

Session 3: Messiah in the Prophets

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I. The Prophet Greater Than Moses

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die." The Lord said to me, "They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Dt 18:15–18)

A. Jewish and Christian interpreters alike have both wrestled with this passage. Was Moses speaking of a whole class of prophets, or was he speaking of a single and specific individual?

1. The answer seems to be both.
2. As commentator John D. Currid rightly states, "It is best to see this verse as a double prophecy. It is a declaration of God's establishment of the prophetic office in Israel, but it also promises the coming of a great prophet who is the Messiah."
3. On one hand, the larger context of the passage points to a collective institution of prophets. These prophets who would come after Moses would have to meet some specific criteria.
 - a) First, they must be Israelites.
 - b) Second, they would have to be 'like Moses' in that he heard directly from God. Third, because the true prophet would hear God's words, the people were obligated to both listen to and obey his words.
4. While Moses was most certainly pointing to many prophets who would succeed him, there are also at least three reasons to see this passage as pointing to the Messiah.
 - a) First, the reference to "prophet" is singular: *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me... you shall listen to him" (v. 15).*

- b) Second, the prophet who would come after Moses would have to be 'like' him, and there are several ways in which Moses stands out as entirely unique above all of Israel's other prophets.

(1) Moses was much more than a common prophet.

(2) Moses served as the mediator of a covenant (Gal 3:19).

(3) Whereas other prophets reminded Israel to obey the law, Moses was actually the lawgiver.

(4) Unlike most other prophets, Moses served in the office of both a prophet and priest (Ex 24:4-8).

(5) Moses was chosen to serve as Israel's sole leader and as their deliverer.

(6) Beyond his unique and unparalleled position and office among the people Moses also enjoyed an intimacy with the Lord that was unparalleled among the prophets. We're told:

"The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex 33:11).

"Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Dt 34:10; cf., 5:4).

- c) So while other prophets could be said to be 'like Moses' in some ways, there are also several ways in which they all fall short of truly being like him.
- d) The Messiah on the other hand, would be someone who would entirely surpass Moses in all of these things.
- e) As the New Testament would later testify, Jesus is not merely a priest, but is:

"a great high priest who has passed through the heavens" (Heb 4:14).

- f) Jesus is also greater than Moses the lawgiver. In His sermon on the mount, multiple times did He state

“You have heard that it was said (in the law of Moses) ... But I say to you,” (Mat 5:27,38,43).

- g) Jesus is: *“the mediator of a better covenant”* than the covenant mediated by Moses (Heb 8:6).
- h) While Moses spoke directly to God face to face, Jesus’ relationship to the Father is one of mutual indwelling and oneness:

“I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me” (Jn 14:10).

5. The third reason to see this passage as pointing to the Messiah is because by the second temple period, Jewish exegesis had come to understand this as either a Messianic prophecy or a prophecy about some special and unique “Prophet.” The New Testament testifies to this.
 - a) After Jesus prophesied to Nathaniel, in awe he declared, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote —Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn 1:45).
 - b) After Jesus multiplied the fish and the loaves of bread, the people said, *“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (Jn 6:13–14).*
 - c) On yet another occasion, after the people had listened to and been amazed by Jesus’ words, they declared, *“This certainly is the Prophet” whereas some others were saying, “This is the Christ.” (Jn 7:40,41).*
 - d) After Jesus had rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, the Apostle Peter believed that Jesus filled the role of both the Prophet and the Messiah (Ac 3:22,24), as did Stephen (7:37). According to the early Christians, the wait was over, for the fulfillment had come.

“Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. ‘And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ “And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. “It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be

blessed.’ “For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” (Ac 3:22–26)

6. As Jack S. Deere rightly states, *“The ultimate Prophet like Moses ... is Jesus Christ—the One who spoke God’s words and who provides deliverance for His people ... However distinguished a future prophet’s role might be in Israel, none would be like Moses until the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, came.”*
7. Deuteronomy 18 Moses predicts not only a series of prophets who would come after him, but also a single and very special individual: The Prophet. Like Moses, this individual would stand apart from and above every other prophet as a law-giver, a covenant mediator, a deliverer, as one who speaks God’s words, as Israel’s king, priest, and prophet.

II. The Messianic Kingdom

- A. After the reigns of King David and his son Solomon, the glory of the kingdom quickly diminished and was divided in two. Israel became its own kingdom in the north and Judah in the south.
- B. Over the next few hundred years, both kingdoms were attacked, defeated, and its people deported. Assyria took Israel and Babylon took Judah. Throughout this period, the prophets continued to hold out hope in the coming Messiah, drawing from and expanding upon the previous prophecies.
- C. Some distinct new concepts also emerged.
 1. First, while the prophets continued to speak of the promised King, they also began to focus much more heavily on the actual kingdom itself.
 - a) What would this messianic kingdom look like? What would the world become during those days?
 - b) The prophets consistently describe it as a golden age resembling a combination of the Garden of Eden and the Kingdom of David.
 2. Second, to refer to this coming messianic kingdom, the prophets frequently used the term “Zion.”

3. Third, they spoke of these days as some time off in the future, using phrases such as “in the latter days,” “the last days,” “in that day,” or specifically, “the Day of the Lord.”
4. Fourth, the prophets describe the messianic age as being preceded by a period cataclysm and divine judgment against both Israel and the nations.
5. By the first century, during the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, each of these concepts were thoroughly interlinked and well established within the mind of pious Jews.
6. If we wish to rightly understand the expectations of Jesus’s countrymen, then we must familiarize ourselves with these passages and the concepts they communicate.

D. Isaiah 2-4

*The mountain of the house of the Lord
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
And will be raised above the hills;
And all the nations will stream to it. (Isaiah 2:2)*

1. Israel is described as the tallest mountain in the world. All other nations, described as smaller hills, will be subordinate. Like rivers, the peoples flow (interestingly, upwards) to Zion to learn the ways of God:

*And many peoples will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they learn war. (vv. 3-4).*

2. As a result of the Lord’s global leadership, wars will cease and the whole earth will be filled with peace. Portrayed as an agrarian utopia,

citizens of the world will convert their weapons of war into farming instruments.

3. Throughout the prophecy, the phrase, “in that day” is repeated six times (2:11,17,20; 3:18; 4:1,2), linking chapters 2-4 together into a single oracle.
4. Finally, Isaiah makes a direct reference to the messianic king:

In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. (Isaiah 4:2)

5. Isaiah uses a new title here for the Messiah. He calls Him “The Branch,” (Hebrew: *tsemach*).
 - a) Later prophets would also use similar terms for the Promised One (cf., Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12).
 - b) In some of these texts, He is called “The Branch of David,” meaning that He springs forth from the family tree of David.
 - c) But here in Isaiah, He is “the Branch of the Lord.” Thus this passage points to the Messiah’s divine nature.
 - d) As Motyer comments, “The Messiah springs from a dual ancestry as he belongs in the ‘family tree’ of both David and the Lord.”

E. Isaiah 9:6–7

1. The prophecy of Isaiah chapter 9 contains a powerful summation of Israel’s hope.
2. It is among the most powerful messianic prophecies in the Bible.
3. The prophecy is addressed to the northern Kingdom of Israel, the region around Sea of Galilee which was the land designated to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali.
4. In Isaiah’s day, the northern kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians, and its people carried off into exile.
5. Israel as a kingdom had literally been erased from the map.

6. Despite the “gloom” and tremendous pain experienced there, its future would be glorious and full of joy.

But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people who walk in darkness

Will see a great light;

Those who live in a dark land,

The light will shine on them.

You shall multiply the nation,

You shall increase their gladness (Isa 9:1-3)

7. Despite the near complete depopulation of the region, in the messianic age, the whole nation will be multiplied not only in its citizenry, but also in its joy.
8. The “gladness” here is described by commentator Gary V. Smith as, “wild celebrative joy... The people will rejoice and jump for joy like people do when they see an unusually massive harvest ... or when they observe the hoards of goods brought home by the troops after an enemy nation is plundered.”
9. But what will cause Israel’s fortunes to change so dramatically? What will bring her such happiness? What is this “great light” that will shine on them? The answer is none other than the long awaited King, the Son of David Himself:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;

And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (v. 6)

10. The child here is the baby who Isaiah had predicted in a previous prophecy:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (God with us, or God is with us)” (Isaiah 7:14).

11. Within this one verse is a power-packed summary of the Messiah's nature, titles, and the global effects of His rule.

- a) He will be born like any other human.
- b) We might wonder why it even needs to be said.
- c) As we have seen, while some prophecies portray the Messiah as the human "seed" of Eve, Abraham, and David, several other passages indicate that in some manner, He has a divine nature and at times is equated to Yahweh Himself.
- d) For example, He is also called, "Mighty God" (Hebrew: *El gibbor*).
- e) He is also the Wonderful Counselor; the same one mentioned in Isaiah 2:4 who will "judge between the nations" and "render decisions for many peoples."
- f) He is also the Prince of Peace; the same one previously mentioned by David who likened the Messiah to Melchizadek, who is "the King of Peace" (Psalm 110:4).
- g) He is also called Eternal Father not because He is "God the Father," but because He is the revelation of the Father and thus will care for His people as a loving father.

12. The four names taken together point to one who is both fully divine and truly human.

13. Keil and Delitzsch add: "if we look at the consciousness of the prophet himself ... the Messiah would be the image of God as no other man ever had been."

*There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore. (v. 7a)*

14. Finally, as the Lord's covenant-promise to King David had already made clear, the Promised One will rule on the restored throne of His father David, and His kingdom will never end (2 Sam 7:12-13).

15. Isaiah concludes by assuring His audience that the prophecy will be fulfilled because God Himself is personally and passionately committed to see its fulfillment through:

“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this” (v. 7b).

F. Isaiah 11:1–10

1. Again, Isaiah prophesies encouragement to the fallen Kingdom of Israel, which he describes using the imagery of a felled tree.
2. Although it appears to be dead stump, the life of the root remains, and it sends out a shoot!
3. This shoot is also called a branch. The same metaphor was used in chapter 4.
4. The Messiah will come from the ‘family tree’ of David. His father Jesse is mentioned specifically:

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit” (v. 1).

5. At the time that Jesus was born, the metaphor of a seemingly dead stump was an ideal metaphor for David’s dynasty.
6. Although the family line of David was still intact, it had been lacking in any royal power for six hundred years.
7. This is why the Promised One is spoken of as a shoot or branch coming forth from the seemingly dead stump of Jesse.
8. The Spirit of the Lord would rest on Him in far greater measure than any other man of God in history:

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And He will delight in the fear of the Lord,
And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; (vv. 2-3)*

9. The righteous judgments of the King, previously called “Wonderful Counselor” (Is 9:6) are here restated.

*But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,
And faithfulness the belt about His waist. (vv. 4-5)*

10. The fact that He is capable of striking the earth with “the rod of His mouth” and slaying the wicked with “the breath of His lips.” further points to His divine nature. Paul the Apostle would later cite this very verse and apply it to Jesus killing the Antichrist when He returns: “that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming” (2 Th 2:8).

11. The emphasis of His righteous rule is to provide justice for the poor and the afflicted.

- a) Any survey of the many passages that speak of the Messianic King and His Kingdom will show an overwhelming emphasis on His care for

- (1) the afflicted and needy (Is 29:19),
- (2) the lame, and the outcast (Micah 4:6),
- (3) the blind, deaf, and mute (Is 35:6; Zeph 3:19),
- (4) the lost, and the broken (Ez 34:16).

- b) Many in the younger generation today have a passion for justice issues, yet completely reject the topic of the return of the Lord or the millennial kingdom. Yet the essence of the return of the Lord and His rule is justice.

12. Then we read one of the most well known messianic kingdom passages in the whole Bible:

*And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little boy will lead them.
Also the cow and the bear will graze,*

*Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. (vv. 6-8)*

13. The imagery of animals who normally relate to one another only as predator and prey, cuddling together like siblings points to the renewed Edenic nature of the world under this great King.

14. The carnivores have become herbivores.

15. The light has come, the shoot has come forth and sprouted; eventually its blossoming brings complete renewal even to the natural order itself.

*They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea.
Then in that day
The nations will resort to the root of Jesse,
Who will stand as a signal for the peoples;
And His resting place will be glorious. (vv. 9-10).*

16. The global impact of the Messiah's reign results in the knowledge of the Lord flooding the whole world.

17. The emphasis here is placed on the impact this will have on the Gentiles.

- a) The nations are said to turn, not to the "shoot" of Jesse, but to the "root." This is a stunning flip.
- b) Not only does the Davidic King come after King David, He also came before Him.
- c) As Jesus would later declare of Himself:

"before Abraham was born, I am" (Jn 8:58).

G. Micah 4-5

H. The prophet Micah, whose ministry overlapped with Isaiah, also gave us a powerful description of the coming Kingdom:

*And it will come about in the last days
 That the mountain of the house of the Lord
 Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
 It will be raised above the hills,
 And the peoples will stream to it.
 Many nations will come and say,
 "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord
 And to the house of the God of Jacob,
 That He may teach us about His ways
 And that we may walk in His paths."
 For from Zion will go forth the law,
 Even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
 And He will judge between many peoples
 And render decisions for mighty, distant nations.
 Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
 And their spears into pruning hooks;
 Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
 And never again will they train for war.
 Each of them will sit under his vine
 And under his fig tree,
 With no one to make them afraid,
 For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.
 Though all the peoples walk
 Each in the name of his god,
 As for us, we will walk
 In the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.
 "In that day," declares the Lord,
 "I will assemble the lame
 And gather the outcasts,
 Even those whom I have afflicted.
 "I will make the lame a remnant
 And the outcasts a strong nation,
 And the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion
 From now on and forever. (Mic 4:1–7)*

- I. In chapter 5, Micah gives us some new information about the Messiah:

*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
 From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
 His goings forth are from long ago,
 From the days of eternity." (v. 2)*

- J. About five miles southwest of Jerusalem, Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David (1 Sam 16:1, 18; 17:12).
- K. Despite its small-town stature and relative insignificance, it would also produce the long-awaited Messiah.
- L. The King would become the ruler of all of Israel, unifying the northern and southern kingdoms.
 - 1. As in other previous messianic passages, the Messiah's preexistence, (from "long ago" and "days of eternity") is declared.
 - 2. The remainder of the prophecy speaks of the Lord giving Israel up to suffer at the hands of her enemies, *"until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child"* (v. 3).
 - 3. When the King comes, *"He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God"* (v. 4).
 - 4. He is described as delivering Israel militarily from the efforts of foreign invaders and occupying forces. (v. 5).
 - 5. In those days, the "remnant" of Israel will be victorious over her enemies, *"Like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep"* (v. 8).
 - 6. All of her enemies *"will be cut off"* (v. 9), and the King will, *"execute vengeance in anger and wrath on the nations which have not obeyed"* (v. 15).

M. Conclusion

- 1. After the death of David and Solomon and the division of the kingdom, the prophets continued to greatly expand upon Israel's growing messianic expectations.
- 2. They built on, and at times added new and important pieces of information that were not previously known.
- 3. The prophets frequently described, in the most poetic and tantalizing manner, the nature of the coming kingdom.

4. They drew back from the idealized days of David's kingdom and the Garden of Eden, and cast the messianic kingdom as something much better than both.
5. The King's dominion would expand beyond the borders of Israel and cover the whole world.
6. The Gentiles, including many of Israel's former enemies would look to Him for leadership, counsel, and guidance.
7. Zion, the location for the King's throne would become the center of the world.
8. The prophets would also give us new and important pieces of information concerning the nature of the King.
9. As David did before them, they spoke of the Coming One as much more than any human. He is also, in some way divine. As Yahweh's representative on the earth, He will be called "Mighty God" and even do things that only God can do. His origins are from eternity past. The prophets also utilized new terms for the Promised One such as "the Branch of David" or "the Shoot of Jesse." Because many of the prophets ministered during times in Israel's history when all appeared to have been lost, they repeatedly spoke of the coming of the kingdom as a reestablishment, a revival, or a resurrection. Knowing that these things were some time off in the distance, they cast their fulfillment as taking place, "in the latter days" or "in the last days." These are all concepts and ideas that we must be familiar with if we wish to better understand the popular expectations of the Jewish people during Jesus's ministry in the first century.