

THE MESSIANIC HOPE OF ISRAEL

Studies in Messianic Prophecy

by

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Chapter 6. THE HOPE SCHEDULED

THE EXILE cut a deep notch in the history of the covenant-people. To the mass it was an unexplainable mystery, but to an exercised remnant a discipline and an education.

To the prophets raised up from this time too, the exile appeared as a necessary prelude to the re-establishment of a holy community in the city and land of their fathers. And it is clear they expected the Messiah to appear during the life-time of the restored Jerusalem and of the new order set up by the exiles who had returned from Babylon.

The prophets we have in mind are Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and we will now briefly consider their testimony to the time of the appearing of the expected One.

(1) The Witness of Daniel

(a) The Seventy "Weeks" or Sabbatical Years. Chapter 9.

If in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the world-empires under the figure of a colossal image of a man, the coming of the universal Kingdom of GOD takes place after the destruction of Gentile military imperialism (Daniel 2); and if in chapter 7 the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven, ends the rule of the beast-empires; then in chapter 9, we see *a messianic appearing previous to this glorious display of power*. It was the angel Gabriel, who afterwards announced the birth of the Messiah to His virgin-mother, who imparted to Daniel His coming to suffer before His appearing in kingly majesty.

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."

These seventy weeks (or sabbatic years) are then subdivided as follows:

"Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."

Here are sixty-nine weeks of years - broken up into seven and sixty-two. Why that? Because from Nehemiah to Malachi, who closes the Old Testament canon, were forty-nine years. Then came the long silence of sixty-two weeks of years - which ran out on the very day our LORD was presented to Jerusalem and officially announced as Messiah, according to the prophecy of Zechariah 9. Sixty-nine weeks of years after Nehemiah was commanded to set up again the walls of Jerusalem the scheduled arrival of the Messiah took place. (Matthew 21).

One more "week" remains, and during that week a terrible tragedy took place. "**After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.**" It was only a few days after the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, that our LORD was hounded to His death. And the result? "**The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.**"

(b) The Jewish War

This war is not yet ended. The longest and most cruel war in history, the war with the people guilty of Messiah's death. The reason that this war is still going on is because the Jewish people have not yet accepted the divinely offered terms of peace. They will remain, till then, wanderers among the nations.

Again a long gap, before the final seventieth week. GOD does not count time when Israel is outside of her inheritance. But returned in unbelief, they will put themselves under the protection of the prince whose people destroyed city and sanctuary in A.D. 70 - the last representative of the Roman Empire, under which our LORD was crucified. "**He shall confirm** [or make strong] **the covenant with many for one week.**" Will he confirm and strengthen the Mandate given by the League of Nations to make it possible for the Jewish people to re-establish their ancient homeland in Palestine? We know it has lapsed in execution. Howbeit, he will prove a treacherous friend. "**In the midst of the week,**" he will break his covenant with the Jews and put a stop to the temple ritual with its daily sacrifice. And that will be the end. The treacherous "prince," known in Revelation 13 as "the Beast," will want to set up his image in the temple as an object of adoration, and put the worship of the true GOD under an interdict. But that will be the hour when the heavens will open and the LORD will be revealed in flaming fire to vindicate the rights of GOD.

We have seen from chapter 9:25, 26 that Messiah's being "cut off" results in "war," "desolations," and the destruction of both city and sanctuary. We know that this took place at A.D. 70. Ever since then the Jewish people have been captives of war among all nations. Their seasons of prosperity have always been rudely interrupted by fresh outbreaks of anti-Jewish animosity. They have no security of tenure anywhere.

But in verse 27 they are seen worshipping in Jerusalem in a sanctuary. But alas! they will still be in unbelief. There is a long gap between the temple destroyed in verse 26, and the building of another temple and the resumption of sacrifices in verse 27. The calling out of the Gentiles fills that gap. See Romans 11:25: When "**the fulness of the Gentiles**" has been brought in, then will the REDEEMER come again to Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob. The treading down of Jerusalem will be ended then. Her warfare is accomplished at last. (Isaiah 40:2).

(2) The Witness of Haggai

The restoration from Babylon was a necessity for the fulfillment of the purposes of GOD. The little flock that gathered in weakness, in poverty and reproach, amidst the ruins of their ancient home, and set up an House for JEHOVAH's Name, built better than they knew. There had to be a Home into which in the fulness of time the blessed Babe of Bethlehem could be welcomed.

And as it was under a Joshua that the people of Israel first took possession of the land, so now, it was under another Joshua - the High Priest, that they made a fresh start, and that as a congregation devoted to JEHOVAH, and not as an independent state.

The priest-prophet Haggai delivered four addresses. It would appear that his prophetic ministry was committed to him in his old age, and it brought about a revival of religious fervor among the discouraged people, who had enthusiastically laid the foundation of the temple, but allowed themselves to be intimidated by their enemies and so had put off the work of completing the temple. The messages of Haggai proved electric, and the people began with fresh zeal to finish the work of temple building (Ezra 5:1, 2; 6:14).

It is in his second and fourth messages that Haggai brings in the Messianic expectation. He predicted that the hopes of the people for glory would be connected with the second temple, so insignificant in comparison with the first. So chapter 2:6-9 predicts the shaking of Heaven and earth, and of all nations, and that the Desire of all nations would come and the house would be filled with glory. The shaking of all nations would result in their awakening to the recognition of spiritual values - and the poverty stricken appearance of the latter house would give place to a glory which Solomon's temple never knew. **"And in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."**

"The Desire of all nations shall come," proclaimed Haggai. In the Hebrew the word for "desire" is in the plural, which gives the value of the superlative to the idea conveyed. The reference is undoubtedly to CHRIST. What the nations only hope for and seek after, blindly groping after it, finds its true goal in Him. Whether it be a warless world, based on justice and fair dealing among all nations and races; a government which does not oppress, but seeks the weal of all classes alike; a fair opportunity for every man, so that there shall be no underprivileged classes any more; He alone can bring about such a social, economic and political order. Neither legislation, education, science or philosophy can give to the weary nations the desire of their hearts. The malady lies too deep to be healed thus. The CHRIST is the One who alone can bind up the wounds of this distracted world.

Haggai closes with one more message (2:21-23), which, in its brevity, is an epitome of the Apocalypse. Zerubbabel, the royal prince of the house of David, is addressed. He is clearly regarded as a figure of the Messiah, for the promise could only be fulfilled in Him.

It speaks of a day of universal shaking, when kingdoms and armies shall be overthrown. In that day GOD will put honor upon the One whom He has selected as the Man of His counsels, to fulfill all His pleasure. He will come into His rights then.

He is now at GOD's right hand biding His time. His day is about to dawn. The shakings and overturnings of our times may be the prelude to the Day of CHRIST!

"I... will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of Hosts." Grace here reverses the sentence passed upon Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:24). It looks beyond Zerubbabel to his son and anti-type - the Messiah. He is the express Image of the Substance of the Father (Hebrews 1:3), His "signet" in His Manhood. And all who belong to Him whom He calls "His own," are stamped with this signet (I Corinthians 15:49). Thus CHRIST is the true Zerubbabel, as He is the true David (Ezekiel 37:24).

(3) The Witness of Zechariah

Zechariah, Haggai's younger colleague, has a peculiarly rich testimony to bear to both the sufferings and glories of the Messiah. His book divides itself into two main parts. Chapters 1-6: The prophetic visions here partake of an apocalyptic nature. Chapters 7-14, contain more direct utterances. The entire book has for its background, chapters 1-8, the Persian era; chapters 9-10, the Grecian era; chapter 6 the Roman era; chapters 12-14 take us to the time of the end.

In the first group of visions (chapters 1-6), the Messiah stands forth as "the Branch" (3:8; 6:12). He is the one GOD falls back upon in the face of the failure of Israel. Out of the dead and barren condition of Judaism springs this fruitful Branch. But He is also the *Foundation* and *Top-Stone* (3:9; 4:7). GOD works from CHRIST and to CHRIST. All the counsels of GOD centre in Him.

The second group of prophecies (7-14) bring before us in a wonderful way the ministry of the Messiah as recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew. He is seen as the true Shepherd (chapters 11:7, 10, 11). The flock is exploited by false and hireling shepherds. The poor of the flock, however, who waited upon GOD, recognized the One who was the shepherd to be hearkened to.

In chapter 9 we have the official presentation of the Messiah to Jerusalem on the day called: "Palm Sunday." All the four evangelists give space to it. It was the beginning of the Passion week.

The Jerusalem rebuilt by the remnant returned from exile would witness this royal entry. He would come as king of Peace, not riding on a war-horse, but on a peaceable ass. As Professor F. Delitzsch has pointed out, the language of chapter 9:9 implies that "the royal glory rises upon the dark ground of suffering. The coming King is *Tsadik* and *Nosha*, a righteous one whom GOD has helped out of tribulation and struggle to salvation and victory; hence He is also called *ani*, that is, bowed, pressed down through sorrow. We still see Him as the Sufferer. His lowliness is not yet transformed into pure and full glory. Therefore He does not come loftily on a noble steed or in a grand coach of state like the kings of this world, but upon a peaceful animal; not upon one belonging to another, but upon a colt which has never been ridden (compare Matthew 21:2), for He is a King of humble mind, of tender heart, and whose final object is peace" (verse 10).

However, in chapter 11:12, 13, He is valued the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32)! It is the story of His base betrayal. Deep were His sorrows, but deeper still awaited Him!

In chapter 13:5, 6, we see Him wounded in the house of His friends, those for whose sake He had been a bondman (see verse 6).

But the One who was wounded in the house of His friends, was also smitten by the sword of JEHOVAH. He was JEHOVAH's Shepherd and the Man, His Fellow (13:7). He is thus very GOD of very GOD, and very Man of very Man. During the night of His betrayal our LORD claimed to be the One spoken of here (Matthew 26:30, 31). The sword of JEHOVAH is His judicial stroke (see Jeremiah 47:6-7). It speaks of GOD's action when He died. At the hand of man CHRIST suffered for righteousness. But being "**made sin**" for us He Himself "**knew no sin**," He made expiation for sin. He was made to feel all that sin is, all that sin deserves, in the sight of a holy, sin-hating GOD. Psalm 69 speaks of the first; Psalm 22, of the second.

JEHOVAH says of Him, when in His deepest humiliation: "My Fellow." The SPIRIT addressing Him in Psalm 45 and Hebrews 1 speaks of "Thy fellows." He took their place with all its consequences that they might share His place with all its consequences.

In chapter 12 we see Israel's final conversion. In that day they will recognize that in piercing JESUS they pierced the very heart of JEHOVAH - as He says: "**They shall look upon Me** (i.e. JEHOVAH) **whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.**"

Then will Israel experience a threefold cleansing.

- (1) The sight of the wounds of JESUS will purge the conscience. The Blood of JESUS has made expiation.
- (2) The fountain there opened for sin and uncleanness cleanses the walk and the state by the washing of water by the Word (13:1).
- (3) But there is besides the fire-baptism (13:9). We need the discipline which helps us to practically turn from the things which we have judged. The Father chastens us to make us partakers of His holiness (Hebrews 12). For there is but one way of salvation and sanctification, for this age and for that which is to come, for Jew or Gentile, i.e. through repentance and faith, apprehending the atoning sacrifice, and experiencing the power of the Word and Spirit, and submitting to the disciplinary dealings of the guiding and chastening hand of GOD.

Recapitulation

a. The Man among the myrtles (Chapter 1)

Though Israel may be like a valley of myrtles, signifying a depressed condition, the theophanic Angel (the Messiah) is in the midst of the myrtles in the valley. The hosts of the LORD are at His disposal. He is the Intercessor on behalf of the tribulated people, for Israel, and now for the church, for she too is often in the valley of depression.

b. JEHOVAH's Servant, the Branch (Chapter 3:8)

This is an echo of Isaiah 4:2. When He is brought forth Truth will be despised no more. Israel's land will have been atoned for (verse 10). Universal peace and brotherhood will prevail;

conditions of Eden-like fertility will return.

c. The Stone with the seven eyes upon it (Chapter 3:9)

If the prophecy concerning the Branch looks on to the future, when Messiah will be revealed in glory, the Stone-prophecy has a present application. The Stone has already been laid as a divine foundation (see I Peter 2:7). And the preciousness of this Stone attaches to all who build upon it. It is an immovable foundation. The floods cannot overthrow it. The gates of hell will never prevail against it, nor upon that divinely built on it.

And that Stone is sovereign. It has seven eyes, the eyes of divine omniscience. The Messiah has all authority in Heaven and on earth (see Zechariah 4:10). All power is in His hands, and the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Him bodily.

d. The first coming of the Messiah (Chapters 9-10)

These chapters fill up the gap prophetically between the Testaments, as they cover the period of the Grecian and Syrian domination over Jerusalem. Thus verses 1-10 give us the victorious inroads of the armies of Alexander the Great, by which the coast line of Palestine was subjugated. But he was not allowed to tamper with the city and the temple of Jerusalem.

The reason for this is given in verse 9. The Messiah will have to enter that city. Between verses 9 and 10 runs the Christian dispensation. The prophetic forecast of Jewish history in the days of the Maccabees is resumed in verses 13-17.

e. The Betrayal (Chapter 11:12, 13)

"**A goodly price!**" was given for Him!

f. His crucifixion (Chapter 13:5, 6)

"**He shall say**": It is Messiah speaking (verse 6), the true Prophet (Deuteronomy 18), the One who was here in bondsman's form from His youth (verse 5). Being rejected He became a Husbandman - a "Sower" (Matthew 13), a Vine-dresser (Luke 13), and wounded in the house He had come to serve in love.

g. Smitten of GOD (Chapter 13:7)

JEHOVAH bruised Him (Isaiah 53:10). GOD brought Him into the dust of death (Psalm 22:15). These are more than martyr sufferings.

h. His glorious Coming again (Chapter 14:1-3, 5)

When Jerusalem will suffer her last and worst siege. "**All nations**" against the Jewish people!

i. Standing on Olivet (Chapter 14:4, 5)

The very spot from which He ascended.

j. Israel's recognition of Him (Chapter 12:10)

k. His universal reign (Chapter 14:9)

l. His royal Priesthood (Chapter 6:13)

(4) The Witness of Malachi

We come now to the close of the prophetic period in Israel. The anointed seer, speaking directly from the mouth of JEHOVAH, saying: "**Thus saith the Lord**," is about to be displaced by the learned scribe and doctor of the law, whose authority consisted in their being in harmony with the recognized rabbis who had preceded them. But before the living voice of prophecy is silenced by dead tradition, a messenger utters the divine Word once more.

The anonymous prophet (for Malachi means: "My messenger," and is clearly an appellation and not a name) evidently appeared during the absence of Nehemiah in Persia, before his return. The abuses which he dealt with are the same denounced in this book.

It is the last prophetic communication to Israel and is of the nature of a dialogue between JEHOVAH and the people who had so sadly degenerated. See chapter 1:2, 6, 7; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13.

Judges and the two books of Samuel contemplate the *failure of the nation*. First and Second Kings, and First and Second Chronicles, the *failure of the kingdom*; but Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi, witness against the *community of restored exiles*.

The sevenfold "*wherein?*" of the people (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13* - *this last is "what"*) is answered by a fourfold indictment.

(a) Their religion was profane (Chapter 1:7-10)

(b) Their morality was corrupt. They practiced sorcery, committed adultery, were given to perjury, oppressed the weaker (Chapter 3:5).

(c) Their social relations were in utter confusion. Intermarriage with heathens was rife (Chapter 2:11).

(d) They robbed GOD in not paying the income tax in the form of "tithes" (Chapter 3:8).

The priests were guilty of profaning the temple, so that GOD could take no pleasure in them. He refused to accept a meat-offering at their hands (1:10).

But they were told that there would be a calling out of a new people of GOD from among the Gentiles:

"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts" (1:11). The prophet uses the present tense - it is the prophetic vision of the future as already present. And while the thought-forms (incense and meat-offering) are borrowed from the ritual

of the Jewish temple, the spiritual message is that the Kingdom of GOD would be taken from the covenant-people and be found among the Gentiles, as has come to pass. Jerusalem has ceased to be GOD's religious center, as our LORD pointed out to the woman of Samaria (John 4:23) as about to happen. Thus is the present dispensation clearly foretold in this book.

The Angel of the Covenant

Before the close of Malachi a very wonderful Messianic promise shines out in celestial splendor. **"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in (or for whom ye long): behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts"** (Chapter 3:1).

The messenger (or angel) who prepares the way of JEHOVAH is explained as a second Elijah (Chapter 4:5). **"Suddenly,"** i.e., immediately following him, the herald, the LORD Himself (Hebrew **Ha-Adon, proprietor of the temple**) **will come. He is also called *Malach Ha-Berith*, i.e. the angel of the Covenant. It is the same Angel-Presence that connected Himself with the patriarchs and was with their descendants throughout their history. He would once again appear. JEHOVAH is in this Angel. He is called "the Angel of His Presence" (or Face).** The word "covenant" links Him with "the Servant" of Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8, where the servant of JEHOVAH is made *L'berith Am*, i.e. a "covenant of the people." He is the Messianic Mediator of the new and everlasting covenant of grace. The Elijah-like ministry of John, calling to repentance, prepared His way, Israel having broken the old covenant; and so He comes to establish the new and better covenant, established on grace and not on human merit, and ratified in His Blood.

The Son of Righteousness

But for Israel fierce judgments are appointed before the terms of the new covenant can be made good (Chapter 4:1). Out of this fiery oven a new and purified nation will emerge. In fact, it will only be a remnant which will be the nucleus of a holy people of GOD. Those who in Malachi's day feared the LORD and spake often one to another of Him, were despised by the mass (Chapter 3:16-18). They were but a remnant of the remnant escaped from Babylon. But they will be as precious jewels to the LORD in the day of His public manifestation. The Sun of Righteousness will arise upon them with heavenly healing (Chapter 4:2). They have loved His appearing during the long night of His absence. His coming will bring in everlasting day.

Thus does Old Testament prophecy close. The prophets were shining stars, but the Messiah is the Sun. The whole Old Testament is waiting for the sunrise. The key to the entire Scriptures of Israel is the word: Yovah, i.e. *He comes!*

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