

# **The Messianic Hope: Christianity's Response to Jewish Expectations**

**By Martin Pickup**

Jewish culture in Late Antiquity comprised a host of different Judaic groups, all with similarities and differences. Throughout the Judaic writings of the late-second century BC and extending to the last writings of the Rabbinic period at the close of the sixth century AD, we see evidence of a clear, though variegated messianic anticipation. We read of diverse eschatological figures who function in varied roles – a messianic king perhaps, or priest, or prophet, or interpreter of God's Law, or heavenly deliverer, or rabbi.<sup>1</sup> There is no uniformity among these figures from group to group, nor does every group manifest a belief in all or even any of them. The most common and widespread messianic view was a belief in an eschatological royal figure who would restore the kingdom of God and conquer the enemies of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I want to survey the data regarding the Jewish conception of a messianic king in order to make clear the conceptual milieu of the world in which Christianity emerged. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the novelty and impact that Christianity's claims about Jesus of Nazareth would have had upon ancient Jewish minds.

Let me begin by looking briefly at what the Jewish Scriptures themselves suggested about a future king.

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<sup>1</sup>See John J. Collins, *The Scepter And The Star* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); J. Neusner, et al., eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. Neusner, *Messiah In Context: Israel's History And Destiny In Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>J. Collins, *The Scepter*, 68.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT PROMISE

The Jewish messianic hope was fueled by the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 and its recapitulation and development throughout the Old Testament corpus. As believing Jews considered the promise in its canonical context, the belief in a future, ideal king of the house of David emerged and grew. Again, this messianic hope was interpreted within the framework of ancient Near Eastern kingship.

In passages such as Psalm 2:8-9, Psalm 110:6 and Isaiah 11:10, Yahweh promised the Davidic throne a worldwide dominion. The rulers of other nations also claimed that their gods had promised them worldwide sovereignty. In one of the Egyptian pyramid texts a god says to the pharaoh, "I have given the horizons to him."<sup>3</sup> In the Mari tablets the god Adad says to king Zimri-lim, "I shall give him the land from the rising (of the sun) to its setting."<sup>4</sup> Universal sovereignty was a common kingship ideal in the ancient world and it is not surprising to see the Old Testament incorporate this concept into its monotheistic theology. The validity of Yahweh's claim to be the one true God is made to rest upon whether the Davidic throne would one day attain dominion over the world.

The promised endurance of the Davidic throne was expressed in terms indicating that the seed of David would rule until the end of time. In Psalm 89:29-37 Yahweh says,

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in E. Voegelin, *Order And History*, 305.

<sup>4</sup>A. Malamat, "A Mari Prophecy And Nathan's Dynastic Oracle," *Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 150 (1980), 68-82; quoted in S. Hermann, "2 Samuel VII In The Light of The Egyptian Konigsnovelle--Reconsidered," in *Pharaonic Egypt. The Bible And Christianity*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: The Magness Press, 1985), 123-124.

So I will establish his seed forever,  
 And his throne as the days of heaven.  
 . . . . .  
 His seed shall endure forever,  
 And his throne as the sun before Me.  
 It shall be established forever like the moon,  
 And the witness in the sky is faithful. (89:3, 29-37)

Verse 3 refers to the promise as God's "covenant" with David. The certain fulfillment of this promise of perpetual and universal sovereignty for the Davidic throne could not be more forcefully affirmed.<sup>5</sup>

Because the pre-exilic kings of David's lineage failed to rule righteously, the Old Testament speaks of God's disciplining the seed of David by bringing about the decline of the grandiose Solomonic empire. The kingdom divided and the small Judean territory retained by the house of David shrank even further as a result of foreign invasion. The continued unfaithfulness of the Davidic rulers finally led to the collapse of Israel's kingship when Babylonia conquered the helpless nation of Judah. But pious Jews could only regard this calamity as a suspension of Davidic rule and a temporary loss of the kingdom. One day the throne of David would be reestablished and God's oath concerning the eternal duration of the Davidic throne would be fulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

Several prophecies anchored this hope. Amos 9:11-12 declared,

In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David,  
 And wall up its breaches;  
 I will also raise up its ruins,  
 And rebuild it as in the days of old.

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Heb. 6:13-18.

<sup>6</sup>See the discussion of the messianic hope in F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969.), 68-82.

Isaiah 9:6-7 and 11:1-3 said,

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
 And the government will rest upon his shoulders;  
 And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.  
 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.  
 The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,  
 And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.  
 And 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.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 said,

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and he will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is his name by which he will be called, The LORD our righteousness.”

Modern scholars may debate the date and historical circumstances of such passages, but Jews of Late Antiquity could read these verses in only one way – eschatologically.<sup>7</sup> Since these passages were contained in a corpus of documents believed to be inspired of God and infallible, and since their ideal depiction of the Davidic throne had not been realized in the past, Jews looked to the future as the time of their actualization. They read these texts as foretelling the rise of a future messianic king who would restore the throne to Israel. This hope underlies the thoughts of the post-exilic books of Haggai and Zechariah.

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<sup>7</sup>Other passages besides the ones cited above stirred messianic hopes. Among them would be Ezekiel 34:23-34; 37:24-25; Hag, 2:21-24 and Zech. 4:7, as indicated by the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Some Jews may have hoped for the Davidic kingdom to be restored in the person of Zerubbabel, a member of the royal ancestry of David and the Persia-appointed governor of Judea. His involvement in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple certainly connected him to the promise of 2 Samuel 7 (cf. Zech. 4:6-10). But despite what Jews of the Persian period may have expected, the kingdom was not restored at that time. With the fall of Persia to Alexander the Great, Palestine came under Grecian domination, a domination that reached its height in the fourth decade of the second century BC with the persecution of Jews by the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Jewish rebels led by Judas Maccabeus broke the Syrian yoke in 165 BC and a little over a century of native rule followed. But the Jewish leaders of this period, the Hasmoneans, were controversial figures. They were Levites and therefore not of Davidic descent, and they assumed the high priesthood though they were not of Zadokite descent. Judea's fall to the Roman general Pompey in 63 AD marked the end of Judea's Hasmonean rule, but it also meant political and military domination by a Gentile power yet again.

### **JEWISH MESSIANISM IN THE ROMAN ERA**

The tumultuous events of the Hasmonean period and the Roman takeover of Palestine sparked eschatological hopes in the hearts of pious Jews who looked for the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. The extant literature at this point in Judea's history reveals an emergence of eschatological fervor and messianic expectation. John J. Collins has argued persuasively that eschatological feeling among Jews lay dormant from the end of the Persian period until it was spurred again by the religious controversy associated with the Hasmoneans

and Rome's takeover of Palestine.<sup>8</sup> Another important factor may have been the Jewish understanding of the eschatological visions of the book of Daniel. Daniel 7 presents an apocalyptic vision of four beasts, representing four successive Gentile empires, and the judgment against them that is rendered when the eschatological kingdom of God dawns. This vision is parallel to the vision of Daniel 2, a chapter which also prophesies of the rise of four successive world empires to be followed by the irruption of God's everlasting kingdom.

Most modern scholars have dated the book of Daniel (or at least its visionary section) to the mid-second century BC and have interpreted the four kingdoms that are symbolized in the book as Babylonia, Media, Persia and Greece. These scholars view the book as a diatribe against the contemporary persecution of the Jews by the forces of Antiochus Epiphanes and as a (failed) prediction of the advent of God's kingdom occurring in the Hellenistic era. The "son of man" figure who receives the eternal kingdom in 7:14 is usually understood as a corporate symbol of the faithful Jewish remnant.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is so standard among current scholarship that in studying Jewish messianism one may overlook the significance of the fact that at a very early period the book of Daniel was regarded by Jews as an authentic work of a prophet of the Babylonian era (sixth century BC) and the four kingdoms were uniformly interpreted as Babylonia, Media, Greece and Rome. In other words, ancient Jewish writings indicate that the standard interpretation of Daniel from at least the first century BC (the time when messianic expectation resurfaces) until the Rabbinic period and beyond was that the

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<sup>8</sup>J. Collins, *The Scepter*, 49-56.

<sup>9</sup>John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 313-317. Collins himself argues that "the son of man" in Daniel 7:14 is a reference to the archangel Michael.

eschaton would come during the time of the Roman empire.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, with Daniel's eschatological time-frame as additional impetus, the disintegration of Hasmonean rule at the hand of the Roman general Pompey signaled to pious Jews that the time of Scripture's fulfillment was fast approaching and the eschaton was near.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to the dawn of Christianity, several Jewish writings expressed an expectation of a royal Messiah who would provide the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic promise. Messianic references abound in the *Psalms of Solomon*, a pseudepigraphical work from the first century BC.

See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from nations who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth; at his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Rabbinic Literature is replete with allusions to the four world empires of Daniel 7. The consistent interpretation is that these four empires were, respectively, Babylonia, Media, Greece and Rome. See e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* LXXV:VI; *Leviticus Rabbah* XVIII:V:13.

<sup>11</sup>See J. Collins, *The Scepter*, 40-56. Collins fails to note that the rise of messianic expectation was assisted by the visions of Daniel 2 & 7 and the Jewish understanding that the fourth world empire under discussion in these visions was Rome (not Greece).

<sup>12</sup>*Psalms of Solomon* 17:23-24, 32-36. These psalms were written in the aftermath of the Roman capture of Jerusalem by Pompey. See R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1985), 639-650.

The portion excerpted above manifests a profound hatred for the domination of Judea by Pompey and his forces. The author looks forward to Jerusalem's liberation from Gentile occupation, a liberation to be achieved by a king from the lineage of David. The pseudepigraphon as a whole indicates a rejection of the Hasmonean rulers, not merely because of their non-Davidic ancestry, but because of their spiritual and moral failings. Neither facet fit the scriptural picture of the ideal king to come. The messianic expectation revealed in the *Psalms of Solomon* was influenced largely by the picture of the Davidic king in Isaiah 11:1-4 and Psalm 2. Language from both of these texts is prominent in the above excerpt.

The Qumran scrolls have yielded several documents evidencing a similar messianic expectation. A *peshar* (commentary) on Isaiah 10 and 11, designated by scholars as 4QpIs<sup>a</sup>, interprets Isaiah 11:1-3 as a reference to "the Branch of David who will arise at the end of days."<sup>13</sup> The fragment correlates Isaiah's "shoot" from the stump of David with the "branch" metaphor of Jeremiah 23:5. This messianic king is the one who will conquer "the Kittim," a reference to the anticipated defeat of the Roman empire.<sup>14</sup>

The above *peshar* on Isaiah and several other Qumran scrolls speak also of "the Prince of the Congregation,"<sup>15</sup> a title that is derived from Ezekiel 34:24: "I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them." It is clear in the scrolls that the Branch of David and the Prince of the Congregation are both titles for the same messianic

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<sup>13</sup>G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 321.

<sup>14</sup>J. Collins, *The Scepter*, 58.

<sup>15</sup>4Q285; CD 7:19; 1QM 5:1.

figure.<sup>16</sup> The author of the *Damascus Document* (CD 7:19) midrashically interprets Balaam's oracle in Numbers 24:17 as a prediction of the Davidic Messiah: "A star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel' (Num. 24:17). The scepter is the Prince of the whole Congregation, and when he comes 'he shall smite all the children of Seth.'"<sup>17</sup> A messianic understanding of Balaam's oracle is seen throughout various Jewish works of Late Antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

Another Qumran fragment (4Q252) sees the Davidic promise presaged in the blessing pronounced upon the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49:10. In the biblical passage, Judah is promised rulership over the other tribes of Israel: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." The Qumran fragment gives the following comment:

Whenever Israel rules, there shall not fail to be a descendant of David upon the throne. For the ruler's staff is the Covenant of kingship, and the clans of Israel are the divisions, until the Messiah of Righteousness comes, the Branch of David. For to him and his seed is granted the Covenant of kingship over his people for everlasting generations which he is to keep . . . the Law with the men of the Community. . . .<sup>19</sup>

A messianic interpretation of the blessing upon Judah in Genesis 49 is common among Jewish writings throughout the period of Late Antiquity and the messianic interpretation of verse 10 especially stands out. The Hebrew word *shiloh*, though often translated in modern versions as

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<sup>16</sup>J. Collins, *The Scepter*, 61.

<sup>17</sup>G. Vermes, 103.

<sup>18</sup>1QM 11:6-7; 4Q175; Philo, *De Praemiis et Poenis*, 95; *Testament of Judah* 24:1-6; *J. Ta'anit* 68d.

<sup>19</sup>G. Vermes, 302.

“to whom it belongs”<sup>20</sup> was commonly taken as a messianic title.<sup>21</sup> The messianic view is reflected in the Qumran fragment above which explains the term *shiloh* as a reference to “the Messiah of Righteousness . . . the Branch of David.” These epithets call to mind the biblical emphasis upon the righteousness of the ideal king, as expressed for example in the statement about a “righteous Branch” in Jeremiah 23:5. The fragment appears to interpret Genesis 49:10 to mean that the Davidic kingship will culminate with the reign of the Davidic Messiah rather than understanding the Messiah to begin a new line of Davidic kings.<sup>22</sup>

The foundational Old Testament passage on the perpetuity of the Davidic throne, 2 Samuel 7, is interpreted midrashically in 4Q174 (also called Florilegium). Rather than seeing the biblical promise of rest and security for Israel in the land as a past accomplishment in the days of Solomon, the author of this text sees its true fulfillment as something that will occur in the eschaton.

And concerning His words to David, ‘And I will give you rest from all your enemies’ (2 Sam. 7:11), this means that He will give them rest from all the children of Satan who cause them to stumble so that they may be destroyed by their errors, just as they came

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<sup>20</sup>E.g., The New International Version.

<sup>21</sup>*Targum Onkelos; Genesis Rabbah 98:8; B. Sanhedrin 98b.*

<sup>22</sup>J. Collins (*The Scepter*, 67) says that the Davidic Messiah at Qumran “is expected to restore a dynasty rather than rule forever himself.” I see no basis for drawing this conclusion from any of the examples Collins cites. In 4Q252 the statement “whenever Israel rules there shall not fail to be a descendant of David upon the throne” is a reference to the common biblical claim about the house of David being guaranteed continuous rulership of Israel (1 Kings 2:3-4; Jer. 33:17). This guarantee was conditioned upon the dynasty’s faithfulness, and the unrighteousness of the ancient Davidic kings resulted in the throne becoming vacant. The author of 4Q252 sees this promise being renewed when Israel is no longer subject to foreign powers, i.e., in the eschaton. The perpetual occupation of the throne by the Davidic king will be accomplished through the Messiah of Righteousness/Branch of David who will culminate the Davidic royal line. The words “For to him and his seed is granted the covenant of kingship over his people for everlasting generations” refer back to David, not to the Messiah.

with a devilish plan to cause the sons of light to stumble and to devise against them a wicked plot, that they might become subject to Satan in their wicked straying.

The Lord declares to you that He will build you a House (2 Sam. 7:11c). I raise up you seed after you (2 Sam. 7:12). I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:13). I will be his father, and he shall be my son (2 Sam. 7:14). He is the Branch of David who will arise with the Interpreter of the Law to rule in Zion at the end of time. As it is written, 'I will raise up the tent of David that is fallen (Amos 9:11). That is to say, the fallen tent of David is he who shall arise to save Israel.

'Why do the nations rage and the people meditate vanity, the kings of the earth rise up, and the princes take counsel together against the Lord and against His Messiah?' (Ps. 2:1). Interpreted, this saying concerns the kings of the nations who shall rage against the elect of Israel in the last days. This shall be the time of the trial to come over the house of Judah to perfect . . . Belial, and a remnant of the people shall be left according to the lot (assigned to them), and they shall practise the whole Law . . . Moses. This is the time of which it is written in the book of Daniel, the prophet: 'But the wicked shall do wickedly and shall not understand, but the righteous shall purify themselves and make themselves white. (Dan. 12:10).<sup>23</sup>

This text links together 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2 and Amos 9 as passages that all refer to the Davidic Messiah who will come in the last days and bring about Israel's deliverance from her enemies. In addition to identifying this figure as the Branch of David, ala Jeremiah 23:5, the text also appears to identify him as the "elect of Israel,"<sup>24</sup> a royal messianic title probably drawn from Isaiah 42:1 and frequently used in other documents outside of the Qumran corpus.<sup>25</sup> The Florilegium's treatment of the eschatology of Daniel as something still to be fulfilled in the future indicates that Rome is being reckoned as the fourth kingdom of Daniel 7.

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<sup>23</sup>G. Vermes, 353-354. Also see J. M. Allegro, "Further Messianic References in Qumran Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956), 174-187; also, "Fragments of A Qumran Scroll of Eschatological Midrashim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 77 (1958), 350-354.

<sup>24</sup>The author interprets "the Messiah" in Psalm 2:1 as "the elect of Israel."

<sup>25</sup>E.g., *The Similitudes of Enoch* (1 Enoch 45:3; 47:3; 51:3, et al.); Luke 9:35; 23:35. In both of these texts the Elect one is the Davidic Messiah and is associated with the "son of man" figure in Daniel 7.

An Aramaic Pseudo-Daniel scroll recovered from Qumran, dated to the latter third century BC, speaks of a royal figure as “Son of God.”

But your son shall be great upon the earth, O King! All (men) shall make peace, and all shall serve him. He shall be called the son of the Great God, and by his name shall he be named. He shall be hailed (as) the Son of God, and they shall call him Son of the Most High. As comets (flash) to the sight, so shall be their kingdom. (For some) years they shall rule upon the earth and shall trample everything (under foot); people shall trample upon people, city upon city, [...] until there arises the people of God, and everyone rests from the sword.<sup>26</sup>

The identity of this figure is greatly debated by scholars. It has been interpreted as a historical figure, Alexander Balas, the son of Antiochus Epiphanes;<sup>27</sup> as a Jewish Antichrist;<sup>28</sup> or as Michael the archangel.<sup>29</sup> But John J. Collins offers a persuasive defense of another view, viz., that the Son of God figure in this fragment is the Davidic Messiah.<sup>30</sup> Since much of the language in this Qumran text is reminiscent of the vision of Daniel 7, it is possible that the fragment represents an early messianic interpretation of that chapter, identifying the “son of man” figure of Daniel 7 with the Davidic Messiah and applying to him the title “Son of God.” It is impossible to be certain on these matters because of the fragmentary nature of the text. But what is particularly striking is the similarity between the language of this fragment and the depiction of Jesus in Luke 1:32-33. In that Gospel the angel Gabriel says to Mary, “[Jesus] will

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<sup>26</sup>This is the reconstruction and translation of J. A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, 92-93. Fitzmyer notes that J. T. Milik interpreted the scroll historically, as a reference to Alexander Balas. But Fitzmyer favors an interpretation that sees a future ruler under discussion. (See also 105-107.)

<sup>27</sup>This is the opinion of J. T. Milik, provided in Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, 92-107.

<sup>28</sup>D. Flusser, *Judaism And The Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 207-113.

<sup>29</sup>F. G. Martínez, *Qumran And Apocalyptic* (Leiden, 1992), 162-179.

<sup>30</sup>J. Collins, *The Scepter*, 154-172. Collins offers a critique of all of the aforementioned views before arguing his own messianic interpretation.

be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and his kingdom shall have no end.”

The Qumran scrolls speak of more messianic-eschatological figures than just a royal Messiah. Of even greater significance to the Qumran community was the expectation of a messianic high priest of the line of Zadok who would purify the temple worship at Jerusalem. The Qumran sectarians believed that this figure would hold a rank even higher than that of the Davidic Messiah. Also evidenced at Qumran was a belief in an eschatological Prophet, and perhaps even a future Teacher of the Law.

The apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 and its depiction of “one like a son of man” who appears upon the clouds and receives the rulership of the kingdom of God appears to have sparked a view of a transcendent, heavenly messiah figure among some Jewish groups. *4 Ezra*, a Jewish apocalypse from the first century AD, borrows from the Son of Man figure in Daniel to create its own new apocalyptic vision:

And I looked, and behold, this wind made something like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea. And I looked, and behold, that man flew with the clouds of heaven; and wherever he turned his face to look, everything under his gaze trembled, and whenever his voice issued from his mouth, all who heard his voice melted as wax melts it feels the fire (13:2-4).

This figure is explained later in the text as “he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left” (13:26).<sup>31</sup> In 13:33-38 he stands atop Mount Zion and renders judgment upon the nations of the world. Psalm 2 seems to be the basis for what is described, especially since in 13:37 God refers to this

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<sup>31</sup>Micah 5:2 may have also influenced this conception: “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.”

figure as “my son.” This epithet appears to equate him with the Davidic king who receives the same epithet in 7:28.

For my son, the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. And after these years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings; so that no one will be left. And after seven days the world, which is not yet awake, shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish. And the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it; and the chambers shall give up the souls which have been committed to them. And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment.

This Messiah is a suprahuman figure, a transcendent, pre-existent being whom the Lord reveals at the proper time.<sup>32</sup> The biblical book of Daniel surely suggested this idea, what with its depiction of a Son of Man figure coming upon the clouds and receiving a heavenly throne. What is significant in *4 Ezra* is that the Danielic Son of Man is equated with the Davidic Messiah, something that becomes common in later Jewish and Christian messianism.<sup>33</sup>

The scrolls may also envisage such a transcendent Davidic Messiah in a fragment known as 4Q246, or the Son of God text, but this identification is uncertain due to the brevity of the text. Another text that clearly parallels *4 Ezra* in interpreting the Danielic Son of Man as a suprahuman figure is a document that was not found at Qumran, viz., the *Similitudes of Enoch*. Usually dated to the first century AD, this work speaks of a pre-existent Son of Man who sits on the throne of God to render just judgment. He is called Messiah, the Elect one, and the Righteous. Despite the many similarities of the *Similitudes* with *4 Ezra*, the two works have no literary dependence upon one

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<sup>32</sup>2 *Baruch* 29-30 (early second century AD) speaks of the time when “the Anointed One will begin to be revealed.” This seems to indicate a Messiah who is a pre-existent figure, similar to what we see in *4 Ezra*.

<sup>33</sup>Justin’s *Dialogue With Trypho* 32. In the rabbinic texts (*b. Hag.* 14a; *b. Sanh.* 38b) we read of Rabbi Akiba’s view that the thrones (plural) of Daniel 7 were two in number, one for God and one for the Davidic Messiah.

another and come from different groups. How widespread the view of a suprahuman Messiah was among Jews before the advent of Christianity is something that cannot be determined. The fact that *4 Ezra* and the *Similitudes* present a royal Messiah of a transcendent nature doesn't mean that all (or even many) Jewish groups thought in such terms or that they even connected Daniel 7 with the Davidic Messiah at all.<sup>34</sup> But these two works demonstrate the impact that the vision of Daniel 7 could have on Jewish messianic thought and how the motifs of the Daniel passage could be combined with the portrait of the Davidic Messiah found in other biblical passages. It is interesting that later in the Rabbinic period the idea of a pre-existent, transcendent Davidic Messiah becomes normative.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>In Qumran fragment 4Q491 (commonly known as "The Song of Michael") an enigmatic figure says,

I am reckoned with the 'gods' and my dwelling-place is in the congregation of holiness. My desire is not according to the flesh, [and] all that I value is in the glory of . . . the place of holiness. Whom do I count as despicable, and who is comparable to me in my glory? Who is like . . . the young (?) like me? Is there a companion who resembles me? I have . . . , and no instruction resembles my instruction . . . Who shall attack me when [I] open my mouth? And who can deal with the issue of my lips? Who shall summon me to be destroyed by my judgment? . . . For I am reckoned with the 'gods,' and my glory is with the sons of the King. No pure gold or gold of Ophir . . . .

It is possible that the speaker is a royal (Davidic) Messiah. If so, it is further evidence of a transcendent messiah-concept late in the Second-Temple period, perhaps sparked by the Son of Man figure in Daniel 7. The sectarian documents at Qumran never speak of the Davidic Messiah in such lofty terms as we see in this fragment. Most scholars identify the figure as Michael the arch-angel who figures prominently in the War Scroll (see 1QM 17:7). Collins (*The Scepter*, 148-149) argues that the figure is the eschatological priest-teacher mentioned in several of the scrolls.

11QMelchizedek speaks of an eschatological figure, Melchizedek, who several times is addressed as *elohim*. He rises in the heavenly council and administers judgment. Most scholars believe that "Melchizedek" is another name for the angel Michael. (See Collins, *The Scepter*, 176, and my further discussion of this Qumran scroll in chapter seven.)

<sup>35</sup>The *Babylonian Talmud* says that the name of the Messiah is one of seven things created before the world was made (*Nedarim* 39b; *Pesahim* 54a). Psalm 72:17 is given as the basis for this idea: "May his name endure forever; may his name increase as long as the sun shines." *Pesikta Rabbati* 33.6 also speaks of the Messiah as a being whom God created before He made the world.

The above survey has shown that the belief in a Davidic Messiah who would come in the last days is evidenced by a host of Jewish documents composed either before or contemporaneously with the New Testament books. The Davidic Messiah is not the same kind of figure in each document. On the one hand, we see in the *Psalms of Solomon* a human warrior-king who leads the armies of God to victory in the decisive eschatological battle. In the *Similitudes*, however, we see a pre-existent being, concealed since before the creation of the world, one who sits on the throne of God and speaks forth the secrets of wisdom. It is evident that Judaic groups of Late Antiquity were reading the same canonical corpus and deriving similar, yet differing views of what Scripture foretold. The vagueness of Scripture itself – its lack of clear messianic definition and continuity – invited a variety of speculations about what the messianic reality of the eschaton would be like. Within the heart of this milieu Christianity emerged.

### CHRISTIAN MESSIANISM

Christianity offered its own unique messianism. It did not speak of multiple messiahs as did the sectarians of Qumran. Even though the Gospels assign to John the Baptist an eschatological role foretold by Scripture, John is presented as a precursor to Christ and not as his messianic complement. In Christianity, the ideas of messianic king, prophet, and priest are all subsumed in the one person, Jesus Christ. He is called *the* Messiah, not merely because there were no other Anointed ones that Christians recognized, but because he assumed all roles that any messianic figure of Scripture might possess.

At the base level of Christianity's messianism was the idea of Jesus as the royal Messiah, the ideal Davidic king who would restore the throne of David and deliver Israel from

all her enemies. But this idea was also interpreted in terms of the Danielic Son of Man so that the nature of the Davidic Messiah is conceived as being more than that of a mere human being. As we have seen, Christianity was not unique in equating the Son of Man figure of Daniel with the more typical messianic son of David; a suprahuman Messiah was not a unique conception. But Christianity takes this concept to a remarkably higher level than anything found in other Judaic systems.

Even more astounding is the fact that Christianity did not assign its elevated messianic ideology to some abstract figure of the future who was yet to make his entrance into the empirical realm. The New Testament identified this elevated suprahuman Messiah as a definite historical person. This is unique among Jewish messianism. In the first century AD, Christians claimed that the Jewish messianic hope had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, a crucified descendant of David who arose from the dead and ascended to heaven (Acts 2:32-36; 17:31; Rom. 1:4). Christians claimed that this event had been confirmed by eyewitnesses (Heb. 2:3; Mark 16:19). The Messiah of the New Testament does not purge Jerusalem of Gentiles in order to rule on an earthly throne; he exercises his sovereignty on a heavenly throne. What Christianity said about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus – what it affirmed as historical fact – is what shaped its messianism in a profoundly unique way and elevated it to a higher plane than that known in any form of Judaism before or since.

Why did Jews reject their own Messiah? Because they were unwilling to reconsider their assumptions about Scripture and accept the fact that God's plan differed from their own desires. As a result, they opposed Jesus and the true meaning of their own Scriptures eluded them. "For until this very day," Paul wrote, "at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ" (2 Cor. 3:14-16). Jesus is the focal point of

Old Testament prophecy. But that truth remains obscure to a person unless he is willing to believe in Jesus. The miracles performed by Jesus and his first-century disciples provide the proof for all that Jesus claimed about himself and about Scripture. If one is willing to accept Jesus as the Messiah, then one will accept his explanation of the Scriptures, and the full eternal plan of God will become clear.