

WHO IS YESHUA?

Part 2

YESHUA IS MESSIAH

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Consider this riddle from the Bible:

Who has ascended into heaven and descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has wrapped the waters in His garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is His name or His son's name?
Surely you know! (Prov. 30:4)

At the time Solomon asked this riddle, no one knew the exact answer to the last question. But the people of ancient Israel clearly recognized that God did have a son, even if they didn't fully understand how that could be. This son was understood as being the promised Messiah of Israel.

Today, you will not hear those terms used together in modern Judaism. But it was the case in the Second Temple period. In that day it was commonly believed that the Messiah would be the Son of God. At the heart of this understanding was the second Psalm:

The kings of the earth take their stand,
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed (v. 2)

God then replies by saying about this anointed one:

"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.
I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son,
Today I have begotten Thee.
Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance,
And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.'" (vv. 6-8)

The Talmud in *Sukkah 52a* confirms the understanding in that day that the Messiah is the Son of God:

"Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the Messiah, the Son of David (May he reveal himself speedily in our days!), 'Ask of me anything, and I will give it to thee,' as it is said, 'I will tell of the decree etc. this day have I begotten thee, ask of me and I will give the nations for thy inheritance.'" "

The question then becomes, who is this son of David about whom God is speaking? For Christians, the answer is very clear: the Messiah is Yeshua (Jesus). But for most Jews, his identity is still unclear. Orthodox Jews see the Messiah as being the person who will regather the

Jewish people to the land of Israel, rebuild the Temple, and rule the world from there in righteousness and peace, but not as the Savior who would die for the sins of humanity.

However we know from the historical writings that originally the beliefs of Christianity and Judaism were very similar regarding the concept of the Messiah. These ancient sources included the Targums, which were translations of the original Hebrew texts into Aramaic, the common dialect of the Ancient Near East. Since some of the Targums were found at Qumran, we know that these writings were in part written before the New Testament, and they reflect the thinking of the Second Temple period. In passages that were accepted as being messianic in nature, the Targumists made it clear in their translations about that view. The Talmud (written 2nd-5th centuries A.D.) adds to our understanding.

Two primary portraits of the Messiah are evident in these ancient sources. When some ancient rabbis noticed that there were two rather divergent portraits of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures, they postulated that there were two Messiahs. One was described as Messiah ben Joseph who would suffer and die. The other one was known as Messiah ben David who would reign over the restored kingdom of Israel and bring about universal peace. Other sages determined that there would be one Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of humanity, and then ultimately reign over a kingdom on earth.

It is only later that we see these beliefs shifting to positions that are very different from Christian beliefs. For example, Isaiah 53—the great chapter on the suffering servant—was originally believed to refer to the Messiah. It wasn't until the influential French rabbi Rashi came along nearly 1000 years after Yeshua that Isaiah 53 was said to refer to the sufferings of Israel. And in the succeeding years, the concept of the Messiah continued to shift within Judaism, to the point that within today's Reform movement, instead of referring to a person, the Messiah is now said to be a metaphor for civilization evolving socially to an era of peace and harmony.

If that is true, then it seems that the Jewish forefathers had to be dead wrong in what they believed. But on the other hand, what if the forefathers and the great majority of the people of ancient Israel were right in their understanding? After all, they were much closer in time and cultural context to the actual speaking and recording of the prophetic words.

Really, all we can do today is to consider the evidence and then to decide for ourselves—to decide if the world is in fact getting more and more civilized, with peace and harmony right around the corner. Or if the message described in the Bible makes sense and describes the solution to the needs of humanity in every generation.

The Biblical portrait of the Messiah

We know that the Messiah would be both divine and human

- Called God's son—Ps. 2; Prov. 30:4 (Mark 1:1)
- Called both God and man—Isaiah 9:6 (Luke 1:32)
According to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Is. 9:6*,
“The prophet saith to the house of David, ‘A child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and He has taken the Law upon Himself to keep it, and His name has been called from old, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, He who lives forever, the Messiah, in whose days peace shall increase upon us.’“
- Called “God with us”—Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:23)

- Has divine authority—Psalm 110:1 (Mark 12:36,37)
- Exists from eternity—Micah 5:2 (Rev. 1:8)
Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Micah 5:2 reads:
 “Out of thee Bethlehem shall Messiah go forth before me to exercise dominion over Israel . . . he whose name was mentioned from before, from the days of creation.”
- Called a “righteous branch of David” who will also be LORD—Jer. 23:5,6 (Luke 3:23-38)

We know when the Messiah would come

- Before Israel’s line of rulers ceased—Gen. 49:10 (John 18:31)

Targum Onkelos Gen 49.10

“The transmission of dominion shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children’s children, forever, until the Messiah comes, to whom the Kingdom belongs, and whom nations will obey.”

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Gen 49.10

“Kings and rulers shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor scribes teaching the Torah from his seed, until the time when the youngest of his sons, the king Messiah, shall come and because of him the peoples shall flow together.”

This passage is significant because it was widely recognized in ancient Israel that the tribe of Judah would retain the ability to govern itself until the ultimate ruler—Messiah—would come. History records that Israel lost its right to administer Mosaic Law in 6 A.D. when Archelaus the last ethnarch of Judea and Samaria was deposed. In other words, the Messiah would have to be present before this time. We also know that Yeshua would have been a young boy at that time.

- 483 years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem—Dan. 9:25 (John 12:12,13)

Daniel makes this prophetic declaration:

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. “ (Dan.9:25)

Here is the math of this verse:

7+62=69 weeks (periods of seven years)
 69x7=483 years
 483x360 days (Heb. calendar)=173,880 days

If you start from the day Artaxerxes gave the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 445 B.C. (Neh 2:1-8) and count 173,880 days, you come to the exact day now known as Palm Sunday when Yeshua made his entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12,13).

- Before the destruction of the Temple—Mal. 3:1; Dan. 9:26 (Mark 11:15,16; Matt. 24:1,2)

Daniel goes on to say:

“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. “

We know the Messiah's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38)

- Descendant of Abraham—Gen. 12:3
- Descendant of Isaac—Gen. 26:4
- Descendant of Jacob—Gen. 28:14
- Descendant of Judah—Gen. 49:10
- Descendant of Jesse—Isaiah 11:1
- Descendant of David—2 Sam. 7:12-13; Ps. 89:3-4; Jer. 23:5

We know the Messiah's attributes

- Born in Bethlehem—Micah 5:2 (Matt. 2:1-6)
- Born of a virgin—Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:18-23)
- A prophet—Deut. 18:15-19 (Jn 12:48-50)
- A Melchizedek priest—Ps. 110:4 (Heb. 6:17-20)
- A priest-king—Zech. 6:12,13 (Heb. 8:1; John 12:12,13)
- The spirit of God would rest upon him—Is. 11:2; (Matt. 3:16,17)
- He would have the wisdom of God—Is. 11:2 (1 Cor. 1:24)
- He would come as a humble king—Zech. 9:9 (Matt. 21:1-11)
- He would look like an ordinary man—Is. 53:2 (Phil. 2:7,8)
- He would bring salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike—Is. 49:6 (Acts 13:47,48)

We know what would happen to the Messiah

- Political and religious leaders would conspire against him—Ps. 2:2 (Mark 3:6)
- He would be silent before his accusers—Is. 53:7 (Matt. 27:12-14)
- He would face capital punishment—Dan. 9:26 (Matt. 27:35)
Note: the phrase “cut off” is a Hebraic term for capital punishment.

- The form would be crucifixion—Ps. 22; Zech. 12:10 (Matt. 27:27-50)
According to the Talmud (*Sukkah 52a*), Zech. 12:10 refers to the Messiah:

“Messiah son of Joseph was slain, as it is written, ‘They shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son.’ “

- He would be despised by men—Is. 53:3 (Matt. 27:25,29-30)
Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Isaiah 53:3

“Then He [My Servant Messiah] will become despised, and will cut off the glory of all the Kingdoms; they will be prostrate and mourning, like a man of pains, and like One destined for sickness; and as though the Presence of the Shekinah had been withdrawn from us, they will be despised, and esteemed not.”

- He would be considered to be judged by God—Is. 53:4 (Matt. 27:41-43)

- He would die for our sins—Isaiah 53:6,8,10-12 (Rom. 5:8)
Midrash Bereshith Rabbah:
“The Holy One gave Messiah the opportunity to save souls but to be severely chastised: and forthwith the Messiah accepted the chastisements of love, as is written, ‘He was oppressed, and he was afflicted.’ And when Israel is sinful, the Messiah seeks mercy upon them, as it is written, ‘By his stripes we were healed,’ and ‘He carried the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.’ “
- He would pay the penalty instead of us for our sins—Is. 53:5 (1 Pet. 3:17,18)
- He would be resurrected from the dead—Is. 53:10; Ps. 16:8-10 (Matt. 28:6)
- He would ascend into heaven—Prov. 30:4 (John 3:13; Acts 1:9)
- He would first be rejected by His own people—Isaiah 53:3; Ps. 118:22 (Matt. 21:42,43; 27:21-23)
- He would later be acknowledged by His own people—Zech. 12:10 (Matt. 23:39; Rom. 11:27)
- He will return to establish His everlasting kingdom and perfect peace—Dan. 7:13,14; Is. 11:5-9 (Luke 1:31-33)

The meaning of the word Messiah

In ancient Israel, kings and priests and in some cases prophets were formally recognized in an anointing ceremony. We see an example of this ritual in Exodus 29 when God gave instructions for the recognition of Aaron as high priest:

“Then you shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him” (Ex. 29:7).

The word “anoint” in Hebrew is *masach* which has the root meaning “to rub.” Not only was Aaron to be anointed with oil, he was to have the blood of a ram rubbed on his body:

“And you shall slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron’s right ear and on the lobes of his sons’ right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet, and sprinkle the rest of the blood around on the altar” (Ex. 29:20).

The ancient Jewish sages taught that this particular procedure symbolized total service to God. His ear was anointed to represent listening to the people. His thumb was anointed to remind him to act on behalf of the people. And his big toe was anointed as a reminder that he needed to go to the people. The passage goes on to say:

“Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments, and on his sons and on his sons’ garments with him; so he and his garments shall be consecrated, as well as his sons and his sons’ garments with him” (Ex. 29:21).

Here we are given the purpose for the anointing: he was being consecrated. The word “consecrate” in Hebrew is *kadash*, which has the sense of being “set apart” or “holy.” It is a picture of a special person with a specific calling for service.

In the vast majority of the passages where the word **anoint** is used, so is the word **consecrate**. These attributes would not only apply to the anointed high priests and kings of Israel, but an ultimate anointed priest king, *the Messiah (ha Mashiach)*. He, too, would need to be set apart from other people, capable of listening to them, acting on their behalf and actively

going to them.

That describes Yeshua precisely. As He proclaimed:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden” (Luke 4:18).

He would use His ear since He had to be able to listen to the needs of the poor and captive and downtrodden in order to be able to preach the good news to them. He would use His thumb and his hands to recover the sight of the blind and in other ways acting on behalf of the people. And He would use His toe and His feet as He was sent forth to crowds and individuals alike. Surely, Yeshua was as qualified as Aaron to serve as the special set apart one in God’s great plan.

And there is more that we can learn from the act of anointing. Exodus 30 describes the ingredients of the anointing oil:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. “And you shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil” (Ex. 30:22-25).

The oil used for anointing contained myrrh (Heb. *marar*, “bitter”). In spite of its bitterness, it had a valuable use since it was used in healing salves and as an agent of purification. Myrrh was present at the beginning of Yeshua’s life when the wise men brought it as a gift (Matt. 2:11). And myrrh was present at the end of His life when ignorant soldiers offered it as a drink as He hung on the cross (Mark 15:23). We have a symbol of what His purpose was as Messiah. Like myrrh, Yeshua

“Gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

The anointing oil had cinnamon, which was then such a valuable spice that it was considered to be a worthy gift to kings. Unlike today, cinnamon in biblical times could only be obtained at great expense. Cost was the issue in Yeshua’s day when a woman in Matt. 26 came to him and anointed his body with perfume, in spite of the protests of the disciples who called it a waste of money. Yet Yeshua received the anointing as being an act recognizing His true worth.

The oil used for anointing also contained calamus (also called cane in some translations). This was a large plant with yellow flowers that produced a fragrance that was extracted by crushing. It is a picture of brokenness. As Isaiah foretold (53:5) Yeshua “was crushed for our iniquities. “

Another ingredient was cassia, a spice like cinnamon that came from tree bark. The name comes from a word meaning, “to bow or bend.” It is a picture of Yeshua about whom it is written:

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Lastly, olive oil was used in the mixture. Olive oil is made from applying pressure to the fruit. No one ever faced more pressure than Yeshua—pressure to succumb to the most intense temptation by Satan in the wilderness and pressure to avoid His definitive purpose on the cross. Yet He persevered.

Clearly each of the ingredients in God's recipe for anointing special called out persons symbolically applies to the life and ministry of Yeshua.

There is a second principle evident in the use of the anointing oil that points toward Yeshua:

“And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me. And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on anyone’s body, nor shall you make any like it, in the same proportions; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever shall mix any like it, or whoever puts any of it on a layman, shall be cut off from his people’ “ (Ex. 30:30-33).

Not everyone could be anointed in this manner. It was limited to the high priest and his sons. In time, the highest priest of all would come—one who would enter the heavenly holy of holies with his own blood once and for all (Heb. 9:24-10:10).

Can you top that? Can any of those who have claimed to be the Messiah down through the centuries come anywhere close to that? Yeshua alone stands out.

This passage in Exodus is a largely overlooked characteristic of the Messiah in Scripture. We do well to recognize the messianic prophecies. But we also need to acknowledge the process of anointing itself, from which we get the name anointed one, or *Mashiach*, Messiah and Christ. It sets a standard that only one person in history reaches—and that is Yeshua.

What is the importance of Yeshua's identity as Messiah?

For some people, the depiction of the Messiah in the Bible is a confusing thing. But when we carefully consider each of the messianic prophecies, the specific concept of anointing, and then the life and ministry of Yeshua, the confusion gives way to clarity. We can trust the claim that Yeshua is the Messiah. We can count on Yeshua's ministry as king, prophet and priest. We can share in Yeshua's anointing.

There is one last riddle for all of us to consider:

Now when Yeshua came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Yeshua answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:13-17).

So who do you say that Yeshua is? It is a very serious question, and Psalm 2 tells us why:

“Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth.
Worship the LORD with reverence, and rejoice with trembling.
Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way,
For His wrath may soon be kindled.
How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” (Ps. 2:10-12)

That is a very serious situation because there is blessing and refuge for those who worship the Son of God, and perishing for those who don't. And we recall how the ancient sages of Israel acknowledged that the Messiah was the Son of God.

Yes, Messiah will one day establish peace on this earth. But not before He establishes true and lasting spiritual peace in the hearts and souls of people. It is something that happens every day when people believe in Him as Messiah and as the one who saves them from their sins just as the prophets foretold.