreciation of the inexhaustible depths of meaning God has implanted in the words of our Scriptures:

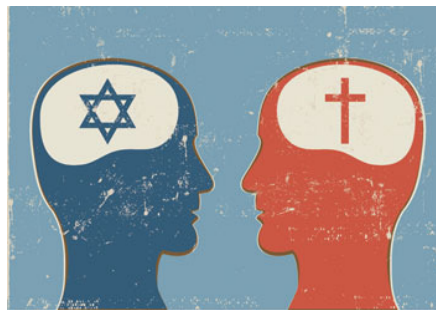
Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible [i.e., they cannot be entirely reconciled or unified]

On the practical level of exegesis, Christians can, nonetheless, learn much from Jewish exegesis practised for more than two thousand years, and, in fact, they have learned much in the course of history. For their part, it is to be hoped that Jews themselves can derive profit from Christian exegetical research. (Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible," 2002, §22)

Earlier in this presentation, I mentioned a famous talk given by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. But I only quoted *the first half* of his words, and I think that reading and reflecting on the *full* quotation is a good place for us to conclude, and to discuss further on this fascinating (but not simple) question:

"What is the difference between Jews and Christians? ... We all await the Messiah. You Christians believe that He has already come and gone, while we Jews do not. I, therefore, propose we await him together.

And when he appears, we can ask Him, 'So, were you here before?' ... I hope that at that moment I will be close enough to whisper in his ear, 'For the sake of heaven, don't answer!'"⁷



⁷ As cited in Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pp. 354-55.

Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship Between Judaism and Christianity*, pp. 101-102:

... it seems that we might summarize the Jewish Messianic belief along the following lines: A Messiah or a Lord's Anointed would be first preceded by Elijah; then he would come himself, heralded by troubles and calamities of every kind: wars, famines, etc. It would be a real upheaval of nature. The wicked would form a coalition under the command of a leader, whose identity remained rather vague. These hosts of evil would be defeated, but the identity of the victor was also undefined; the greater number believed that this conqueror would be the Messiah himself. The Messianic Kingdom would be established in Jerusalem. After a long period of years, perhaps a thousand, this period of peace and unparalleled happiness would come to a climax: all corruptible elements would be destroyed in a purifying fire; the dead would arise; the righteous and the wicked would receive their reward; the sentence would be pronounced by the "Son of Man," giving judgment in God's name. In the Pharisaic circles it was held that the Messiah would belong to the tribe of Judah and house of David, as the prophets had foretold. The idea of the advent of a Messiah of the tribe of Levi had also gained adherents. According to a very widely held view, another Messiah, a son of Joseph or a son of Ephraim, would come, whose relation to the Messiah son of David is hard to define. The Talmud speaks of him. He was to die in battle, and it is in connexion with him that the question of a suffering Messiah might be raised. There is an intimate connexion between the idea of the Suffering Messiah and the words of Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant.

From Maimonides:

If there arises a ruler from the family of David, immersed in the Torah and its commandments like David his ancestor, following both the Written and Oral Torah, who leads Israel back to the Torah, strengthening the observance of its laws and fighting God's battles, then we may assume that he is the Messiah. If he is further successful in rebuilding the Temple on its original site and gathering the dispersed of Israel, then his identity as Messiah is a certainty.

Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, eds., *Jewish-Christian Encounters over the Centuries: Symbiosis, Prejudice, Holocaust, Dialogue*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994, pp. 13-14

Christianity is the only Jewish messiah movement that ultimately survived and in that sense succeeded. Needless to say, however, it was not able to survive and therefore did not finally succeed within the Jewish world in which it originated. Early on Christian missionaries penetrated the gentile world and it was in that cultural setting that they eventually made a home for themselves. In the process Christianity underwent a profound transformation which had wide-ranging repercussions on its relationship with its own Jewish heritage, a heritage which derived from Jesus himself and his first disciples, all of whom were themselves Jews. By the time of the rupture between rabbinical Judaism and Christianity, which occurred in a more or less definitive fashion towards the end of the first century, significant discontinuity between the two traditions was already apparent even if a not insignificant continuity remained. The discontinuity was to deepen in subsequent centuries as ties of continuity were further weakened even if never completely severed

...

It can only have been owing to their belief in the vindicating resurrection of Jesus that they felt sufficiently confident to find in a crucified prophet Israel's messiah, as well as to preach that unusual view of things in the

Jewish world, and to attempt to ground it authoritatively in a creative rereading of the scriptural tradition. Christians all too easily and uncritically assume that the Old Testament literature, especially the prophetic literature, provides abundant support by way of prophecies or predictions for the sort of crucified and resurrected messiah Christians believe Jesus was. The issue is in fact far more complicated than that. The difficulties attached to the proclamation of an untraditional crucified and resurrected messiah were further and seemingly fatally compounded by unavoidable questions regarding the messianic age and the reign of God. If Jesus was the messiah, where in fact was the new age of peace and justice, the age of *shalom* in this world, which the messiah was expected to bring? The world seemed, at least to the Jewish objector, quite unaffected and unaltered by the appearance of the messiah Jesus. There was no empirically obvious evidence that any messiah had made his appearance, let alone that Jesus of Nazareth might be such a messiah.

Robert McAfee Brown (Protestant theologian, 1920-2001)

The Jew laments: ‘Since the world is so evil, why does the Messiah not come?’ The Christian wonders, ‘Why, since the Messiah has come, is the world still evil?’⁸



For Further Reading:

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The One Who Is to Come*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.

Klausner, Joseph. *The Messianic Idea in Israel, from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956.

Mowinckel, Sigmund. *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1956.

Patai, Raphael. *The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends of Three Thousand Years*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015.

⁸ See, for example, McAfee Brown’s *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 78-79.

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (12)

From: *NET Bible Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. Edited by Gregory White: https://bible.org/assets/pdf/White_ntsynopsis.pdf

Messianic Prophecies

| # | Prophecy | Promise | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John | Pericope | Page |
|----|------------------------------|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------|----------|---------|
| 1 | Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19 | Messiah was to be a prophet like Moses | | | | 7:40 | 241 | 169 |
| 2 | Exodus 12:46 | Messiah's bones were not to be broken | | | | 19:31-36 | 349 | 238 |
| 3 | Isaiah 50:6 | Messiah was to be struck and spat on by his enemies | 26:67, 27:30 | 14:65 | | | 322 | 226 |
| 4 | Isaiah 50:6 | Messiah was to be struck and spat on by his enemies | 27:30 | 14:65 | | | 340 | 232 |
| 5 | Isaiah 53:1 | Who has believed our report? | | | | 12:37-38 | 303 | 209 |
| 6 | Isaiah 53:1, 3; Psalm 118:22 | Messiah was to be rejected by his own people | 26:3-4 | | | 12:37-43 | 305 | 211 |
| | | Numbered with transgressors | 27:38 | 15:27-28 | 23:32-33 | | 345 | 236 |
| 8 | Isaiah 53:12 | He will be great | 28:18 | | 24:27 | | 355 | 243 |
| 9 | Isaiah 53:12 | He will be great | 28:18 | | 24:27 | | 359,364 | 245,247 |
| 10 | Isaiah 53:12 | Made intercession for sinners | | | 23:34, 39-43 | | 344,346 | 235,236 |
| 11 | Isaiah 53:12 | Messiah was to suffer with criminals and pray for his enemies | 27:38 | 15:27-28 | 23:32-34 | | 345 | 236 |
| 12 | Isaiah 53:3 | Despised and rejected | | 9:12 | 17:25 | 1:10-11 | 1,162 | 22,129 |
| 13 | Isaiah 53:3 | Despised and rejected | | 9:12 | 17:25 | 1:10-11 | 235 | 165 |
| 14 | Isaiah 53:4 | He has borne our infirmities | 8:16-17 | | | | 38 | 54 |
| 15 | Isaiah 53:4 | Considered smitten by God | 27:38-44 | | 23:35 | | 345 | 236 |
| 16 | Isaiah 53:5 | Jesus was flogged | | 15:15 | 22:63-65 | 19:1 | 341 | 233 |
| 17 | Isaiah 53:5 | Jesus was flogged | | 15:15 | 22:63-65 | 19:1 | 332,340 | 226,232 |
| 18 | Isaiah 53:5-6, 8, 10-12 | Messiah was to die as a sacrifice for sin | | | | 11:49-52 | 260 | 180 |
| 19 | Isaiah 53:5-6, 8, 10-12 | Messiah was to die as a sacrifice for sin | | | | 1:29; 11:49-52 | 18 | 37 |
| 20 | Isaiah 53:7 | Silent before His accusers | 26:62-63, 27:12-14 | 14:60-61, 15:3-15 | 23:8-10 | 19:9 | 332,336 | 226,229 |
| 21 | Isaiah 53:7 | Silent before His accusers | 26:62-63, 27:12-14 | 14:60-61, 15:3-15 | 23:8-10 | 19:9 | 337 | 230 |
| 22 | Isaiah 53:7 | Silent before His accusers | 26:62-63, 27:12-14 | 14:60-61, 15:3-15 | 23:8-10 | 19:9 | 340 | 232 |
| 23 | Isaiah 53:8 | Messiah was to be tried and condemned | 27:1-2 | | 23:1-25 | | 334 | 228 |
| 24 | Isaiah 53:9 | Buried with the rich | 27:57-60 | 15:43-46 | 23:50-53 | 19:38-42 | 350 | 239 |
| 25 | Isaiah 53:9 | Died with the wicked | 27:38 | 15:27-28 | 23:32-33 | | 345 | 236 |
| 26 | Isaiah 7:14 | Messiah was to be born of a virgin | 1:18-25 | | 1:26-38 | | 3,7 | 25,28 |
| 27 | Micah 5:2 | Messiah to be born in Bethlehem | 2:1-6 | | 2:1-20 | | 8 | 29 |
| 28 | Psalm 110:1 | Messiah is now at God's right hand | | 16:19 | 24:50-51 | | 363,365 | 247,248 |
| 29 | Psalm 16:10 | Messiah was to be raised from the dead | 28:1-10 | | | | 352 | 241 |
| 30 | Psalm 22:1 | The forsaken Christ | 27:46 | 15:34 | | | 347 | 237 |
| 31 | Psalm 22:12 | Surrounded by enemies | 27:27-31 | 15:16-20 | | | 342 | 234 |
| 32 | Psalm 22:14, 16-17 | Messiah was to be physically weakened and die by crucifixion | 27:31 | 15:20, 25 | 23:26 | | 343 | 234 |
| 33 | Psalm 22:15 | Thirsty | | | | 19:28 | 347 | 237 |

ADVENT: LEARNING TO WAIT ... TOGETHER (13)

| # | Prophecy | Promise | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John | Pericope | Page |
|----|---------------|--|--------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|----------|---------|
| 34 | Psalms 22:16 | Hands and feet pierced | | | | 20:20, 25 | 356 | 244 |
| 35 | Psalms 22:16 | Surrounded by enemies | 27:39-44 | | | | 345 | 236 |
| 36 | Psalms 22:16 | Hands and feet pierced | | | | 20:20, 25 | 356 | 244 |
| 37 | Psalms 22:17 | Bones not broken | | | | 19:31-36 | 348 | 238 |
| 38 | Psalms 22:17 | Stared at by the people | 27:55-56 | | 23:35, 48-49 | 19:20 | 348 | 238 |
| 39 | Psalms 22:17 | Stared at by the people | 27:55-56 | | 23:35, 48-49 | 19:20 | 344,345 | 235,236 |
| 40 | Psalms 22:18 | Lots cast for His clothing | 27:35 | 15:24 | 23:34 | 19:23-24 | 344 | 235 |
| 41 | Psalms 22:18 | Others were to cast lots for Messiah's garments | 27:35 | | | 19:28-30 | 347 | 237 |
| 42 | Psalms 22:6-7 | Verbally abused by men | 26:67-68, 27:27-31 | | | | 332 | 226 |
| 43 | Psalms 22:6-7 | Verbally abused by men | 26:67-68, 27:27-31 | | | | 342 | 234 |
| 44 | Psalms 22:7-8 | Messiah was to be mocked and insulted | | | 23:11, 35 | | 337 | 230 |
| 45 | Psalms 22:7-8 | Messiah was to be mocked and insulted | 27:29-44 | | 23:11, 35 | | 340 | 232 |
| 46 | Psalms 22:7-8 | Messiah was to be mocked and insulted | 27:29-44 | | 23:11, 35 | | 342 | 234 |
| 47 | Psalms 22:7-8 | Messiah was to be mocked and insulted | 27:29-44 | | 23:11, 35 | | 345 | 236 |
| 48 | Psalms 22:8 | Trust in God ridiculed | 27:39-44 | 15:29-32 | 23:35, 39 | | 345 | 236 |
| 49 | Psalms 41:9 | Messiah was to be betrayed by one of his followers | 26:14-16 | | | | 307 | 213 |
| 50 | Psalms 41:9 | Messiah was to be betrayed by one of his followers | | | 22:19-23 | | 311 | 215 |
| 51 | Psalms 41:9 | Messiah was to be betrayed by one of his followers | 26:47-50 | | | | 331 | 225 |
| 52 | Psalms 69:21 | Messiah was to be given vinegar and gall | 27:34 | | | 19:29-30 | 344 | 235 |
| 53 | Zechariah 9:9 | Messiah was to enter Jerusalem in triumph | 21:1-9 | | | 12:12-16 | 269 | 185 |