

## **THE MESSIANIC HOPE**

### **OF ISRAEL**

Studies in Messianic Prophecy

by

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### **Chapter 7**

#### **THE HOPE MISUNDERSTOOD**

WHEN our LORD was here the Messianic hope had become a subject of speculation and the extraordinary disturbance in the mind of the populace, which the astonishing teaching and miracles of our LORD provoked, were caused by the conflicting ideas about the Messiah which had arisen during the so-called "silent centuries" between the Testaments. The fourth Gospel from Chapter 7 to 10 records the confusion in the thoughts of the people. These chapters explain why the last and greatest divine self-revelation to Israel met with rejection on the part of the mass. The leaders of Jewry felt that JESUS was an irritant, which had to be got rid of at any cost.

The Talmud, which though written centuries after the beginning of an era, yet mirrors the confusion in the minds of Jews in the times of JESUS about the Messianic hope. Some thought that He would make His appearance in Rome; others that Babylon would see His advent first; again others that He would be born in Zion, basing their assertion on Psalm 87:5. The sublime delineation of the suffering Servant of JEHOVAH of the book of Isaiah, and of the smitten Shepherd, the Man, JEHOVAH's Fellow, of Zechariah, had receded into the background, and a military leader supplanted it.

The four centuries between the Testaments were very important in the development of events that had the coming of the Messiah as their terminus. For the Jews it was a time when they attempted the noble experiment of being a holy community devoted entirely to the service of JEHOVAH, even though they failed in realizing their ideal. Then they had to enter into the life and death struggle with Hellenism. It was an heroic conflict, as the books of the Maccabees record, and Judaism was almost strangled to death by it, but the after history of the kingdom of GOD would have pursued a very different course if the candle lit in Jerusalem had been put out by Hellenistic culture and paganism. The idea of the Messiah underwent a disastrous change in the process. The outstanding characteristic of the Messiah then cherished was no longer the Prophet and the Priest, but that of a Man, a Hero, a Soldier. At least that was the Palestinian concept to the more or less Hellenized Jews who had taken root in Egypt, and to whom we owe indeed the *Septuagint*, and the writings of Philo: the Messiah was dissolved into an allegory, an idea, into anything but a reality.

The Book of Wisdom, which is tinctured with Alexandrian philosophy, while it has in it much

that is beautiful and worthy of praise, reveals the tendency to bring into agreement the revelation of the Old Testament with the pantheistic philosophy of Greece. It teaches the eternity of matter, that creation is but the re-forming of the material already existing in a state of chaotic shapelessness; that the human soul preexisted before birth into its earthy course; the Platonic antithesis between matter and spirit; that matter is inherently evil: that the body is the prison-house of the soul, and not a potential temple for the indwelling. The divine *Sophia* (or Wisdom) is not as Proverbs 8 teaches the Creator and Friend of man, antedating the universe, really the Messiah, the *Logos* (or Word) that was with GOD and was GOD, according to the prologue of the fourth Gospel, but only a pantheistic speculation, the universal life-force, which has no personal existence of its own.

The book of Ecclesiasticus with its lofty ethics is nevertheless the print of Sadducean rationalism. It offers no consolation in the hour of death, as it has no hope for an after life. There are neither angels or spirits, only two beings: GOD and Man. But the Messiah is ignored. It has no place for Him. Hence the Sadducean hostility to the preaching of the doctrine of the resurrection of JESUS in the early chapters of the Acts. The other apocryphal books, the Fourth book of the Maccabees and the Sibylline Oracles, are far removed from the prophetic concepts of the Messiah.

He was to them a phantom, an abstraction. Instead of a *divine redemption*, mediated by the One whose Name is "**The LORD our Righteousness**," self-redemption is taught. We are delivered solely by our own virtues and achievements.

However, other voices were also heard. There was "*the book of Enoch!*" True religion in it is not a mere matter of ceremonial externalia, but of mercy, purity, love, and truth in the inward parts. The book of Enoch harks back to the sublime figure of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven, delineated in Daniel 7. He is "the Elect," "the Anointed," and "the Son of GOD." He is even called "the Son of Woman," and "The Light of the Gentiles," the Comforter and Healer of the wounded in heart. He is also the Judge before whose throne both men and fallen angels must stand.

Mention might also be made of "*the Psalter of Solomon*," consisting of eighteen spiritual poems, written in the face of the harsh treatment inflicted on the Jews by Pompeii, after Jerusalem had of its own accord opened its gates. The writer seeks comfort in the hoped for Messiah who would take up the cause of His afflicted saints. Once upon a time this poetical work was much valued by Christians, and was the only specimen of Jewish apocalyptic literature, added as an appendix to the New Testament in the Codex Alexandrinus.

## **The Targums**

The Targums are ancient paraphrases on the Hebrew text of the Scriptures and are very revealing as to the ideas current among the Jews when Christianity arose. We can see from them, amidst some illuminating views, much that is very puerile. Thus while the "Servant" passages in Isaiah 42-53 are referred to the Messiah, the sufferings of the Servant are applied to the Jewish people. The Messiah remains only as a victorious Warrior. Hence we cannot wonder that the people, goaded into rebellion by Roman injustice, flocked to the standard of Bar Cochba, as before they were ready to espouse Theudas and Judas of Galilee. Uninspired Jewish thought never could

have evolved the idea of the Messiah set forth in JESUS of Nazareth. The pious remnant found in Malachi 3:16, and reappearing in Luke 1 and 2, alone cherished the deeply spiritual hopes founded on the ancient prophecies. And this hidden remnant proved to be the secret source of that blessed movement, called Christianity, in which the best of Judaism comes into blossom and fruit.

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