

**THE MESSIANIC HOPE
OF ISRAEL**

Studies in Messianic Prophecy

by

Max I. Reich

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2. THE HOPE RAISED

We will have to turn to the Book of Genesis to find the hidden source in history of the ever brightening Hope which illuminated the often dark record of Israel's story.

The Book of Genesis covers a longer period of time than all the Scriptures put together. And its story emphasizes four distinct prophecies concerning One who was to come: the prophecy made by the LORD GOD Himself (Chap. 3); the prophecy of Noah (Chap. 9); the prophecy made to Abram and his family (Chaps. 12 and 22), and the death-bed prophecy of Jacob, the last of the three roots of the people from whom the earthly progenitors of the Coming One have sprung (Chapter 49).

(1) The Proto-Evangelium - The Gospel of the Gates of Eden

The first theophany (or divine self-revelation in visibility) occurred after the Fall of Man when to his undoing he became, as the LORD GOD said:

"The man is become as one of us," that is, his own master. Then the LORD GOD began His redeeming search. Grace took the initiative, as it always has done. In the plaintive cry: **"Where art thou?"** we hear the mother call of divine love. And this theophany was but the first of many more, culminating in the Incarnation, **"God was manifest in the flesh"** (I Timothy 3:16).

Full of mystery, yet rich in content, are the words pronounced on the serpent, the creature which camouflaged the approach of the world of evil towards man. The curse pronounced on the serpent does not fall on man, though the ground, his material environment, is affected by it. But in the heart of the judgment on the personification of evil gleams the hope of redemption for man. GOD will not give up His original plan in man's creation. The very woman beguiled by the serpent, would bring forth the One who should bring the reign of sin and death to an end.

May we not see in the cryptic term "the seed of the woman" an intimation of a Virgin-birth? The Redeemer must be Man, and in manhood win out in the conflict with evil where man has been worsted. But He must be free from the taint generation of sinful seed entails. Hence the necessity of the miraculous divine intervention in the origin and birth of the Emancipator of a fallen race. But this deliverance would cost Him the bruising of His heel. Both the sufferings and the triumphs of the Messiah are thus sketched forth in the first prophecy of Holy Scripture, the root

from which the widely branched tree of Messianic prophecy has grown.

The first intimation of the Coming One connects Him with the human race, its representative and Redeemer. Hence the new name which Adam gave to his wife after hearing this prophecy: Chava, (Zoe in the Greek Septuagint), that is, she would be "**the mother of all living**" (Genesis 3:20), the mystical mother of Him who calls Himself Ho Zon, the Living One, and the spiritual mother of all those who would obtain through faith "life in His Name," prefiguring the "**Jerusalem which is above... which is the mother of us all.**"

And it is noteworthy that Adam's faith in the coming Deliverer was accompanied by the LORD GOD covering man's nakedness: "**Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them**" (Genesis 3:21). Is not the atonement prefigured in this? The word used for *clothed* is the same employed for *atonement* in the Hebrew. Our nakedness and sinfulness is not seen when covered by the virtue and value of the atoning sacrifice thus prefigured.

Lamech, the tenth from Adam restricts the fulfillment of the promise to a certain part of the human race, to that of Noah. Noah, the father of Shem, was looked for at his very birth as the one who would bring in the looked-for comfort: "**And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed**" (Genesis 5:29); and while this was a premature expectation, it nevertheless remained true that Noah was chosen to be the direct ancestor of the Comforter to come, while an initial fulfillment was made in the everlasting covenant established with Noah and his descendants after the flood.

(2) The Noahic Prophecy

In Genesis 9, the light of prophecy breaks through the gloom of human ignorance: "**And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said: Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant**" (9:25-27). This remarkable pronouncement is the first recorded prophecy of Holy Scripture by *human* lips (the proto-evangelium was a prophecy uttered by the *divine* mouth directly), and speaks of the LORD GOD of Shem. It is the first time that GOD identifies Himself with a particular man. The children of Ham and not Japheth were the first civilizers and masters of the world. The cradle of culture stood in Egypt, Phoenicia and Babylon. The day when the sons of Japheth would come to the front was much later. The "enlargement" promised to Japheth did not begin till the Persian Cyrus began his conquering career which started the political and militaristic hegemony of the Aryan race till our day.

Then centuries after came the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Shem, that the LORD GOD would be his GOD in a special sense. He did indeed choose the tents of Shem from His abode and the conquering Japheth must needs go to the tents of Shem to find the true GOD.

The words: "**Blessed be the LORD God of Shem**" indicate that Shem would be pre-eminent in being the bearer of the Divine Name. The very word *Shem*, i.e., *Name*, points to that. By the "Name" is meant the self-revelation of GOD in history, as well as in creation and providence.

Not military and political glory, but to be the bearer of spiritual values for the good of others would be the mission of Shem.

(3) The Abrahamic Promise

The descendants of Noah soon corrupted themselves. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans describes the second fall of man after the Flood, as chapter 5:12 goes back to that in the Garden of Eden: "**Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.**" Idolatry supplanted the knowledge of the true GOD. The tower of Babel was meant to be an outward sign of man's apostasy, to "**make us a name,**" said the Babel builders. Their names have perished, for man's pretentious self-advertisings must always end thus.

Then GOD did a new thing. He called Abram. He separated one man unto Himself and made him the depository of Promise. The era of Promise, properly speaking began thus and looks on to the time when all nations shall have found their fullest blessing in Him who is Abraham's Seed, of whom Isaac was a type.

The story of Abram begins in the closing verses of Genesis 11. What preceded, and the time covered is greater than the entire period of inspired history, is introduction, to show why the choice and call and discipline of Abram was necessary. It is the story of the two falls of man. But now a new stage is reached in the unfolding of the Messianic Hope. The prophecy concerning the Seed of the Woman, becomes the promise of the Seed of Abraham. The promise that Abraham and Sarah should become the ancestors of kings, looks on to David and his royal line culminating in David's Messianic Son, and the promise that His seed should secure the blessing of all nations, points to a Mediator-Priest, beneath whose benediction the restless and competitive nations would find the solution of their age-long problems at last.

The history of redemption properly begins with the appearing of the LORD of Glory to Abram: "**And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran**" (Acts 7:2). The goal is the re-appearing of the glory and the earth being filled with it as the waters cover the sea. The call of Abram was the first step towards this.

GOD's separating Abram and confining Himself to his family as the centre of His interests was intended to bring about the blessing of all nations. Election has for its ultimate not so much the good of the elect, as that of the non-elect, through the agency of the elect. And for this the elect, like Abraham, have had to go through a severe process of suffering and discipline in order to be vessels meet for the divine use.

(4) The Shiloh Prophecy

The patriarchal age closed with the passing of Jacob. He and his clan had migrated to Egypt by the invitation of Joseph. But ere the curtain falls the voice of prophecy is heard once more, confirming the Messianic Promise and developing its implications.

Jacob must have pondered deeply the truths of which he, as the one to whom "the birth-right"

belonged by divine decree, was the custodian, and what he had he held in trust for all mankind.

He foresaw that the Messianic family would develop into twelve tribes. Their having been transplanted into Egypt did not mean the canceling of GOD's choice of Shem. But it was a necessary interlude. They were less likely to be amalgamated with their non-Semitic environment there. But which of the sons of Jacob would be the head of the chosen line whose end would be that mysterious Being who would be the representative of both GOD and Man in one personality according to the Proto-evangelium?

Divine choices are never blind and arbitrary. Rueben forfeited his birth-right. He had committed infamy. Simeon and Levi had been confederates in wickedness and cruelty. Joseph had received a double portion in his two sons. But Judah, who had so nobly volunteered to be surety for Benjamin, thus exhibiting the spirit of the One who was willing to become our Surety in death, was elevated to the primacy as the royal tribe: "**Now the sons of Rueben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's**" (I Chronicles 5:1-2).

The Gentile peoples, at war with each other ever since their speech was confused at the tower of Babel, would gather to "Shiloh," a Son of Judah, and render Him obedience: "**The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be**" (Genesis 49:10). The sceptre would not depart from Judah till Shiloh's appearing. GOD would not allow his tribal distinction to be wiped out, as has happened to his brethren. The Word *Shebet* means both tribe and sceptre. The star of Judah would continue to shine till it would lose itself in the more glorious light of Shiloh, his noblest Son.

And what does "Shiloh" mean? It might mean either *the sent One; the Peace-bringer; or He whose right it is*. Probably the last is the true meaning. We get an echo of it in Ezekiel 21:27, where we read: "**I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.**" The nations will not know rest till He takes the government into His own hands.

The indestructibility of the Jewish people, the homeless, scattered and suffering children of Judah, is the miracle of history. The northern kingdom of Israel has disappeared from sight. But Jacob would have been a false prophet if the Assyrian had swallowed up Jerusalem as he had Samaria. If Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, Vespasian and Titus, the Spanish Inquisition and the modern Anti-Semitic atrocities had succeeded in wiping out Judah also as a distinct people, then would the Messianic Hope have proven a superstition. But the Word of our GOD must stand for ever and human counsels come to nought. The ancient Synagogue did not fail to perceive the Messianic significance of the divine oracle concerning Shiloh, from the lips of the dying Jacob. Thus the Targum of Onkelos has it: "Until the Messiah come, whose is the Kingdom."

The Targum of pseudo-Jonathon: "Till the King, the Messiah shall come." The Babylonian Talmud "What is Messiah's Name? His Name is Shiloh, for it is written, 'Until Shiloh come'."

And with these interpretations agree Bereshith Rabba, Kimchi, Aben Ezra, Rashi and other Rabbis of note, such as the famous Rabbi Solomon Yitzrachi.

NOTE: Hengstenberg points out that the name *Shelomo* (Solomon) comes from the same root as *Shiloh*, and denotes "a man of rest," corresponding to the "Prince of peace" in Isaiah 9:6, like the German Friedrich - Frederick, that is, "rich in peace," the peaceful one.

Elliott says: "We cannot fail to recognize an allusion to Shiloh in those passages of the prophets in which the Messiah is described as the author of rest and peace (Isaiah 9:6-7; Micah 4:1-4; Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 9:10, and many other passages).

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