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# The Evangelical Quarterly

OCTOBER 16th, 1939

## THE MESSIAH-KING<sup>1</sup>

WHEN we use the name Messiah-King, we think of the Old Testament, especially of those passages there where the Saviour of the future is described as the great King whom God will give. My subject therefore is much more limited than if it were formulated as "Christ in the Old Testament". The Old Testament shows Christ in many qualities, as the King, but also as the Prophet and as the Priest of the future, and as the suffering Servant of the Lord. I may say more. To speak of Christ in the Old Testament would mean to speak of the whole Old Testament. For Christ is there everywhere, where He is named, and where He is not named. He is in the sacrifices and other ceremonies, in the history of Joseph, of David, of Israel itself: everywhere you see the types and shadows of Him. The whole revelation since the fall in Paradise is a revelation of grace, and all that grace flows from the eternal covenant of grace, of which Christ is the Mediator, and so it is a revelation in Christ and of Christ.

Christ is everywhere in the Old Testament. And He is there as a King. He is the Mediator of theocracy, of God's Kingship over Israel. In a special sense Christ as Messiah-King is shown to us by those persons who were the Old Testament mediators of theocracy: David and his successors, in so far as they were theocratical kings, they were types of Christ in His kingship.

### I

In connection with this fact I have to draw your attention to a distinction in the Messianic prophecies. There are

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at the Theological Students' Conference (I.V.F.), Swanwick, England, March, 1939.

prophecies that point directly to the Messiah. But there are other utterances of the Old Testament that we call mediately-Messianic, because they speak in the first instance of an earthly king, or perhaps of Israel as a people of kings, but so that this earthly king, or Israel, is type of the great King of the future, Jesus Christ.

Now I have to speak to you principally of those prophecies, wherein the Messiah-King was promised in old days. Modern writers speak of the Messianic *expectation* in Israel. We have, I think, to prefer another name: there is first the divine *promise* of the Messiah; and the expectation follows.

When did Messianic prophecy begin? In modern times much has been written about what is there called Messianic expectation in Israel.

Some years ago, in 1929, I have written an article in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, "The Messianic promise of salvation and the later discoveries", wherein especially this subject of age and origin has been treated. To-day I would prefer to say but little about this side of the question. I think this will be better, because it is a subject in itself, and, though it is of importance of course, it is not the *most* important thing as to Messianic prophecies.

I will now mention only the following. Among the critics of the school of Wellhausen there was a trend to place Messianic prophecies in exilic and post-exilic times. Some disciples have gone even farther than the master. Wellhausen himself acknowledged the Isaian origin of the great King-prophecies; some of his followers have placed these too in a later time. But another school has risen—I may mention such names as that of Gressman and Gunkel—and these scholars were or are of the opinion that there had been in the world of the near East, with Babylon and Egypt as central, a widely-spread expectation of a glorious king and saviour of the future; and that Israel had borrowed this expectation from the peoples, for instance from the Canaanites, to whom it had come from Babylon or from Egypt. In this wise it is thought that a kind of Messianic expectation, but devoid of any spiritual contents, from old times had been cherished in Israel; and the prophets have adopted these popular expectations and filled them as well as they might with more lofty and religious ideas.

It is evident, I think, that the conception of such a kind

of Messianic expectation filling the old Oriental world has in it something attractive to everyone who believes that in Paradise the promise of the seed of woman has been given to mankind. Every demonstration of the existence of such expectations among the peoples of the East would be welcomed by us as an indication that this old promise has left some reminiscence in the hearts of men. But when we see closer, it must be said that up to this date it has not been proved by solid arguments that the expectation of a king-saviour has in olden times, outside of Israel, really existed.

Nevertheless these theories have brought some profit. This profit, that the charm of the old critical school with its tendency to place the Messianic prophecies in exilic and post-exilic times, has been broken. And though this does not make a real difference for us who accept the testimony of the Scripture, nevertheless we may rejoice when we see that the so-called scientific arguments against this testimony are nowadays rejected also by critical and modernist authors.

## II

In any case, the chief thing for us is the testimony of the Holy Scripture. According to this, the promise of a Saviour was given already in Paradise. And though this promise did not speak in explicit words of a Saviour-King, yet we may say that there is some indication of His kingdom, because the seed of woman is described as contending with and triumphing over the serpent and its seed.

A more or less evident indication of His kingdom is given in some other prophecies of ancient times; in the word of Jacob the Patriarch (Gen. xlix. 10): "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come"; in the prophecy of Balaam (Num. xxiv. 17): "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel"; whereas the name Messiah or Anointed is already found in the hymn of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in these words (1 Sam. ii. 10): "And He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed."

But the period which is especially important for the foundation of the Messianic hope, is the period of David. He was to become for all times the example of the theocratic

king, and in connection with this fact was given to him by the mouth of Nathan the divine promise of 2 Sam. vii. 11 ff. that the Lord will build him a house, and will set up his seed after him, and will establish the throne of his kingdom, "and thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever". In this prophecy the special foundation is laid for the expectation of a King from the loins of David, whose kingdom will last evermore.

Now it is evident that in this prophecy the reference in first instance, is to David's immediate successor to his throne, Solomon. But the prophecy does not speak of Solomon only, but of the whole dynasty of David, and in last instance of Him, in whom this dynasty will find its glorification. So the prophecy of the Messiah-King is closely connected with the dynasty of David.

The same phenomenon appears in the second Psalm. Here too is important the distinction between direct and indirect Messianic prophecies. That the second Psalm finds its fulfilment in Christ, is taught us by several passages of the New Testament, for instance Acts iv. 25 f., where it is said in relation to Christ: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ." Nevertheless when you read the Psalm itself, it is in my opinion not very probable that it speaks in first instance of the Messiah. I think it much more acceptable that it speaks of a living king (David) against whom the subdued peoples revolt, and of whom the Lord says: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." You know what follows (the king speaks): "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me: thou art my son, this day I have begotten thee." I think in first instance it is still David, who as the anointed of the Lord is called His son, and to whom the Lord says: "I have begotten thee", that is: I have made thee my son on the day of the anointment.

But in a higher sense all these things point to the Christ, of whom David was a type.

Often it is difficult to know whether a psalm or prophecy speaks in first instance of a human king or of the great King of the future. Sometimes too there is some blending of traits: in a picture of the human king traits are added which really

belong to the Messiah-King. This is, I think, already the case in the second Psalm. The words I cited are followed by these other words: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Here, I think, in the human picture traits are added which belong directly to the great King of the future.

A modern conception explains these traits in another sense. The author of the second Psalm, so it is said, was a poet laureate; his task was to glorify the king and for that purpose he made use of the formulas with which the poets of Babylon and Egypt were wont to glorify their mighty masters; and so the formulas of word power which were usual at these courts, were borrowed from there and applied to the king of Jerusalem.

I think it not very probable that a poet of Israel, whatever may have been his name, would have transmitted without discrimination the formulas of Babylon or Egypt to the king of Israel. We may better accept what he himself tells us that he has received these words in a divine revelation: "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, etc."

It is the God of revelation and of prophecy who thus has blended into the image of the earthly king the traits of the great King of the future. And we should not think that there is in this something unnatural.

There is between the human king of Israel and the Messiah-King not only a strong resemblance, but also a deeper unity, because both of them are the instruments of theocracy. The human king was a type, and not only a type, but also a representative of the Messiah-King: in him Israel really possessed something of the Messiah, because he too was an instrument or organ by which the Lord communicated His grace to His people, that grace which in Christ has its only fountain.

### III

The divine promise that by the mouth of Nathan had been given to David, really dominates the Messianic prophecies of later centuries. There is no time left to enumerate them now; and they are not unknown to any of us. I will take out of them just one example wherein I hope to show you something of

the importance which Messianic prophecy had for the faith of old-Israel. I will take this example from the prophecies of Isaiah. I may say: Of course, for Isaiah is the prophet who has left us the most brilliant prophecies of the Messiah-King; and this again is quite natural, for Isaiah was the great prophet of Jerusalem and of the house of David, with which he was closely connected, perhaps by ties of blood, and in any case by his activity.

I might take the prophecy of Immanuel in ch. vii; or the prophecy of ch. ix, where we find those important names: "Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." But this time I take the prophecy of the eleventh chapter. Here the great King of the future is shown in contrast with the Assyrian world-power of which the prophet had spoken in the tenth chapter.

Assur was the rod of the Lord's anger against Israel and the nations. But Assur did not content itself with being the instrument in the hand of the Lord; it sought its own greatness and the lust of its own heart. So Isaiah announces the divine judgment that will come against Assur too; and the prophet announces the salvation of Judah from Assur's fury. In the same moment at which the dominator of the world thinks to crown the series of his triumphs by conquering Jerusalem, he will find his judgment (x. 32 ff.):

"He shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. . . . Behold the Lord, the Lord of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And He shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one."

The world-power in its pride may exalt itself as the high mountain-forest of the Lebanon, the mighty hand of Israel's God will hew down the high cedars, and he that exalted himself towards the sky will be humbled to hell.

You remember what follows then (xi. 1):

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots."

Over against Assur the proud mountain-forest, the eye of Isaiah's illuminated mind beholds the abased house of David, deprived of all its splendour as the trunk of a cut down tree. But see! as those high cedar-stems are hewn down, this

forgotten trunk receives new glory: out of the despised house of David rises the great King, who in all respects forms a contrast with the despot upon the throne of Assur.

A contrast in the *course of their history*. There, in Assur, you see the fulfilling of the word: "Whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased", Matt. xxiii. 12; here, in Judah, is shown that the God of Israel turns His hand upon the little ones, Zech. xiii. 7; and in the metaphorical language of the prophet, in his speaking of the rod that comes forth, you feel already the indication of the mystery of Is. liii through the cross to glory.

A contrast too there is in the *character of their domination*. Over against the figure of the Assyrian usurper is pictured the beautiful image of Zion's King:

"And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him . . . and righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins."

A contrast, finally, in the *fruits of their reigns*. Assur's domination has filled the world with the cry of war, the King from the stem of Jesse brings the realm of everlasting peace:

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

So you see the great antithesis of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world; and the Kingdom of God is concentrated in the Messiah-King. You see also that the expectation which the prophecy will raise, has nothing to do with the humanitarian hope that by human efforts a realm of goodwill and of peace may be established: it is the miraculous power of the Lord that does here everything; and it is the Spirit of the Lord that rests upon the Messiah and that makes righteousness the girdle of His loins and faithfulness the girdle of His reins.

#### IV

The most important question that has been put with relation to the prophecies of the Messiah-King, is the question concerning the religious value which may be attributed to them.

According to the New Testament and the Christian belief



of all past centuries these prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and therefore are of the highest importance for our faith. But modern critics are of another opinion. They think the difference between these prophecies and the facts of New Testament is so great that there is no reason to speak of a fulfilment.

And in general the opinion of these critics is that the religious value of the prophecies of the Messiah-King is very small. Whereas the prophecy of Is. liii, of the suffering Servant of the Lord, is highly praised by them for its religious-ethical contents, their opinion is that on the contrary the prophecies of the Messiah-King exhibit a much less elevated spirit. They stand—so it is said—far beneath what is called genuine Jahweh-prophecy. The most outstanding feature of this would have been its ethical character, its preaching of monotheism, and in connection with this its universalism: the idea of the one God, who rules the world according to an ethical standard. In accordance with these ideas these prophets preached the divine judgment coming over their own people: the powerful nations as Assur and Babylon were the instruments of God's wrath against Israel.

Contrary to this—so it is said—the prophecies of the Messiah-King reflect the lower-minded expectations of the people and of those prophets of glory who were the adversaries of men like Isaiah and Jeremiah: they are not universal, but particularistic, they are the expression of Israel's aspirations of national greatness. So it is thought that so far as these prophecies have indeed been given by the great prophets, they do not really breathe their spirit; they are concessions which the prophets made to the people. The prophets tried to bring into these popular expectations something of a higher idea. But the result has not been very satisfactory; and when we pay attention to the effect these prophecies have had in history, it must be said that they have been a hindrance against the coming of Christianity and not an advancement of it.

What shall we think of all these and of other objections? In the first place this: if you will seek in our prophecies what God has given us in other parts of the Bible, but not here, you will not judge fairly. For instance: these prophecies do not speak of the atonement of sin; you find the atonement in Isaiah's prophecy of the Servant of the Lord; you do not find

it in the prophecies of the Messiah-King. These prophecies form one side of revelation; and we have to realize that the revelation is one, and though we may consider one side or part in itself, yet we should never do so in an absolute sense: we should ever hold in mind that this is only one side and that therefore there may be important elements of revelation which are not to be found in this very part.

That's the first fault of the critics: they do not understand the unity of the Holy Scripture, and therefore they judge each part by itself.

And then there is another thing. According to the opinion of these critics the religious value of a prophecy depends on its preaching of ethical monotheism and universalism; and I may add of the individual's relation to God.

Now I think you have here again the same immanent conception of prophecy and of the whole Scripture of which I spoke to you yesterday. They do not speak of revelation, they speak of religion; and when they speak of revelation, they really mean religion, that which is in man. But prophecy and the whole Scriptures give and are revelation; religion may follow, but is never the first thing. God speaks, that's the thing. He speaks in His anger or He speaks in His grace. He tells: I will punish you; or He tells: I will help you and be with you, Immanuel. And this "God with us" and: God with us in a Man whom He will send—forms the real contents of the prophecies of the Messiah-King; and when God tells us so, we are not to judge, but we are to believe and to adore. Of course all that God will tell us about the way in which He will be with us, is important for us; but wherever He will tell us that He will be with us, we will not have to complain about that which is not said, but we shall praise God and rejoice for the great thing that is said; and I think this is the true religion, that follows the revelation.

And now let us notice the manner in which God speaks in these prophecies of the King He will give to His people, and of His kingdom. It is true: this kingdom is painted with the colours of Old Testament theocracy; that was the form that God judged necessary; for what reason? I think for the very same reason for which we speak of heaven in earthly terms: for this reason that Israel could not in another manner have realized the significance of this wonderful promise. But that

is secondary; the primary thing is the divine promise that God, the true, living God, the God of the covenant, will make His kingdom come on earth, and this means that His name will be glorified on earth as it is in heaven, and that His people will be saved. It means more still, and God has spoken of these other things elsewhere, but these few things are so great that these prophecies, when believingly accepted, were of immense worth not only for the contemporaries but also for the succeeding generations.

And this touches already the question of the effect.

The faithful in old Israel with Isaiah in dark times were upheld by their belief in the coming Messiah-King whom God would give; and this belief has been a mighty factor for the preservation of the Jewish people, of Old Testament theocracy and of the Church of the old dispensation. And the New Testament Church has been built upon the confession "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", Matt. xvi. 16.

Is this a delusion? I think we have some things to answer the critics that pretend this. In defiance of all difference there is a real unity between the Old Testament image of the Messiah-King and the figure of Jesus Christ as He is shown to us in the New Testament, and as we see His work in His Church. And to some extent this unity is demonstrable. There are arguments to maintain that all that was essential in the figure of the Messiah-King, is evident in Him, as He has come as the anointed with the Holy Ghost who has brought a kingdom not of this world, but from God, a kingdom of which the deepest essence is glory to God and salvation to mankind. We may also mention the fact, that Bethlehem by prophecy was named as His birth-place, and—not to forget—that in the name "the mighty God" His divinity has been foretold; and that He is the fulfilling of that one wonderful name Immanuel, in which all the graces and promises of God to Israel are concentrated.

But one thing we should never forget. Prophecy is mystery and therefore in the question of its fulfilling not reason but faith has the deciding voice. When Peter made his confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", Jesus answered him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." This has not altered since. The facts that have

come after Peter's confession, Jesus' atoning death, His resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, are matters of faith. And by all these facts the fulfilment of prophecy has only begun. The Church is still waiting for the second coming of Christ, and not before then will be seen the external glory which psalmody and prophecy have attributed to the Messiah-King.

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