

**EXPECTATIONS OF A MESSIAH:
DOES JESUS OF NAZARETH
FULFILL HISTORICAL JEWISH
EXPECTATIONS FOR THE
MESSIAH?**

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Introduction

From early on in the Jewish faith different attitudes were adopted in regard to expectations for the future. These attitudes were termed messianic expectations, according to the belief that these expectations included a future era brought about by God. The differences concentrated around the expected signs that would signal the beginning of the era and around what this era would bring for the Jewish people. Prophets throughout biblical history detail these signs and signals and predict that the era will occur. Jews interpreted these prophecies differently before and during the time of Jesus, thus bringing about conflicting conclusions.

The previous conclusions were complicated further by the appearance of prophets who were understood to be the Messiah. One of these prophets was Jesus of Nazareth. As a result of his teaching some Jews began to believe that Jesus would bring about the Messianic Age. Other Jews did not find any reason to believe this because they claimed he was no different than any other prophet. Jesus of Nazareth's influence was enough to divide Judaism so deeply that it could not be reconciled. This division resulted in the formation of a new religion, Christianity. This thesis addresses whether Jesus fulfilled the Jewish expectations for a Messiah.

Before and after Jesus there were competing views within the Jewish tradition on the coming of the messianic age. Some believed it would begin through a person who would initiate it; this person was either divine or human depending on the interpretation. Others perceived that the age would come about through the collective actions of the Jewish people. This thesis develops a picture of these different perspectives and then

looks at how these expectations were interpreted by Jews who did not believe in Jesus and by those who believed Jesus was the one to usher in this age. An examination of the Hebrew Bible texts will show the diversity of interpretations.

To begin this examination, the first chapter will address the expectations in the Jewish faith before the ministry of Jesus. The definitions of messianic expectation and Messiah will be given and then developed. A picture will then be drawn of how these terms were developed and interpreted by early Jews. There were three main possibilities for the coming of the messianic age: a human messiah, two Messiahs, or corporate actions of the people of Israel that would bring about the messianic age. Scriptural references of 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 31: 31-37 and Isaiah 42: 1-4 will be used to show the ideas for a future Messiah and to show possible reasons for the differences in expectations. Excerpts from other Jewish literature from the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. will also be considered for a non-biblical perspective of the first references to the messiah and messianic expectations. These same texts will be used in chapter two in order to show the differences in interpretation between expectations prior to Jesus and those that developed out of his life, death and resurrection.

The second chapter examines the beliefs of Jews who saw Jesus as the fulfillment of messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. The authors of the New Testament show how believers in Jesus interpreted these prophecies. Throughout the New Testament, Hebrew Bible verses are used to show how Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies, whether they were historically interpreted as Messianic or not. Specifically, I consider verses used in the Gospel of Matthew, the Letter to the Hebrews and Paul's Letter to the

Romans. All three of these books contain quotations from the Hebrew bible, some of which were considered messianic at the time of the Jews and some that believers in Jesus feel were messianic and not recognized. Within the Gospel of Matthew and the Letter to the Hebrews Isaiah 11, 2 Samuel 7 and the two Messiah prophecies are reinterpreted in reaction to new insight brought about by Jesus. It appeared to believers that the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible were being fulfilled through Jesus in ways they never expected. This caused them to rework their initial interpretation and expectations for the fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew uses this new style of interpretation to give a more complete picture of who Jesus was through Hebrew Bible scripture. These quotations are used adjacent to events in Jesus' life that fulfilled the prophecies.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he describes how he believes the Jews have misinterpreted scripture. A Jew himself, Paul believed that because the Jews did not have complete knowledge from God, they had unknowingly misinterpreted what the Hebrew Bible was prophesizing. Due to his belief in Jesus' testimony, former interpretations needed to be looked at in a new way. The life of Jesus opened his eyes to a new way to interpret scripture and the new interpretation contributed to a continued belief in the teachings of Jesus.

The third chapter looks forward to how the new interpretations of scripture caused a divide in the Jewish faith and resulted in Judaism and Christianity as two separate religions. Through this separation people of both faiths have maintained their beliefs. Christians continue to proclaim that Jesus is the messiah and that he came died and was resurrected. They also continue to provide evidence of why they think that he is. Judaism

still maintains that Jesus is not the messiah and is still waiting expectantly for the first messiah to come. These divergent beliefs have significant implications for the future.

Further examination of both sides of this issue will be addressed in the hope of coming to a conclusion as to whether Jesus is a valid messiah for the Jews or not. Each religion is able to provide evidence for their own position and holds strongly to their beliefs. For Jews Jesus did not bring about the world-changing events they expected to bring unity, prosperity and restoration to the land of Israel. They also had no historical belief in the idea of original sin so there is no need for the personal redeemer that Christians talk about. For Christians validity is found when first people to see the empty tomb of Jesus were women and this was followed by a quick change in the disciples' attitudes. Others find validity in Christianity's survival. The Christian religion that developed from their belief has become one of the world's major religions. Christians find validity in Jesus as their messiah but Judaism has also developed into a major religion that survives without Jesus as their messiah.

The question to be answered is whether this interpretation of Jesus as the Messiah needs to be or is valid for the people who believe in Judaism. Jesus may be valid for Christians and not for Jews; Jesus may be valid for both. This thesis attempts to provide a conclusion but no matter what the validity of Jesus has been debated for centuries and will probably be debated for the rest of time. It is a topic more central to those who profess the Christian faith. It is central to their entire system of beliefs and it holds within it important implications for the treatment of Judaism by Christians.

Previous attitudes towards Jews by specific Christians created historical, present and future implications that continue to effect history of the world and changed the lives of many forever. Decisions regarding whether the Jews accept Jesus or whether they need to is an important discussion between Jews and Christians across the world and is an issue that often plays a central role in working dialogue between Christians and Jews as they try to live together in today's pluralistic society. An understanding needs to come about if any sort of dialogue and understanding is to continue and grow towards a place where they can live together without mistrust and suspicion.

1

Jewish Expectations of a Messiah

A prominent view the Jewish faith historically maintains is an expectation that a messiah will usher in the messianic age. Within that expectation variations arise in the definition of what form the expected messiah will take. Jewish expectations for the messiah have differed greatly for centuries and there is still active debate on how the messiah will be identified. This was the case even before the role of Jesus became a factor in debate among the Jews. Even though the expectation of a messiah was a prominent view, not all Jews felt a messiah was necessary for the messianic age. Among Jews who were actively searching for a messiah a debate arose over whether the messiah would be of divine or human origin. At the same time those not searching for a messiah came to different conclusions of viable options for the beginning of the messianic age. The goal of this chapter is to examine what these different expectations were and what they implied for Jews who believed in them.

The first step in determining what the expectations for the messiah were is to define terms central to this discussion. The terms “messianic expectation” and “messiah” are essential words and their meaning will open the doors to continue exploration. The definition of “messianic” has developed over time but “the oldest and most general expectation was for a coming era of happiness,”¹ happiness being used to signify a time of peace and prosperity. It was only later that it became associated with a “Savior and

King Messiah.”² In fact there was “little occurrence of messianic ideas prior to the messianic movements of 4 B.C.”³ The term “messiah” comes originally from the term *mashiah*, which originally meant “anointed with oil.” Most references in the Hebrew Bible use it to describe kings, priests and prophets, all of who were anointed with oil. This action implies being singled out and gradually brought about the meaning “chosen.”⁴ It is not until 200 B.C. – 100 A.D. that the term “anointed” is used for a future savior and redeemer. Even then it only referred to an anointed one who is to come in the future.⁵

A Messianic Hope

Based on this definition, we can begin to expand messianic beliefs of the Jewish people and begin to examine what expectations they had before Jesus’ ministry started. The messianic hope around 200 B. C. was due to the events of the near and distant past. Since the time of the exile the people of Israel had become more and more devoted to the laws of God because they felt that they were being punished for turning away from God’s laws. Every effort was made to live as God required, to avoid the judgment they faced in exile and to hurry God’s deliverance of them from their enemies.⁶ This hope resulted from social and political events that had occurred in the nation of Israel. Christopher J.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 15.

² Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 15.

³ Richard A. Horsley, “Messianic Movements in Judaism,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, ed. by David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992.), 795.

⁴ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Completion of the Mishnah*, trans. by W. F. Stinespring, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), 8.

⁵ Marnius DeJonge, “Messiah” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, ed. by David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992.), 777.

⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 25.

Wright explains very well the reasons and expectations that developed in the Jewish community,

As persecution continued and as the nation experienced martyrdoms and great suffering, there developed hopes of a final climactic intervention of God himself, as the prophets had foretold. He would establish his kingdom forever by destroying his (and Israel's) enemies, vindicating and uplifting the righteous oppressed, and putting an end to their suffering. In varied ways these hopes included the expectation of a coming figure who would realize this intervention of God and lead the people. These were not all linked together, or attached to one single figure. The coming of such a figure would herald the end of the present age, the arrival of the Kingdom of God, the restoration of Israel and the judgment of the wicked.⁷

It has been explained further that the messianic age and the coming redemption will be known through a "public world-historical event unequivocally linked to a process that historically overthrows the forces of evil in the world and establishes the Kingdom of God."⁸ This redemption according to Joseph Klausner can come either through, "the prophetic hope for the end of the age, in which there will be political freedom, moral perfection, and earthly bliss for the people of Israel in its own land, and also for the entire human race"⁹ or through a messiah that is "the prophetic hope for the end of the age, in which a strong redeemer, by his power and his Spirit, will bring complete redemption, political and spiritual, to the people of Israel, and along with this earthly bliss and moral perfection to the entire human race."¹⁰ Both would result in the redemption of Israel and bring it out of servitude. Israel would become a vessel to redeem the rest of the world. This is the longing of Judaism that its people would be brought out from under other

⁷ Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, 26.

⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Anti-Semitism and Christian Theology," *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, ed. Eva Fleischner, (New York: KATV, 1977), 80.

⁹ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel*, 9.

¹⁰ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel*, 9.

nations and restored to a condition of peace and prosperity. This event could also include an instantaneous universality of all the world's people through conversion to a belief in the figure bringing about this age. In this event, "the peoples (will turn) to a pure language...to serve Him with one consent (Zeph 3:9)."¹¹

There were wide ranges of interpretations among the Jewish people of how the messianic age will come, what circumstances will bring it about, or cause it to end. These expectations range from the idea of a messianic age, brought about by a corporate messianic movement, to the expectation that there are two messiahs. Within this range, there was the expectation that there would be an "unmediated redemption, which would come directly from God"¹² instead of a divine mediator.

Messiah of Human Origin

In one expectation, the Jewish people say they "expect that the messiah will be a man of purely human origin,"¹³ a man who will come to show that the end is coming and that the complete redemption of the world God promised will be occurring soon. For the Jews who believe that the messiah will be human, the messiah will be "peaceful in his very name, as it is written."¹⁴ He will be the epitome of goodness, wisdom and knowledge. Paula Fredriksen states that, "Like the David esteemed by tradition, the Messiah will be someone in whom are combined the traits of courage, piety, military prowess, justice, wisdom, and knowledge of the Torah."¹⁵ The messiah was a political

¹¹ Joseph Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant*, ed. and trans. Frank Talmage, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1972), 52.

¹² Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel*, 8.

¹³ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel*, 520.

¹⁴ Isa. 9:5, all scripture is taken from NIV translation.

¹⁵ Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament images of Jesus*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 86.

figure that would free Israel from their enemies and restore the land of Israel to a place of power. The messiah's purpose is to bring Israel out of its exile and free the whole world from suffering, famine, war and oppression.¹⁶

Isaiah 11 includes passages seen by some Jews to predict a future event. This prediction included an event that included the appearance of a person who would bring insight into God's plans for the messianic age. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a branch will bear fruit."¹⁷ This person will "contain the Spirit of the Lord"¹⁸ and be righteous and faithful while bringing in an age where all nations will be in "full of the knowledge of the Lord."¹⁹ All people in exile will also be brought together to fight evil.²⁰ This figure was not seen to be divine but of human origin who would contain all of these characteristics, and would bring about the restoration of Israel.

The new hope for a figure that would bring about a messianic age can be shown through the words of 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Many Jews felt that if there were a messiah, he would come as a descendent of David. This messiah would be a king type figure who would restore the nation of Israel. In these verses, God makes a covenant with David that establishes the eternal rule of his line,

When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.²¹

¹⁶ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel*, 521.

¹⁷ Isa. 11:1

¹⁸ Isa. 11:2

¹⁹ Isa. 11:9

²⁰ Isa. 11:10-14

²¹ 2 Sam. 7:12-14, 16

This passage was interpreted in literature found in the Qumran scrolls, specifically in 4QFlor. This interpretation includes partial quotations of 2 Samuel 7 that seem to suggest there will be a redeemer who will establish the kingdom of David forever. Israel is part of David's kingdom so Israel will be established forever too.²² Whether that redeemer would be Solomon, the direct offspring or a future king in David's line is ambiguous. There is no reference to the redeemer being divine.

Qumran literature dating back to around 70 C.E. mentions the coming of a messiah. Within this literature, 4 Ezra states that after the coming of the messiah there will be 400 years of happiness to all who survive, and then everyone will die, including the messiah, and an age of incorruptibility would be ushered in.²³ This messiah would be of Davidic descent and would destroy the wicked and gather the tribes of Israel.

Two Messiah hypotheses

Other Qumran literature from around the second century C. E., shows that there was an expectation of two messiahs, one Davidic king, ben David, and the other a priest, ben Joseph, who was descended from Aaron. The Damascus covenant "contains references to 'the Messiah of Aaron and (of) Israel' (CD 12:23, 14:19, 19:10(B))."²⁴ This two messiah prediction is also found in Qumran literature found in cave 4, 4QFlor, and is derived from an interpretation of the verses in Numbers 24:17 "A star will come out of

²² Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 59-88.

²³ DeJonge, "Messiah," 785.

²⁴ Devorah Dimant, "Qumran Sectarian Literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. by Michael E. Stone, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 539.

Jacob and a scepter will rise out of Israel.” The scepter mentioned in reference to the Davidic king and the star a representation of the priestly king. This Davidic king is the one that is referenced in the verses of 2 Samuel 7: 10-14.²⁵

Another non-biblical source of the idea of two messiahs is the Jewish literature entitled *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. In *Testament of Levi* there is a reference to the levitical messiah, who will be ‘a new priest’ and who will arise in heaven as a king.²⁶ Then in the *Testament of Judah* 24 a reference is made to another man who comes out of Judah who will rise and save all the Gentiles who call upon the name of the Lord.²⁷ These two messiahs are simultaneous and become one in the figure identified in Christ in the *Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs*.

A Corporate Messiah

The hope of a corporate or collective messiah was also an expectation for some of the Jewish people of this time. Evidence for the possibility of a messianic age brought by collective actions of the people of Israel most often comes from Jeremiah 31:31-37 and the “suffering servant” passages in Isaiah 40-55. These passages show how the people of Israel can work together to bring about the situation they desire.

The passage in Jeremiah makes references to a future establishment of Israel that depends on the actions of the people of Israel. This will come in the form of a new covenant. “The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah and the house of Israel.” This covenant will not be broken and it

²⁵ Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 73.

²⁶ J. J. Collins, “Testaments”, in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. by Michael E. Stone, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 338.

²⁷ Collins, “Testaments”, 339.

will ensure that the nation of Israel will endure forever. "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendents of Israel because of all they have done."²⁸ These passages imply that the covenant is made collectively with the people. If they together reach a point where everyone is obedient and lives by the laws of God, the new covenant will be established and their lineage will survive eternally.

In the suffering servant passages in Isaiah Jews often look at the suffering servant to be a symbolic metaphor for the nation of Israel.²⁹ There are four passages in what is often referred to as Second Isaiah, Isaiah 40-55. Within each of these passages a different aspect of the suffering servant is addressed. The passage Isaiah 42:1-4 is interpreted to show the perseverance of Israel and the peoples' endurance through all of the hardships and trials.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.³⁰

The servant is Israel, which will be upheld and which will bring justice to the nations.

God will stick by the Israelites in their abuse, and work through them to establish justice on the earth.

²⁸ Jer. 31:37

²⁹ Daniel Harrington, S. J., *Why do we suffer?* (Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 67.

³⁰ Isa. 42:1-4

Conclusion

These were the expectations of the Jews for the messiah, and the messianic age, before the time of Jesus. Many expectations were already established and these expectations were complicated further by the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus began his ministry and claimed to be from God, many questions arose on whether this was really possible. Many Jews were unable to accept that he was the messiah but others saw evidence that he was.

Many Jews did not accept him because “we [Jews] most certainly must not accept as a god one who was born of woman and who ate, drank and performed other bodily functions for thirty years and then died”.³¹ Other Jews began to believe that Jesus was the messiah even though he was not what they had expected. Despite the differences from their prior expectations they became confident in his messiahship through his life and death. These Jews along with gentiles that believed in Jesus recorded their beliefs in Jesus in what is now entitled the New Testament. These writings include views and interpretations that provide evidence for Jesus as the messiah and will be discussed in the next chapter.

³¹ Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant*, 72.

2

A Plausible Messiah: Jesus of Nazareth

The expectations of the messiah became dramatically different for Jews who came to believe that Jesus was the messiah. Their belief caused them to look at scripture in a very different way and to see many passages in a different light than the scriptures had before. These Jews, who initially were a small movement within Judaism, pursued their new faith and were some of the founders of the Christian church. They, together with Gentiles who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah, believed that the Hebrew Bible had been misinterpreted. They believe there are places in scripture where the intent may have been to allude to a personal savior. The term “personal savior” signifying an individual who is able to provide forgiveness and redemption for others through death and resurrection. Jews, who held to their convictions, strongly disagreed with this idea of a “personal savior.” The same biblical verses addressed in chapter one will be looked at from the perspective of their new faith. The interpretations are quite different and will be looked at in a way that attempts to explain why the interpretations changed.

This chapter follows the format of chapter one, starting with an explanation of how the expectations for the messianic age and the idea of messiah changed to include a more spiritual side for Jews who believed Jesus was the messiah. Contrasts and expansions will be made to show how beliefs shifted for these Jews from a human figure to a divine one, from two messiahs to one messiah and from a corporate redemption to

redemption found through a personal savior. This will show how Jews who believed in Jesus as the messiah found validation for their change in belief and the new interpretation they used to back it up. It has been found that the "identification of Jesus as the Messiah belongs to the earliest phase of Christian conviction."¹

A Messianic Hope

Jews who believed in Jesus still believed that there would be an end time but it had very different implications than the one that the historic Jewish faith held to. There is no way to determine what initially caused these Jews to believe that Jesus was the messiah, due to a lack of dated information in the form of causal statements. One proposal is that they were in search of an answer to their current suffering and began to see connections between the life of Jesus and scriptures in the Hebrew Bible. These scriptures had not been interpreted as predicting a personal savior but the idea of a human figure ushering in a messianic age was relevant to the time period. This could be an explanation of why some Jews initially turned to Jesus in hope of an end to their suffering. Jesus, as an embodiment of the personal savior, was a figure that inspired possible hope for the future. His message "proclaims the *prophetic presence* of the future kingdom of God."²

The New Testament contains passages that show apparent confirmation that Jesus indeed fulfills expectations of the Hebrew Bible for a messiah. The book of Matthew has

¹ A. Roy Eckhardt, *Reclaiming the History of Jesus: Christology Today*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1992), 152.

² Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 104.

14 of these “traditional qualifications that prove he [Jesus] is the Messiah of Israel.”³ One of the verses used to show how Jesus fulfilled prophecy is Zechariah 9:9, “say to the daughter of Zion ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” It is used in Matthew 21: 4-5 as a direct quote to illustrate that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey or colt, in fulfillment of this prophecy. Passage after passage is cited in the New Testament to show how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. Josh McDowell dedicated two entire books, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*⁴ and *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*⁵, to the analysis of how the words of the Hebrew Bible are fulfilled in the New Testament. Early believers in Jesus used these passages as explanations for their change in beliefs from the Jewish expectations of the messiah to the new belief in Jesus as a personal savior.

These early believers thought that Jesus was the personal savior to bring redemption to Israel. He proclaimed that his kingdom was here but not yet fulfilled, though it was “an event that is already happening precisely and concretely in Jesus himself.”⁶ This is shown in Matthew 12:28, “then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” The present tense of “has come” shows that the kingdom is already present and in progress. Jesus’ followers interpreted this to mean that the kingdom should be accepted now so that they would be accepted into the fulfillment of the kingdom later.⁷ It was

³ George MacRae, “Messiah and Gospel.” in *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the turn of the Christian Era*, eds. by Jacob Nauser, William S Green, and Ernest Frerichs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1987), 179.

⁴ Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, (San Bernardino, California: Here’s Life Publishing, Inc., 1979)

⁵ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Reference, 1999)

⁶ Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 104.

⁷ G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), 93.

believed that this fulfillment would occur through a spiritual redemption instead of a political redemption that some Jews expected. Spiritual redemption would come through Jesus, whose mission “was launched by a revival movement for the restoration of Israel.”⁸ He would initially restore Israel and his disciples’ future mission to the nations would finish the restoration through a unity of everyone with Israel. One reference to this the idea that Israel would be restored first comes from Acts 3:25.

You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.⁹

This idea of Israel being restored first can also be found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Once Israel is redeemed they can turn towards the mission of the Gentiles. Then after the redemption of all, Israel can be fully restored.

It is through the words of Paul that a complete picture can be gained of what new ideas and changes that the life and death of Jesus. His words do not encompass the entirety of these new beliefs but, his reinterpretation of scripture depicts the implications of Jesus. “Paul could envision Jesus as a messianic leader ushering in the final age, but he does so without reference to the limited concept of Messiah as traditionally known.”¹⁰

Paul believed that the role of Jesus was significant because he had been brought down from heaven,¹¹ lived here on earth, and then suffered on behalf of all humans. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share

⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 161.

⁹ Wright, 168.

¹⁰ MacRae, “Messiah and Gospel,” 172.

¹¹ Romans 10:6

in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”¹² Paul shows in Romans 1:3-4, that he believed Jesus was a messianic figure. He opens with an explanation that his writings are, “concerning God’s son, who was descendent of David and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹³ This shows that Paul holds Jesus as the central figure of his theology.¹⁴ Paul thought that God had accomplished through Christ “liberation from the law – sin death, and the powers that dominate humans in this world.”¹⁵

Throughout his writings Paul paints Jesus as a person God made human who came into this earth able to provide for humanity the sacrifice necessary to bring people back into relationship with God through the forgiveness of all sins. This is a mighty call for one man but, because Paul believes that Jesus is the Son of Man, he is able to do all of these things. Paul attributed “salvation, justification, reconciliation, redemption, expiation of sins, peace with God, and pardon,”¹⁶ to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It was these things that would make humanity ready for the end time when all are to be reunited with God. Through Christ’s sacrifice of death and subsequent resurrection believers would be able to work towards a better relationship with God.

Jesus’ life was an example of healing, teaching and learning that ended in a death and brought resurrection. It is said by some scholars that it was at the time of his resurrection that Jesus became really viable as the messiah figure Jews had expected.

¹² Romans 8:17

¹³ Romans 1:3-4, Christ being *Christos* in Greek which means Messiah.

¹⁴ David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 116.

¹⁵ MacRae, “Messiahs and Gospel,” 173.

¹⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, S.J., “The Christology of the Epistle to the Romans,” in *The Future of Christology*, eds. by Abraham J Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1993), 88.

Yet we know, Jews no less than Christians, that the cross was the beginning, not the end. It was the birth of a viable and vital messianic idea, an idea proclaimed by Jews, for Jews, and out of the stuff of regnant Judaism. What gave life to the crucified Messiah was the Pharisaic belief in the resurrection of the dead....It dawned on them [the disciples and other Christians] that the proof of Jesus' claim to be Christ was his resurrection...For them, to deny that they had seen him resurrected was as inconceivable as to deny that they he had been crucified.¹⁷

Though the proof of Jesus' claim to be Christ was found in his resurrection, this was not an easy idea for all people, including Jews to believe. It caused such a problem that Paul addresses it in 1 Corinthians 15.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and so is your faith.¹⁸

Though Jews had a previous notion of resurrection, it was hard for them to understand that the idea of the resurrection was possible for Jesus. This idea was also hard for Gentiles, and this passage in Corinthians may have therefore been directed at either Jews or Gentiles.

It is through resurrection that Jesus became the personal savior that has been mentioned throughout the chapter. He was seen as a personal savior, God's Son, who died as a human sacrifice to atone for all mankind's sins. This sacrifice was a gift from God so that people may be reconciled with Him. This one act was able to wipe out all past sins and allow people to start anew; "just as the result of one trespass was

¹⁷ E. Rivkin, Quote from "The Meaning of Messiah in Jewish Thought," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 26 (1970/71), 398.

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 12-14

condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”¹⁹

A personal savior is a very foreign idea to the historic Jewish faith because they do not believe that there is a need for a human sacrifice to give reconciliation with God. Paul would say that Jesus’ life and death clarified that a separation was there and that a reinterpretation of prior beliefs needed to be taken. Paul himself was a Jew, who had been persecuting people who believed in Jesus until his encounter with him on the road to Damascus. Afterwards this new revelation of Jesus’ teachings brought forth new implications for his faith.

Messiah of Divine Origin

For people who believed that Jesus was the savior there was no longer a notion that the Messiah would be of human origin. E. P. Sanders has been quoted to say that, “The early church came to believe that Jesus was a transcendent being, that God sent him to save the world, that he would soon return in glory, and that all who believed in him would be saved.”²⁰ The passages in Isaiah 11 and 2 Samuel 7 that were used by the Jews to show that there would be a figure of human origin were reinterpreted to show that they could be talking about a descendent of David that was really part of God. These reinterpretations show that the messiah could be divine.

In Isaiah 11 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a branch will bear fruit,”²¹ is used in the book of Romans to show the implications of the

¹⁹ Romans 5:18

²⁰ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, (Philadelphia: Fortress. 1985), 21-22.

²¹ Isa. 11:1

future messiah for the Gentiles. Paul is explaining in verse 15:12 that in Isaiah 11:10 Jesus is the shoot that would arise out of Jesse, who was David's father, to rule over the nations and was predicted to give hope to the Gentiles. He explicitly says "the 'root of Jesse' ruling over and bringing hope to the Gentiles."²² Paul had stated earlier in Romans 1:3-4 that Jesus was [God's] son, descended from David. It follows that the branch of Jesse is seen to be a fulfillment of the messiah and to the prophetic promise that was given to David, thus redefining messiahship.

Paul names Jesus as the physical descendent of David and thus David's "son". But Paul also first introduces Jesus first as God's Son. This idea of sonship - that the king (thus the son of David) is also in some sense God's Son- pertains, as we have already seen, to ancient Jewish traditions of Kingship.²³

A promise is given in 2 Samuel 7:16 that promises a descendent of David will rule forever. "Forever" implies that the person with the ability to do this would not be human but, of divine origin.²⁴ "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me, your throne will be established forever."²⁵ Though many of the Jews of this time did not see evidence for the divine origin of Christ there is evidence that "Paul and other members of the Christian movement were among the Jews who did hold it."²⁶

The Letter to the Hebrews also makes a reference to 2 Samuel 7:14 in the very first chapter of the book. The author is addressing Jewish Christians who were struggling with their new faith, and thinking about converting back to Judaism. Through quotations

²² Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf: 2000), 126.

²³ Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, 125.

²⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 81.

²⁵ 2 Sam. 7:16

²⁶ Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, 129.

from the Hebrew Bible, the author is showing through scripture that Jesus is the way because he is God's son. The citation "I will be his father and he will be my son," from 2 Samuel 7: 14 is interpreted to show that the messiah they were looking for would be the Son of God. Believers currently interpreted this verse to show that Jesus was the son and had been predicted in the Hebrew Bible.

Two Messiah Hypotheses: Jesus was the Priestly Messiah

It is unclear if any early believers in Jesus believed there were two messiahs. Some believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the expectations of the priestly messiah predicted in the passages of Numbers 24:17 "A star will come out of Jacob and a scepter will rise out of Israel."²⁷ The star was the king that would come of human origin to restore Israel but the scepter was the priestly king that had not yet come and would be more powerful king that would come out of the line of David and fulfill the promise again of 2 Samuel 7:10-14 that David's line would be restored forever.²⁸

Jesus had the possibility of being that priestly king and people expected that his kingship would bring great things. A reference is made to Numbers 24:17 in Matthew 2:2 in regards to the star that showed where the king of the Jews was born. Matthew used the star as a reference to the Star of David to show where it was that the scepter of Israel would be born. This scepter, Jesus, would be raised out of Israel to become the priestly king, who would be the new king of the Jews.

²⁷ Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 75.

²⁸ Robert C. Newman, "The Person of the Messiah," in *The Evidence of Prophecy*, ed. by Robert C. Newman, (Hatfield, Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1988), 105.

A Personal Messiah

A corporate messiah was not found by believers in Jesus in the passages of the servant of the lord found in Isaiah 42:1-4 it was a reference to Jesus. Scholars like Tryggve N. D. Mettinger still claim "none of the expressions in Isaiah 42: 1-9 presents any serious obstacle to a collective interpretation of the Servant,"²⁹ but the context in which it is read has changed. Matthew uses this new context to show how this passage can be read to imply a personal savior. He directly quotes these verses from Isaiah because he believes they are fulfilled in Jesus.

Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.³⁰

"Matthew's Jesus is first and foremost the Messiah who fulfills biblical prophecy."³¹ He reinterprets these verses to be a prophecy that predicted the actions of Jesus and not a collective redemption through all of the people of Israel.

In Matthew's interpretation Jesus is the servant being discussed because he has been given the Spirit of God. Jesus is the one chosen to proclaim justice to the Israelites so they can proclaim the same message to the nations. In the previous verses Jesus was healing on the Sabbath and while the Pharisees were planning to kill him as a result of these actions. Jesus recognized this and left the area, asking people to not tell others who he was, though he continued to perform healings. This event fulfills Isaiah 42: 1-9

²⁹ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "A Farewell to the Servant Songs," in *Scripta Minor*, (Lund Sweden: Royal Society of the Letters at Lund, 1983), 31.

³⁰ Matt. 12: 18-21

³¹ Eckhardt, *Reclaiming the History of Jesus: Christology Today*, 148.

because it shows that the Pharisees were making sure the teachings of Jesus were not heard in the streets. Despite the persecution, he endured and continued to work towards victory. This idea was an addition to the Jewish idea that a collective action of Israel would bring victory to the nations. It diverges from the traditional Jewish idea of a corporate messiah because Jesus could bring victory to all of Israel followed by the Israelites bringing victory to the nations through his name.

Other parts of the servant passages in Isaiah, originally interpreted to pertain to the nation of Israel, are reinterpreted as reference to Jesus in Matthew. Isaiah 53: 4, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" is quoted in Matthew 8:17 and attributed to Jesus because he "drove out spirits with a word and healed the sick."³² Both of the verses in Isaiah are made to show that through Jesus' healing powers he is able to "fulfill the mission of the Servant of God."³³ This idea of the servant of the lord and the messiah would never have been joined in Jewish scriptures but authors in the New Testament respond that "Jesus threw light on the whole of scripture and showed how once separate passages could be combined."³⁴

In the Letter to the Hebrews the passage from Jeremiah 31: 31-34 is cited to show believers in Jesus interpreted the ministry of Jesus as the fulfillment of a new covenant because they had not remained faithful to the old.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all

³² Matt. 8:16

³³ Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, 157.

³⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 117.

know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.³⁵

This new covenant would be realized in their hearts and minds. It was about grace and spiritual renewal, instead of about the law as the old covenant had been. Jesus was the one to bring redemption instead of a collective redemption of Israel. This redemption is able to provide a means for all of the trespasses of Israel to be forgiven through Jesus in order that the nations may be redeemed too.

Conclusion

The examples set forth in this chapter show briefly how believers in Jesus believed that scripture needed to be reinterpreted as a result of his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. The New Testament is full similar reinterpretations and this is not by any means an exhaustive comparison but it attempts to give a picture of how Jesus' followers believed scripture should be read. The chasm between Christianity and Judaism began with a group of Jews who believed that Jesus was the messiah and then blossomed into an entirely different religion that included Gentiles. A split which has remained until the present day. The continuing differences and dialogue between the new Christian religion and Judaism as well as implications for their future survival will be the subject of the next chapter.

³⁵ Hebrews 8:10-12

3

Implications and Dialogue

It is evident that the life of Jesus brought a shift in belief and interpretation of scripture. This shift resulted in the beginning of a new church for both Jews and Gentiles who believed that Jesus was the Son of God and the messiah predicted in the Hebrew Bible. This new church began the foundations of the new Christian religion. This new religion was initially persecuted but continued to grow and eventually became the religion of the Roman Empire. Throughout history there have been instances of persecution between the two religions and conflicts still exist between them.

This division of Judaism held many implications for both religions and still does today as both wait for the coming of the messiah. For Jews the future holds the long awaited coming of the messianic age where Israel will be restored along with peace and prosperity. For Christians there are expectations of the second coming of Jesus in which all who believe will be reconciled with God in a final event. These different expectations provide for an interesting future if either of these events occurs. Even at that future time there may be no definite conclusion that can be made as to who was right. Both sides continue to wait expectantly for the event their faith predicts.

Considering both of these religions started out using the Hebrew Bible they have come to significantly different interpretations of the same text. These differences have caused conflict between the religions since the time of Jesus and continue to do so today. Progress has been made through dialogue but not all issues have been resolved.

Christians believe there is evidence that Jesus is the messiah. Judaism believes there is not significant evidence that Jesus is the messiah. It is important to see where the debate has arisen within each of these two faiths.

The Jewish View

For Judaism the appearance of Jesus had no real effect of their messianic expectations. There are still people who believe in a human figure that will usher in the messianic age, people who expect the same of a divine messiah, and there are still Jews who believe that this will come about through the collective actions of the people of Israel and effect the restoration of the nation of Israel. In the restoration of the nation of Israel "political freedom, moral perfection, and earthly bliss for the people of Israel in its own land"¹ can be restored. Along with this will come world peace and redemption in which everything will be restored to the way God originally intended the world to be.

The messianic age and the coming redemption will be known through events such as; a "public world-historical event unequivocally linked to a process that historically overthrows the forces of evil in the world and establishes the Kingdom of God."² If Jesus had been the messiah, the Jews believe there would have been an instantaneous universality of the people in the world, through conversion to a belief in the messiah after his death. At that time the messiah would "turn the peoples a pure language...to serve Him with one consent (Zeph 3:9)."³ The appearance of Jesus did not bring about such

¹ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Completion of the Mishnah*, trans. by W. F. Stinespring, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), 9.

² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Anti-Semitism and Christian Theology," *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, ed. Eva Fleischner, (New York: KATV, 1977), 80.

³ Joseph Kimhi, *The Book of the Covenant*, ed. and trans. Frank Talmage, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1972), 52.

events thus Jews within Judaism found no reason to accept him as the messiah. The purpose of the true messiah is to bring Israel out of its exile and free the whole world from suffering, famine, war and oppression.⁴

Another reason they are still waiting is because there is no need for a personal redeemer in their eyes. Through the idea that Jesus is the risen Lord Christianity makes Jesus a personal redeemer who was needed to reconcile people with God so that they may have a relationship with Him. Jews do not see a need for a savior to intervene between them and God because they view the events that occurred in the Garden of Eden very differently. The sins that Christianity claim Adam committed occurred in the dialogue between man and God, not as a "fall" from the presence of God. In the creation of man, God "created for himself a partner in the dialogue of time,"⁵ and the only way that this dialogue can occur is by man giving his whole life and every action to God. Through man's actions and through the works that he commits the world continues to be formed and created according to God's plans with man as a vessel for this completion.

Jewish belief concludes, "there is no overpowering original sin"⁶ because they do not believe in the "fall" of man. A belief in original sin would presuppose humanity did something completely wrong, which annihilated their relationship with God but they had not; the occurrence in the Garden of Eden was only an event in time. Jewish belief envisions that "God is wholly raised above men, he is beyond the grasp of man, and yet

⁴ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Completion of the Mishnah*, trans. by W. F. Stinespring, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955), 521.

⁵ Martin Buber, "The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul (1930)," *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild, (New York: Continuum, 1996), 126.

⁶ Buber, "The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul (1930)," 125.

he is present in an immediate relationship with human beings.”⁷ This means nothing that occurred warranted the need to be saved by grace through a personal redeemer such as Jesus.

Another argument for Jesus not being the expected messiah is that Jesus is equated with God. Jews do not feel that the Jewish messiah will have any effect on the unity of God.⁸ This means that the messiah the Jews believe in will not be a deity at all but an instrument of a deity so there is no equating Jesus with God. Nowhere in Jewish expectation is the idea that the messiah would be a part of God, in fact Judaism holds strongly to the commandment “you shall have no other gods besides me.”⁹ Jews feel that upholding Christ as a part of God is blasphemous. Jews look at God’s commandment to have one God and interpret this to mean that God is one. He is not a God divided into three persons as the Christian faith has grown to accept in their Trinitarian idea of God. “The rejection of the Christian appeal is thus directed against the image of the human being who was elevated to the status of God.”¹⁰ This leads to the interpretation that the idea of Jesus as the Son of God, and the mediator between man and God, is a form of idolatry. This is idolatry because they see Jesus as an image and symbol of God that is worshiped by people, which is in direct contradiction to the commandment of having only one God.

⁷ Buber, “The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul (1930),” 124.

⁸ Klausner, *The Messianic Idea of Israel*, 530.

⁹ Exod. 20:3

¹⁰ Jacob Katz, “Exclusiveness and tolerance: Studies in Jewish-gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times,” (Behrman Hawk, 1961), 23.

The death of Jesus also created problems for belief in Him as the messiah because Jews expected the messiah's death to bring destruction and the beginning of a new age. There was no idea of a second coming in which the messiah would come back to create these events which Christians were forced to accept at Jesus' death. Jews believe that the messiah will come once to bring the messianic age and then after the death of the Jewish messiah, which would occur at the end of the age, there would no longer be sin and suffering and the end of the world would occur. They are still waiting for their messiah to appear and bring about this event.

A Christian View

In stating these views as Christian it is necessary to clarify what is being meant by the term Christian. Gregory Boyd says, "all that goes under the name of "Christian" is not necessarily Christian. Christianity isn't a religion or an institution of any sort: it is a relationship....Christians are people who have a saving and transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Only people not institutions can be Christian."¹¹ This is how Christianity is being defined and all Christian authors cited are held within this category.

Christians believe that their messiah has already come in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. What they found in Jesus was a personal savior who was able to atone for their sins and provide for their reconciliation with God. The term "messiah" takes on a very different connotation within the Christian faith and is more closely related to the idea of a personal savior, which is not part of the Jewish expectation. "The idea that an ordinary person with a name like Jesus could be the Son of God and savior of the world seems

¹¹ Gregory A. Boyd and Edward K. Boyd, *Letters from a skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1994), 20.

utterly scandalous.”¹² Through this definition Christians have continued to develop their faith and expectations for the future.

Christians find evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus in historical depictions from scholars of the time of Jesus’ life. It is a fact that “both the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus refer to the execution of Jesus by Pontius Pilate.”¹³ According to these references Jesus did live, and was executed. Though it is agreed that it did happen there is still disagreement on how it happened. “The central Christian belief is that Christ’s death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh new start....A good many different theories have been held as to how it works: what all Christians agree on is that it does work.”¹⁴ There is no real evidence that Jesus rose but then again there is no evidence that he did not. The mere fact that there has not been concrete proof that Jesus was not resurrected has sustained the Christian faith. The resurrection is the event in history for which the Christian faith is founded,

The idea of the resurrection was scorned by most people, as the response of the philosophical Athenians to Paul indicates: “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered” (Acts 17:32). But Christianity has stood the test of time. This is significant because Christianity is the only religion that stands or falls on the truthfulness of an event. Its survival is evidence that its unique basis, the Resurrection, is indeed valid.¹⁵

Therefore, if it is not true then the Christian faith ceases to exist. The continued existence of Christianity speaks for the inability to disprove the existence of this event at this point in time.

¹² Phillip Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 51.

¹³ Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1995), 245.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 58.

¹⁵ Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ*, 253.

During the time of Jesus there were many different types of religious cults and many different beliefs. Christianity was one of these small cults that expanded and continued to grow. For many Christians this is evidence enough that there was significance in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christianity began as a small group of believers that could have easily disappeared as time went on, but it didn't. As other small cults of the time started to die out Christianity persevered and has today become one of the major world religions.

Some Christians find evidence for the resurrection through the way that the story is told. One of the simplest and most convincing arguments for Jesus' resurrection is that women were witnesses to the empty tomb. Culturally at the time the words of women were not accepted as authoritative, it would then be a horrible misstep to use women to tell a story that wasn't true. "If the story of the tomb were legendary or of late origin we should have expected the witnesses to be exclusively men."¹⁶ Women never would have been used to give validity to the story. "According to Jewish legal principles, the testimony of women was generally inadmissible as evidence in those days. Yet, the Gospels depict women as the first [human] witnesses of the empty tomb."¹⁷ This claim hurt the validity of the story more than it helped so they would not have used it unless they believed it was true.

Others find evidence for Christianity through the lives of the disciples. The Gospels profess the disciples at the time of Jesus to be fearful and not exactly trusting but

¹⁶ Murray J Harris, *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 111-12.

¹⁷ Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ*, 251, Though the Gospel of Mark claims there was a man in the tomb when Mary got there, he is seen as the angels depicted in the other Gospel accounts.

soon after they are proclaiming the name of God in the streets and professing the death of Jesus as an act of God. These followers were often murdered for their faith and even when they were facing death they did not turn away from or recant their beliefs.¹⁸ Even though these persecutions occurred more people came to believe and Christianity continued to grow and expand.

Dialogue

This division between Judaism and Christianity is deep and their beliefs about the reality of the Messiah are held through their faith and convictions that each is right in their conclusions. Therefore we are left with two religions that have coexisted through conflicts that have encompassed their histories, and two very different views about the messiah. There has been a “tragic history of conflict, separation, and lack of conversation between Jews and Christians, a history for which the church bears by far the greater burden of accountability.”¹⁹ This is being reconciled through a dialogue between Jews and Christians and the willingness, on both sides, to understand where the other is coming from. “Christians, like Jews must take responsibility for their sins in the still sinful world of which we too are a part. Both of us go forward, each on the basis of our different traditions and foretastes of salvation, to a future hope of redemption that transcends us both.”²⁰ Scholars on each side give opinions and ways to do this.

The Christian scholar Clark Williamson believes that “Part of the meaning of redemption for Paul and his school was that the “hostility” between Jews and Gentiles be

¹⁸ Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ*, 254.

¹⁹ Clark Williamson, “A Christian Review of Redemption,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 285.

²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Anti-Semitism and Christian Theology,” 92.

overcome.”²¹ If this is the case then there is a concrete reason for an active role to be taken in the dialogue between Jews and Christians. According to Williamson,

The writer of Ephesians proclaims that in Christ the divisions have been overcome, peace and reconciliation have been effected, and Gentiles are now “also members [not only members] of the household of God.” (2:19) Redemption has taken place in the past, is a present task, and remains a future hope for which we are called both to pray and to work.²²

Therefore “Christians and Jews have a mutual obligation to work and witness together against all forms of injustice and oppression that hold our fellow human beings in bondage.”²³

Augustine speaks to Christians early on and asks “whether they receive these divine testimonies with joy or with indignation, nevertheless, when we can, let us proclaim them with great love for the Jews.”²⁴ No matter how different the beliefs are there is no reason for Jews or Christians to set aside God’s commandment to love in order to hold on to a personal belief. There is a possibility that, “the biblical God, unlike the static, eternally changing God of Greek philosophy, can change his mind. He repents of proposed plans of actions, he reacts to the changing attitude of his human subjects...”²⁵

This means that the prophecies, or the interpretations of the prophecies, of the Hebrew Bible play less of a role of truth than people have thought. It is then possible for these prophecies to be interpreted differently and still be valid according to each faith.

²¹ Williamson, “A Christian View of Redemption,” 291.

²² Williamson, “A Christian View of Redemption,” 291.

²³ Williamson, “A Christian View of Redemption,” 291.

²⁴ Augustine, “Answer to the Jews” trans. by M. L. Ewald in *On Marriage and Other Treatises*, ed. by Roy DeFerrari, (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1978), 414.

²⁵ J. J. M. Roberts, “A Christian Perspective on Prophetic Prediction” in *ATLA Religion DB + ATLAS* 1949-2002/01. From *Interpretation*. 33 (Jl 1979), p. 240-253.

<http://purl.org/atlaonline/atlas/ashow?aid=ario19800000013410>, 243.

Abraham J Heschel and Martin Buber also provide insights and opinions on the positions of Judaism and Christianity. Heschel states that Christians and Jews should be more focused on working for God because “Unless we labor in helping God to carry out His Promise — to be a father to those who are forsaken, a light to those who despair in secret darkness — we may all be forsaken by Him.”²⁶ Buber called for dialogue to begin and for an understanding to be restored so that the main thing all need to remember is,

The common watch for a unity to come to us from God, which, soaring above all of your imagination and all of ours, affirms and denies, denies and affirms what you hold and what we hold, and which replaces all the creedal truths of earth by the ontological truth of heaven which is one.²⁷

It is in this way that both Christians and Jews should be focused, not on differences but on ways that we can work together to bring about God’s plan.

This process of dialogue has already begun and seems to be the only way to continue since it looks like there is not going to be reconciliation in belief anytime soon. Jesus fits the ideal for a Christian messiah but does not fit the idea for Judaism. The only way to step forward is to realize that all belief is by faith and though there are different faiths it is possible to coexist together, peacefully, as long as both sides are willing to keep open hearts and minds towards each other.

²⁶ Abraham J. Heschel, “The Jewish Notion of God and Christian Renewal,” in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, ed. by Fritz A. Rothschild, (New York: Continuum, 1990), 335

²⁷ Martin Buber, “The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul (1930),” *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild, (New York: Continuum, 1996), 131.

Conclusion

For contemporary Judaism Jesus does not fulfill the expectations historical Judaism was looking for in the messianic age. A contemporary Christian scholar Phillip Yancy confirms this when he says, "It seems clear to me that Jesus failed to meet the expectations of Messiah that the Jews were awaiting."¹ Though Judaism holds this view there were Jews who believed that "the enlargement of monotheistic devotional practices to include the exalted Christ seems to have been motivated by the belief that to have done otherwise would have been to disobey the one God whom they sought to obey."²

This divergence in beliefs really strikes me and affects me in a way that I am still trying to grasp and understand. Historical Judaism had very specific expectations for their messiah that they derived from the scripture of the Hebrew Bible. These were their own expectations and not necessarily the expectations that God meant them to have. They believed they were right but what if they were not. I am not claiming in any way that I have the right to say what is right or wrong but am questioning the reasoning behind the choices made. I find valid evidence that there may have been a new way to interpret scripture. The new way did challenge previous interpretation but for some Jews it worked as a way to continue to grow in their faith.

The statement of whether Jesus is or is not a valid messiah is a personal statement of faith. For me, Jesus is the messiah and my personal savior, to say so is a validation of my faith. I find that there is adequate evidence in scripture to show that scripture can be read in a way that shows Jesus as a plausible messiah. Each and every individual looks

¹ Phillip Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 52.

into their own hearts and searches out their answer to this question. Thousands believe that Jesus is the messiah and daily walk in the fact that He is their personal savior. There can be no absolute proof of this factor except the proof that occurs in the hearts, by faith, of the people who hold this believe to be true. "Thus modern Christology always assumes faith, and states that Jesus can be understood this way in faith. Thus it becomes a modern Christology which is accepted within its own circle, but has virtually nothing to say to non-believers, unbelievers or those who hold a different faith."³ I strongly disagree that modern Christology has nothing to say to non-believers but I do believe Jesus is believed in by faith. The same is said for the Jews who believe that Jesus was and is not the messiah and await the appearance of the messianic age. They believe in their hearts that this is true.

People chose their own beliefs and if there were empirical proof one way or another there would only be one major religion in the world today. This is obviously not the case since no one seems to agree. C. S. Lewis makes a claim, "If you are a Christian you do not have to believe that all other religions are simply wrong throughout."⁴ Even if you believe that Christianity is the way there are aspects of truth within every religion. This leaves room for tolerance and discussion through differences in belief. Yes there are differences in belief, but it does not have to cause a wall of division.

It is possible that the Jewish scholar Martin Buber has the right idea when he states that, "Whenever we both, Christian and Jew, care more for God himself than for our images of God, we are united in the feeling that our Father's house is differently

² Larry W. Hertado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd edition, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 121

³ Juergen Moltmann, "Questions about Jesus," in *The Crucified God*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 97.

constructed than our human models make it to be.”⁵ It is only through a revelation of God that there will be conclusive evidence on this issue. I hold this quote in my mind and debate it continuously and have yet to come up with an adequate conclusion.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 43.

⁵ Martin Buber, “The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul (1930),” *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild, (New York: Continuum, 1996), 131.

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