

The Meaning of Messiah in Jewish Thought

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In addressing myself to the problem of the Meaning of Messiah in Jewish thought, I come as an historian seeking to make the past intelligible. I am interested in trying to comprehend how an idea comes into existence, how it develops, how it spreads, and how it diverges into different highways and byways. Since, however, the problem is so complex and the theme so rich, and the space so short, I shall concentrate primarily on the process of gestation.

Let me begin with some facts that are relatively secure. First, Christianity does not antedate the ministry of Jesus. Second, the New Testament quotes freely from the Old Testament to underwrite the claim that Jesus is the Christ. Third, the history of Jews and Judaism had been long and complex prior to the ministry of Jesus. Fourth, to render Jesus and his claims intelligible, it is essential that we know what Judaism was in his day, what it had previously been, and how the Old Testament had come to be used as a divine source for contemporary problems. Fifth, *prior* to the time of Jesus no Messianic claim had survived the death of the would-be Messiah. Sixth, the belief that Jesus was the resurrected Christ has proved to be one of the most powerful beliefs in the history of mankind. Seventh, most Jews rejected Jesus as the Christ at the time and most Jews reject him now. Eighth, Jews harbored a belief that the Messiah would come, but shied away from recognizing any claimant.

The historian must therefore concern himself with the following questions: (1) Why did the notion of the Messiah gain credence around the time of Jesus and not earlier? (2) Why did the claims of Jesus have so unique an impact? (3) Why did the spokesmen for Judaism, on the one hand, reject Jesus as the Messiah, while, on the other, they did begin to take the concept of the Messiah seriously? (4) Why did Judaism foster the belief in the Messiah throughout the Middle Ages and into modern times and yet persistently reject every claimant?

For these questions, I propose a simple answer: the emergence of the messianic idea as a viable concept in the time of Jesus, its powerful embodiment in the proclamation of Jesus as the resurrected Christ, and its ambivalent status within Judaism stem from the interaction of three factors: (1) the prevailing system of authority; (2) the challenge of changing historical conditions; (3) the range of problem-solving options.

The emergence of the Messianic idea as viable and vital was not evolutionary and developmental. It was mutational. It did not follow as an immanent necessity from biblical Judaism. It was not spawned directly by the visions of Israel's prophets. It emerged spontaneously as a solution to a series of problems that Judaism had to face in the Graeco-Roman world, problems for which there were no direct solutions in the Pentateuch.

Prophetic and Priestly Authority

During the biblical period—more than a thousand years—problems confronting Israel had been solved by Yahweh. At any given time during the biblical period Israel knew where it stood, not by reading a text, but by consulting the prophet. When, for example, Jeremiah proclaimed that Yahweh would destroy His house, he was speaking in Yahweh's name. When Ezekiel visualized the reconstituted Temple, and the restructured Israel, he gave Yahweh as his source, not proof-texts. When Isaiah depicted the Suffering Servant and his fate, he did not appeal to a verse in Amos or Hosea. He simply affirmed: "Thus saith Yahweh."

Yahweh was thus Israel's problem-solver. A tiny people, itself divided, settled within a slip of land between gigantic empires, had only Yahweh to save them. Their prophets, certain of Yahweh's omnipotence and steadfast in their faith in His promise, clutched at this solution and that. They had to determine, in the face of bewildering circumstances, Yahweh's will with respect to monarchy in general, and to the Davidic line in particular. They had to wrestle not only with the problem of who should serve as priests, but whether there should be priests at all. They had to make the awesome decision as to what Yahweh's covenant demanded. They had to determine whether Yahweh would countenance the destruction of land and Temple and send His people into exile. For these questions—and a host of others—there were no clear-cut, unambiguous, immutable answers in a sacred text. Yahweh's authority had to be invoked to solve each specific problem as it arose. Hence no past prophet could bind a future one.

During the Exile and the Restoration, the problems became especially complex. Ideal expectations had to be balanced by realistic possibilities. Such questions as the following had to be answered:

Was Yahweh *committed* to the restoration of the Davidic monarchy? Was Yahweh *committed* to an elaborate cultus and a hierarchy? Was Yahweh *committed* even to the prophets forever? The answers, as we know from Ezekiel, the Second • Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Nehemiah, and Ezra, were both Yes and No!

Yet a definitive answer was ultimately given when the canonized Pentateuch became operative in the restored Judea. Prophecy was extinguished, monarchical claims brushed aside, and Aaronide hegemony confirmed. By once and for all elevating God's revelation to Moses above all other revelations, and by implementing Yahweh's command that the sons of Aaron enjoy an eternal monopoly over the expiatory cultic system, there was no longer any role for the prophet to play. Since he could not challenge Mosaic legislation proclaimed by Yahweh to be binding on *all* generations, his access to Yahweh's will was blocked. Similarly, so long as the Aaronide priests exercised absolute authority over the restored people by virtue of Mosaic fiat and of Persian imperial decree, a king would be a problem, not a solution.

The canonization of the Pentateuch and the triumph of Aaronide absolutism thus relegated prophetic activity to the period of Israel's history when the people had needed prophets because of Israel's disloyalty. Prophetic utterances, however Yahwistically inspired, were solutions to specific problems of an age gone by. Predictions of a restored Davidic monarchy were no longer taken seriously; for any such restoration would have undercut Aaronide absolutism and operational Pentateuchalism. The withering away of prophecy effectively cut off any challenge to Aaronidism, since a bid for monarchical restoration would have had to have had

the sanction of Yahweh.

For the Aaronides, therefore, all of Holy Scripture was read in the light of Pentateuchal primacy. This meant that God had given an eternal and immutable revelation to Moses, and, hence, the only real task of Israel was absolute obedience to the Mosaic Law. Israel's failure to do this in the past had necessitated prophets and kings. However, now that the community was reorganized under the Aaronides as God had originally intended, there was no need for any other authority. If problems arose, the Aaronides, and not prophets, would deal with them. If unanticipated situations required decisions, the Aaronides and not kings would make them. Yahweh's continuous presence was now manifest in the expiatory system, centering in the Temple and ministered by a dedicated priesthood.

Aaronide hegemony rendered prophecy obsolete because it was a system that worked. Following on the canonization of the Pentateuch (sometime no later than the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E.), the Aaronides effectively exercised sovereignty over Israel for no less than two hundred years. The only serious rift in all this time was the Samaritan schism, but this threat was averted when the dissenters hied themselves off to Samaria and built a Temple for themselves. Aside, then, from this challenge to Aaronide supremacy, there was no other till Jason bought the High Priesthood from Antiochus and had his brother Onias, the legitimate High Priest, ousted.

These two centuries of almost unruffled sovereignty testify to the operational potency of Pentateuchalism and Aaronide absolutism. This record exposed the pre-exilic history of Israel and Judah as functionally ineffective. In contrast to the inner divisiveness of Israel's early history marked by kings, prophets, priests, and Baalists striving for supremacy, and the continuous violent intrusion of powers from without, the Aaronides exercised the hegemony granted them by the Pentateuch so efficiently, and in so balanced and judicious a fashion, that they stirred up no potent rivals from within and provoked no serious dissatisfaction from without. So smoothly in fact did the Aaronides run things that when Alexander wrested Judea from the Persians, he confirmed the High Priests' autonomy; when the Ptolemies made good their claims to Coele-Syria, they too were pleased to re-confirm the Aaronidic privileges; and when the Seleucids took over from the Ptolemies, their first impulse was to leave Aaronide supremacy untouched.

What need then was there for prophecy during these years? To solve non-existent problems? What need for a voice crying in the wilderness proclaiming the name of the Lord, when the Lord's name was being proclaimed daily, weekly, monthly, and on a variety of festal occasions? Was Israel to be delivered from such steadfast loyalty to Yahweh by a king, prophet, or messianic savior? Yahweh was secure; His Law was secure; His people were secure; His priesthood was secure; His Temple was secure; the record of His providential care of Israel in the past was secure; even the oracles of his beloved prophets were secure. What need then of a vision of the end of days; of eschaton; of a dream of Israel restored to its land and to its God?

There was no need; hence, there was no vision. For more than two hundred years, no person appeared and no book was written that was concerned with the end of days. Yet there were many sensitive spirits, and many of these committed their feelings and opinions to writing. Psalms were composed; words of wisdom set down; meditations over life's vanities shared; God's inscrutable ways with man pondered; stories told; chronicles compiled. But where in the

post-exilic Psalms is there a longing for the end of days, a Messiah? The post-exilic Psalmist addresses himself to God; he wants a relationship with Him; he yearns to have a Fortress, a Refuge, a Rock for support, protection, and hope. And where in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or Job is there a concern for the eschaton? Is the end of days in the burden of Esther or Ruth or Tobit?

The triumph of operational Pentateuchalism thus relegated the historical and prophetic books to dormancy. Though recognized as sacred, even inspirational, they could not be drawn upon to challenge either the Pentateuch or Aaronide hegemony. To underwrite, confirm, enhance—yes; to undermine, question, dismantle—no. The appropriate stance towards the non-Pentateuchal books, to former kings, to prophets, is revealed by Ben Sira in his Ecclesiasticus. Here one finds Aaronide hegemony both taken for granted and jubilantly reaffirmed. Even the glory of Moses pales before that of Aaron. Though Ben Sira proclaims that Moses *revealed God's* Law, the revelation is primarily concerned with the establishment of Aaron's role as the Grand Expiator, the sacred curator of the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle), the guardian of an uncontaminated altar, an altar on which only he and his sons might burn the sacrifices to God. This hegemony, unlike that of Moses', was to be exercised exclusively and forever by Aaron's descendants (Sirach 45:1-24; 50: i-2i).

When, therefore, Ben Sira turns to the other worthies of ancient Israel, be they leaders like Joshua, kings like David, or prophets like Elijah (Sirach 46-49), he takes for granted that nothing he says about them, or that was said by them, or about them, will be taken as incompatible with Pentateuchal supremacy and Aaronide absolutism. So long as the Aaronides exercised hegemony, they, and they alone, determined what sacred Scriptures meant.

Had the Aaronides successfully exercised sovereignty throughout the Graeco-Roman period, the messianic seed embedded in the oracles of the prophets would never have sprouted branches or borne fruit. The two hundred years of dormancy under the Aaronides is evidence enough. But the Aaronides did not succeed in exercising their hegemony. They were toppled from power by their failure to solve the problem presented by Hellenization.

The collapse of Aaronide hegemony had followed on a crisis of confidence: Jason, a brother of the High Priest Onias, bought for himself the High Priesthood from Antiochus. This was a flagrant violation of Pentateuchal law. Its flagrancy was compounded by the fact that it was an effort to foster Hellenization. When this misdeed was followed by the ousting of Jason by Meneleus, an even more radical Hellenist, the vast majority of Pentateuchally-loyal Judeans suddenly found themselves bereft of leadership; at a time when they were faced with the most serious crisis to their religion in more than two hundred years, there was no legitimate High Priest to guide them.

The Pharisaic Revolution

It was this crisis of confidence which spawned a new class of leaders. Though they are better known to us as the Pharisees, they called themselves Soferim, Scribes. However, they were not the Soferim whom Ben Sira describes. These latter had been Aaronide supremacists, intellectual devotees of literal Pentateuchalism. They had exercised no power over the Law. They had supported Aaronide supremacy and literal Pentateuchalism. Their *metier* had been Wisdom: the proverb, the parable, the simile, the bon mot, the riddle, the paradox. They had praised the Pentateuch, the Aaronides, Wisdom. They had *not* determined the Law; nor had they applied

exegesis to it. They knew nothing of an Oral Law. For them, the *literal* Pentateuch was the Law; and the *literal* Pentateuch was more concerned with Aaronide absolutism than it was with anything else.

By contrast, the Soferim who supplanted the Aaronides claimed absolute authority over the Law. They proclaimed that God had given Moses not only the Written Law, but the Oral Law as well, making the Law two-fold, not one. This two-fold Law, they stressed, had been transmitted from Moses to Joshua, to the Elders, to the Prophets, and most recently to the Soferim-Pharisees. They also claimed that the Aaronides had never been the transmitters of the Law; that they were cultic functionaries, not legal authorities. Their job was limited to the administration of the cult, and the offering of sacrifices. It was evident to the Soferim that, except for Aaron and Eleazar, no Aaronide had ever been vouchsafed a direct revelation from Yahweh. In the years following the death of Moses and Joshua, God had spoken to Judges and to prophets, but never to an Aaronide. A Jeremiah and Ezekiel may have been priests, but they had spoken in Yahweh's name as prophets, even when they spoke of priestly concerns.

God's teachings, so these Soferim declared, were not confined to the Pentateuch. Although not a letter was to be added to the Written Law, there was no such restriction on the Oral Law. For the Oral Law was not so much a Law of content as a principle of ongoing authority to take the Law in one's hand. The prophet had not been bound by Pentateuchal law when threatened; the viability of the Law itself was threatened. The historical and prophetic books revealed that the prophets had again and again acted contrary to Pentateuchal law, even though they added not so much as a word to the Pentateuch. Their authority had been ongoing. So long as they did not insert their teachings in the Pentateuch, they had had the right to determine at any given moment what the Law demanded.

Such teachings of the Soferim-Pharisees were radically new. The concept of the two-fold Law had not existed earlier. The right of Soferim to exercise authority over the Law had no Pentateuchal support. Indeed, such an authority is nowhere to be found within all of Holy Writ. Even Ezra the Scribe wields authority by virtue of his pedigree linking him to Zadokk, Phineas, Eleazar, and Aaron (Ezra 7:1-6), and not by virtue of Scribal authority. Nonetheless, this new class of Soferim sits itself in Moses' seat, proclaims a two-fold Law without any authorization from the Pentateuch, even as it reaffirms the Pentateuch as the word of God and Moses the prophet nonpareil.

This new class of Soferim-Pharisees were thus "revolutionaries."¹ They taught doctrines of startling novelty. They proclaimed that the God of revelation was the Heavenly Father of the individual. He was not simply the Father of the Patriarchs or the Father of Israel, but the Father of each and every person. It was out of Fatherly concern that He revealed to Israel the two-fold Law, for it was the path to individual salvation. Here He had clearly mapped out the road to eternal life and resurrection. For the *individual* who internalized the system of the two-fold Law and guided his life by it, there was the promise of an eternal individuation.

Time, History, and Individual Salvation

This good news of personal salvation, of eternal life, of resurrection, transmuted the

concept of the peoplehood of Israel, and the relationship of this people to both God and to the Holy Land. Israel was now conceived of as the brotherhood of the true believers in the gospel of the Father God, the two-fold Law, and the promise of eternal life and resurrection. The divine promises were transferred from the nation and the Land to the individual. Salvation depended on adherence to the system of the two-fold Law and not on birth. It was therefore available to all individuals, Jew and Gentile. It was operative both inside the Land and outside it, whether the Temple functioned or not, whether the people as a whole took advantage of it or not. To be born an Israelite was an advantage; for it gave immediate access to the system of salvation. But it was neither enough, nor absolutely essential. An Israelite of the flesh who denied the authority of the two-fold Law—and there were many, such, as the existence of the Sadducees makes evident—was doomed to eternal punishment, whereas a proselyte who joined himself to Israel was assured life eternal and resurrection.² By transferring the rewards and punishments to the world to come and by shifting the focus of salvation from the people and the Land to the individual, the Soferim-Pharisees stripped Time of its directional thrust. History was not moving anywhere. Time present, time forward, time prior, was indistinguishable in structure and in quality, so long as salvation was attainable. One was no closer to eternal life or resurrection *now*, than had been an Abraham or a Moses *then*. God was no more the Father *now*, than He had been the Father *then*. The individual soul had been as precious *then* as it was *now*.

This timeless quality is beautifully rendered by Josephus, a follower of the Pharisees, in his depiction of the binding of Isaac:

But when the altar had been prepared and he had cleft the wood upon it and all was ready, he said to his son: "My child, myriad were the prayers in which I besought God for thy birth, and when thou earnest into the world, no pains were there that I did not lavish on thine upbringing, no thought had I of higher happiness than to see thee grown to man's estate and to leave thee at my death heir to my dominion. But, since it was by God's will that I became thy sire and now again as it pleases Him I am resigning thee, bear thou this consecration valiantly; for it is to God I yield thee, to God who now claims from us this homage in return for the gracious favor He has shown me as my supporter and ally.

"Aye, since thou wast born (out of the course of nature, so) quit thou now this life not by the common road, *but sped* by thine own father on thy way to God, the Father of all, through the rites of sacrifice. He, I ween, accounts it not meet for thee to depart this life by sickness or war or by any of the calamities that commonly befall mankind, *but amid prayers and sacrificial ceremonies would receive thy soul and keep it near to Himself*; and for me thou shall be a protector and a stay of my old age—to which end I above all nurtured thee—by giving me God instead of thyself."

The son of such a father could not but be brave-hearted, and Isaac received these words with joy.³

This is a striking and paradoxical depiction. Josephus, a devotee of the two-fold Law and its system of salvation, *and* a sophisticated historian who took Thucydides for his model, does not adhere to the literal account in Genesis. He does not simply take liberties with the text, but fashions an account out of some other source, a source that was deemed by him more authoritative and binding than the literal rendering. Since this deviation pertains to the belief in

the immortal soul and its *immediate* access at death to God the Father, this source must have been an oral teaching that took precedence over the literal meaning of the text. Josephus must have drawn upon the non-written lore of the teachers of the two-fold Law, a lore that is generically referred to as *aggadah*, a term not even found in the Bible. Thus Josephus gave preference to an *aggadic fact* over a biblical *fact*, even though biblical fact was a written text, antedating the emergence of the two-fold Law and a text that was believed by Josephus *and* the teachers of the *aggadah* as having been dictated by God Himself.

By this act of transference, Josephus shatters the biblical demarcations separating structures and ideas in time. Whereas the Pentateuch never blurs the differentiation between the period of the Patriarchs and that of Moses, Josephus treats Abraham and Moses as though they were both sophisticated philosophers and urbane statesmen. He casts the spiritual heroes of Israel's past in the same mould, as though time, place, and structure, were largely irrelevant. History is thus nothing other than a record of event jostling event, and is headed nowhere. The individual, caught in the mesh of terrestrial happenings, should shape his life by adherence to the two-fold Law and should take for his models the great spiritual leaders of Israel who had never deviated from virtue, goodness, and righteousness, despite the lure and pressure of "historical circumstances. The temporal world was thus the realm where other-worldly salvation was earned.

The rejection of historical direction was so central to the teaching of the new Soferim-Pharisees that they never chronicled any history at all, not even their own. There is no connected historical narrative to be found in the whole complex of the Oral Law or Lore. There is no biography, only item-like paradigms. There is no Soferic-Pharisaic chronicle of the Hasmonean revolt, no sustained narrative of the split between John Hyrcanus and the Pharisees and the subsequent civil war during the reign of Alexander Janneus; no historical account of the evolution of the two-fold Law, its teachers, and institutions; no setting down of the events leading to the revolt against Rome and the destruction of the Second Temple. The gospel of the two-fold Law, eternal life, and resurrection reduced terrestrial history to irrelevance.

The shift in time perspective had other profound consequences. The entire corpus of Holy Scriptures was now looked upon as expressing the Divine will. Although the Pentateuch was still accorded a certain kind of primacy, it was not the only source of God's revelation. The historical books, the prophets, and the canonical hagiographa—all were repositories of God's word. As such, they could not be in contradiction with one another. Neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor the Psalmist could have disregarded the triadic structure: (1) Father God, (2) twofold Law, (3) eternal life and resurrection for the individual. Every verse was believed either to presuppose this structure or to bear witness to it. Holy Scriptures thus could be drawn upon freely to confirm it, to amplify it, and to enrich it, but never to challenge it. When David, for example, composed the Psalms, the Law that he praised was the two-fold Law, the God that he addressed was the Heavenly Father, the hope that sustained him was the world to come and the resurrection.

The assumption that the triadic structure was the leitmotif of revelation encouraged the exploration of biblical writ for appropriate verses. The interest no longer centered in the book, but in the sentence. What was needed was scriptural proof to clarify a situation, illumine a

teaching, underwrite a law, inspire an act. The larger context was irrelevant; it could not inhibit the usage of a verse for salvatory ends. Indeed what was far more crucial than context was the combining of verses, drawn from different biblical books, to drive home the identical lesson. The fact that a verse in the Pentateuch was reinforced by a verse from the prophets, and confirmed by a verse from the Psalms, was the most powerful proof that one could bring for the essential unity and timeless quality of the revelation.

The re-awakening of dormant Scriptures—thus went hand and hand with its subordination to the triadic structure. Just as the Aaronides had tolerated no challenge to Pentateuchal absolutism and hierocratic hegemony, so the new class of Soferim-Pharisees revived the historical, prophetic, and hagiographic writings to underwrite their authority, not to undercut it. For them, Scripture was a confirmation of, not a challenge to, the two-fold Law system of salvation for the individual.

This system needed no messianic concept. So long as the road to salvation was not blocked by insuperable obstacles in this world, all that was necessary was the two-fold Law and the firm belief that adherence to it would yield salvation. At death, the soul ascended to God the Father and there awaited the resurrection, the time and nature of which was left vague and undetermined. To attain this salvation one needed neither Land nor Temple, nor even the totality of Israel. All that was necessary was the two-fold Law, internalized in the conscience of the individual, and the faith that the Heavenly Father would reward his loyalty with immortality.

Josephus, in his *Contra Apion*, expresses this system of belief simply and eloquently:

For those...who live in accordance with our laws the prize is not silver or gold, no crown of wild olive or of parsley with any such mark of public distinction. No; each individual relying on the witness of his own conscience and the lawgiver's prophecy, confirmed by the sure testimony of God, is firmly persuaded that to those who observe the laws and, if they must needs die for them, willingly meet death. God has granted a renewed existence and in the revolution of the ages the gift of a better life...⁴

Pharisaic Silence Concerning the Messiah

The Scribes-Pharisees never emphasized the messianic concept prior to the destruction of the Temple in year 70—though there were many occasions which lent themselves admirably to such a doctrine, such as the following:

1) The Hasmonean Revolt Although it was during the Hasmonean Revolt that the new scholar class of Soferim-Pharisees came into existence and took charge of the Law, they did not call for the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom. Instead, they invested Simon the Hasmonean with the High Priesthood—an act in direct violation of Pentateuchal command which invested Phineas and his descendants with the High Priesthood forever (Numbers 25:10-12)—and with the ethnarchy.

2) The split between John Hyrcanus and the Pharisees, and the subsequent Civil War during the reign of Alexander Janneus. Throughout these bitter years, the Scribes-Pharisees had a single purpose: the restoration of the two-fold Law. When this was agreed to by Salome Alexandra, the Scribes-Pharisees were perfectly willing to acknowledge her as Queen. They did not disqualify the Hasmonean monarchy because it was non-Davidic. They measured it by a simple test: Did it sanction the operation of the two-fold Law, and did it acknowledge the right of

the Pharisaic-Scribal leaders to teach it?

3) The reign of Herod. Not only did the Pharisees-Scribes not challenge Herod, but their leader Sameas was active in urging the people to open the gates of Jerusalem to him and to acknowledge him as sovereign.

4) The rule of Rome. The Pharisees-Scribes refused to condemn the taking of the census by Quirinius. They declared the issue to be out of religious bounds, even though it meant acquiescing in the levying of the Roman tribute. So principled was this Pharisaic doctrine on the status of the state that when Judas of Galilee insisted that the census should be resisted and the tribute go unpaid, he and his followers were viewed by the Scribes-Pharisees as the founders of a Fourth Philosophy, even though on all other issues Judas and his followers adhered to the teachings of the Scribes-Pharisees.⁵

5) The Revolt against Rome. Although at first opposed to the Revolt, the Scribal Pharisaic leadership reluctantly supported it once it had gained irrepressible momentum.⁶ Yet at no time during the revolt, did Simeon son of Gamaliel⁷ or Johanan ben Zakkai look to a Messiah to deliver the people. In fact, the latter was far more concerned with getting out of besieged Jerusalem than with messianic hopes.⁸

The Scribes-Pharisees thus took no advantage of recurrent opportunities to vivify the messianic concept. It therefore could not have been essential to their system. Indeed it was in most respects a hazardous and threatening notion. The biblical record was more an indictment of the Davidic dynasty than a model for imitation. Furthermore, the concrete experiences of the Scribes-Pharisees with the Hasmonean, Hero-dean, and Roman sovereigns revealed only too clearly the dangers inherent in any exploitation of ambiguous and obscure prophecies to sanctify any kind of monarchy, Davidic or otherwise. The biblical verses did not control the Scribes-Pharisees, but the Scribes-Pharisee? did control the application of these verses to contemporary situations. The greatest deterrence, however, was the certain knowledge that a Messiah would be most reluctant to subordinate himself to Scribal-Pharisaic authority.

Pseudepigrapha, New Prophecy, and Jesus

Although the turbulent times may not have stirred Messianic hopes in the Scribes-Pharisees, they did sow such expectations in others. Indeed, in response to the crisis of confidence in Aaronidism, the very crisis which had given birth to the revolutionary class of Scribes-Pharisees, some unknown writer had looked for some kind of biblical solution. Cut off from access to direct prophecy, he sought to convey Cod's message for these troublesome times by putting it into the mouth of a prophet-like figure, Daniel. He believed that God would save those who, suffering martyrdom if necessary, remained steadfast to the Law; he was certain that the righteous dead would be resurrected, even as the wicked would suffer eternal humiliation (Daniel 12:1-3).

The problem, as we have seen, was not solved in this way. The Hellenistic threat and the collapse of Aaronide leadership were parried by the Hasmonean Revolt and the Pharisaic Revolution. The Book of Daniel was taken at its face value and was believed by the Scribes-Pharisees themselves to have been written in the Babylonian exile, as claimed. It thus was included among inspired Scripture, and Daniel's predictions were taken neither more nor less seriously than those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel.

The pseudepigraphic tactic was not, however, discarded. It was turned to again and again, especially as dissatisfaction with the Pharisaic teaching on the state sought some means of overt expression. The Scribes-Pharisees more and more affirmed that the state was relevant religious concern *only* when the state blocked the road to salvation. So long, however, as the state did not interfere with the teaching and the observance of the two-fold Law, it was to be considered as sanctioned by God. This teaching seems to have matured when Sameas, the Pharisaic leader, urged the people to open the gates of Jerusalem to Herod.⁹ It was re-enforced when the Pharisees refused to oppose the census taken by Quirinius.¹⁰

This doctrine did not sit well with those Jews who had a deep attachment to independence and strong belief that God must be as concerned with the terrestrial fate of His people. His city, and His land, as with the salvation of the individual. Their dissatisfaction with the Pharisaic teachings on the state was intensified as the harsh policies of the Roman procurators condemned large numbers of Jews to poverty and deprivation. It is not surprising, therefore, that many longed for the God who had actively intervened for Israel in biblical days. Why should He who performed miracles for Israel in the past not perform miracles now as well? Seeking to convince others that God would once again intervene directly, visionaries turned to the pseudepigraphical mode. By doing so, they challenged the Pharisees with prophecy. God was not indifferent to the terrestrial status of Israel. Such a confrontation did not, however, necessarily carry with it a rejection of the Pharisaic belief in eternal life and resurrection for the individual.

But the pseudepigraphous mode was not the only resource open to those yearning for God's breakthrough into history. Prophecy could come alive again through a charismatic teacher proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand; the world of corruption about to be swept away; that a Savior to redeem Israel was at hand, the Son of Man was about to usher in the day of judgment. Such good news could be preached directly by a living prophet, by a living Son of Man, by a living Messiah, who could justify his claims by giving concrete meaning to highly ambiguous predictions of the prophets.¹¹ The Pharisees could thus be confuted by their own teaching that all of Scripture was the word of God; that this word was not trapped in the context of a book; that God's revelation had been both immutable and timeless. He could confront the Scribes-Pharisees with verses wherein Yahweh had promised to David an eternal kingdom, and had proclaimed an end of days. He could call upon the grand prophets who had envisioned a Zion restored to peace, serenity, and sovereignty, and who had foreseen God's forceful re-entry into Israel's history. And when confronted, the Pharisees would be compelled to counter with a messianic concept of their own, a concept-which would preserve the prophecies, yet offset their application to contemporary situations, and to contemporary individuals.

The Pharisaic concept of the Messiah was thus originally defensive. It was more concerned with exposing would-be messiahs than with finding him.

For these ends, there were biblical texts that were most helpful. They could argue that a Messiah is indeed promised in Scripture, but he would have to be able to prove that he was of direct Davidic descent; perform signs equaling those of the prophets of yore; follow on the public return of Elijah; be a champion of the two-fold Law, a venerator of the Scribes-Pharisees, a teacher of vintage, not newly pressed, doctrine. The *bona fides* of the Messiah would have to

be verified by the authoritative spokesmen for the two-fold Law— the Scribes-Pharisees, and by them alone. A self-proclaimed Messiah was, ipso facto, a false Messiah.

Such was the stock of messianic thought current among the Scribal Pharisaic leadership when Jesus began his ministry—clearly no rich lode of esoteric doctrine, but an arsenal of confutations. It was meager to begin with, and became enlarged only to the degree that new ideological weapons were fashioned to blunt the power of new claims. The Pharisees-Scribes are thus accurately depicted in the Gospels as devising stumbling blocks to Jesus' efforts to gain a hearing.

The cross normally was the end of the road, the proof positive that the would-be Messiah had been a fraud. For Jesus and his disciples, the crucifixion should have been equally definitive. His *bona fides* had been exposed as fraudulent. Once again the Scribes-Pharisees had been confirmed. The Kingdom of God had not been ushered in for all to see. Jesus crucified should have been a mockery, not a vindication.

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. Agonizing, despairing, and stunned, the grief-stricken disciples clutched at the core hope of the Pharisaic system: the belief that the Heavenly Father would reward the righteous with eternal life and resurrection. Just as Abraham had had faith when binding Isaac that he was dispatching his beloved son to God the Father, so every true believer in the twofold Law had faith that all who were righteous would be so rewarded. It dawned on them that the proof of Jesus' claim to be Christ was his resurrection. The disciples had been misled. The Messiah had not proved himself while alive—but by the awesome fact of resurrection. Only the stubborn could deny such a sign. Jesus had been crucified;

he had risen. Just as the disciples had been witness to the first fact, they were now also witness to the second. For them, to deny that they had seen him resurrected was as inconceivable as to deny that he had been crucified.

Here now was a problem for the Scribes-Pharisees that had not been anticipated. The unusual had occurred. A messianic claimant had not died with the cross. His disciples were testifying that Jesus had risen from the dead. The Pharisaic belief in the resurrection was being called upon to confirm Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. The Pharisees could not deny the possibility of resurrection. They proclaimed that the resurrection was to be anticipated as an empirically verifiable phenomenon. It was not as easy for them to disprove the Second Coming as it had been to disprove the First.

Paul—Pharisee and Christian

Paul attests to the turmoil of a Pharisee who wrestled with the fact of Jesus' resurrection. By his own testimony (Philippians 3:6), Paul had been a Pharisee, and a precocious one at that. He had prided himself on his commitment to the *paradosis*, the Oral Law. He could boast that his righteousness under the Law had been blameless. He had not known the living Jesus. It was the claim that Jesus had been resurrected that had stirred him to zealous persecution of the

Church. From the outset the only Christ Paul had known had been the risen one. This was the Christ that had aroused his fury. As a Pharisee, he did not confront a living claimant, but a resurrected one.

And a frenzied Pharisee Paul was. "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism," he reminds the Galatians, "how I persecuted the Church of God violently and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13). And just as his hostility expressed in the Epistle to the Phillipians (3:6) was tightly linked to his commitment to the two-fold Law, so his confession of hounding the Church in Galatians goes hand in hand with his precocious loyalty to Pharisaic Judaism: "and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions—the *paradosis* [i.e., the Oral Law]—of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14).

Why this persecuting zeal? Was it not because Paul's personal salvation was at stake? The Pharisees proclaimed the gospel of God' the Father. They taught the two-fold Law as His revelation. They promised eternal life and resurrection to the faithful and the obedient. Resurrection was the reward for loyalty to Pharisaism. No one could be resurrected who had been disloyal. Yet the disciples of Jesus preached Jesus the resurrected Christ, the very Jesus who had, in his lifetime, set himself up as a law unto himself. He had challenged the Pharisees and defied them. He had refused to permit the Pharisees to evaluate his messianic *bona fides*. He had stubbornly persisted in putting forth his claims and had ended up on the cross. Now his disciples were proclaiming that this challenger of Pharisaic authority had risen from the dead. This-could not be! Resurrection was the reward for obedience, not rebellion. This pernicious, false, and dangerous teaching must be rooted out! As a zealous champion of the two-fold Law, Paul must take the lead in exposing this fraudulent gospel.

But doubt lurked behind Paul's righteous determination. What if Jesus had risen? What if his resurrection were a fact? What if the proof of Christ *was* the resurrection?

This doubt gnawed and gave him no rest. The more he persecuted, the more fragile became his certainty; the more he hounded, the more he doubted. Surging from the deepest recesses of his being, powerful passions threatened to break through the dikes of the internalized Law. The pressure of sinful impulses began to batter away at the carefully constructed defenses barring them from consciousness. He began to perceive another law at war with the law of his mind, and making him captive to the law of sin dwelling in his senses. And suddenly there came a moment of wretched doubt; the dikes would no longer hold; the internal defenses were overwhelmed; and Paul collapsed into Christ, and was revived.

Jesus, Paul now knew, had" risen from the dead. He was the Christ. He was the Son of God. He sat at his Father's side. It was now all so clear. The Law does not lead to salvation. It is not the road to eternal life and resurrection. It is not the way to overcome the power of sin. The Law is a delusion. It hides the fact that behind the Law sin lurks. The Law does not vanquish sin. It merely holds it off, blocks its overt activity, screens it from consciousness, serves as a defense. But the power of sin is not extinguished by it. It persists through the very commandments themselves. Every "Thou shalt not" is a provocation—stirring sin to activity and awareness of its power in the impulses and senses of man. Unaided, man cannot master the power of sin. Law is a defense, not a solution. God the Father, aware of man's helplessness, had sent his Son as an act of grace to deliver him from the power of sin and death. Christ had come to redeem man from

sin, not Roman rule. Jesus had come to Israel with the Gospel of eternal life and resurrection, the free and gracious gift of God the Father. Eternal life and resurrection was through Christ and not, as the Pharisees taught, the reward for obedience to the two-fold Law (cf. Epistle to the Romans, especially Chapter 7).

Paul's solution was profound. His gospel of Christ as the redeemer from sin freed the messianic idea from the shackles of time and space. Although Paul anticipated that Jesus would shortly return, and although there are apocalyptic patches in his Gospel, his core teaching was not dependent on Christ's imminent return. The redemptive power of Christ was continuously active in every individual who had faith in him. One did not have to wait for Christ to return, because Christ had not really gone away. He was inside the believing individual no less than he was outside. He could be internalized so securely that one lived in Christ, because Christ lived in him. Secure in Christ's internalized presence, the individual was released from the fetters of externality. Space and time lost their reality, to Reality itself. Slave or free, man or woman, Greek or Jew, the individual was threatened by sin *now*, and Christ was there to help him *now*.

Paradoxically, however, Paul's Christ is structurally congruent with the Pharisaic system of the two-fold Law. Each was believed by its devotees to be the creation of God the Father. Each promises to deliver from sin and each offers eternal life and resurrection for the believing individual. Each preaches that Reality is within, not without. Each denies to *externality* the power to refute the certainties of an *internalized* faith. And each acknowledges that the Messiah will come—or come again—but, until that unknown and perhaps unknowable day, salvation is at hand: for the Pharisees in the two-fold Law, for Paul in the ever-redeeming Christ.

Messiah in Christianity and Judaism

I have concentrated on Paul because the development of Christianity followed the road mapped by him more so than that which was opened up by the Jewish disciples of Jesus who had known and loved the living Jesus. Although they too preached the risen Christ, they failed to grasp the elemental power of Christ as the unique redeemer from sin and the substitute for the Law. They were too attached to the Jesus who had lived, healed, and preached for Jews, to Jews, and about Jews. They were too caught up in the terrestrial messianic goals of the pre-resurrected Jesus to abandon them completely after he had risen. They were too dependent on his coming back again to accomplish what he had left undone for Israel in his lifetime. Paul's stand on the status of the Law was for them too ambivalent. They were frightened by Paul's devastating denunciation of the Law as the *agent provocateur* of sin, and they could not proclaim that his was *the* essential teaching of the Cross. The non-Pauline Gospels were important, but not as potent as the gospel of Paul. The ultimate collapse of the Law within the Christian Church — despite Matthew—and the ultimate peopling of the Church with Gentiles—not Jews—would seem to leave little doubt that Paul's gospel was triumphant.

The messianic idea of Jesus and Paul was nonetheless a creation of Judaism. Jesus had lived and taught as a Jew, while Paul had agonized over the reality of the resurrection as a zealous follower of the two-fold Law. What is more, Paul sought to convince himself and others that Holy Scriptures, the very source of the Law, had foretold Christ's coming to redeem Israel from its helplessness and provocation to sin. Paul's entire plea that faith, not acts of the law, is

the true righteousness is dependent on Scripture as God's revelation (Romans 3-4). So, too, the Four Gospels. All rest their claims for Jesus as the Christ, both before and after the resurrection, on biblical writ as the word of God.

There is a point in time, however, when the Christian concept of the Messiah ceases to be Jewish. Once the Law is abandoned, and once the Church is predominantly Gentile, Messiah for the Christians becomes the central core of their faith; whereas for Jews, he continues to remain, as he had earlier, an open and ambivalent possibility.

The success of Christianity, however, did alter the concept significantly for Judaism. The teachers of the two-fold Law could not ignore the challenge posed by Scriptures. They were therefore compelled to take the idea more seriously than they had done before, if only to dilute the appeal of the Jewish Christians. The Messiah, they affirmed, would indeed come. He would deliver the people from their external enemies. He would restore the Temple. He would return the exiles to the land. He would be a son of David. He would fulfill any number of prophetic predictions. He might even perform miracles, usher in the day of judgment, arouse the dead from their graves. Indeed, the real Messiah would do everything that a real Messiah is meant by God to do. What fantasy could not imagine, reality would make good.

He would some day come. In fact, the promise was gradually translated into a dogma, inserted in the daily prayers, and ultimately set down by Maimonides as an article of faith. But faith in a promise is one thing; fulfillment is something quite other. The pressure for a messianic solution came whenever the pain and degradation in the external world bordered on the unendurable. Tempest-tossed, following on the destruction of the Temple in the year 70, the Jews played out most of their subsequent history in the Diaspora. They clung to their faith as minority groupings within larger and far more powerful societies. They were sometimes treated benignly, sometimes roughly. Now they were granted the right of settlement; now deprived of it. They were not only dispersed far from the Holy Land, but they periodically underwent exile from lands they had come to love and neighbors whom they had come to cherish. Pogroms followed privileges, impoverishment always licked at the heels of prosperity. And in Christian countries, they were never allowed to forget that for the majority, Christ, the Son of David, had already come for the Israel of the spirit that had recognized him.

The tides of history were understood neither by Jews, Christians, nor Moslems. The Jews did not know why they themselves were tossed about. They did not know why the seas were sometimes rough, sometimes calm; sometimes washing them to shore, sometimes dashing them on the rocks, sometimes setting them adrift with no star to guide them. Their only compass was the belief that God had chosen them and had made known his revelation in the two-fold Law. When despairing, they could comfort themselves with the faith that life eternal awaited their souls, and resurrection their bodies. The world might be going nowhere, and history might be driftless, but the soul would soar to their Father in heaven and there in the midst of adoring angels, it would find repose.

But man, being the creature he is, has rarely been content with the promise of eternal life alone. He longs to have this life as well. He wishes that God would grant him both. He sees no reason why it cannot be. Abraham was promised a this-worldly land. Moses led his people to the edge of a terrestrial land flowing with milk and-honey. God over and over again had assured His

people that if they would obey him, their this-worldly granaries would be full and their harvests abundant. The prophets had predicted a joyous, earthly Zion for the scattered Israel of Yahweh. Prodded by cataclysmic events, and impatient with the cruel bludgeonings of history, individuals frequently read the signs of the times as evidence that the Messiah was at hand. The dormant texts once again would spring to life. God's meaning once again would be writ clear. The time was fulfilled, the kingdom of God was at hand, the Messiah had come.

With the possible exceptions of Bar Kochba and Sabbetai Zevi, all such readings were discounted, refuted, and mocked by the scholar class in authority, who read the signs and their meanings quite differently. When the pretender failed to come through, when he ultimately suffered death, it was clear that the texts had indeed been misread, and God's will, with respect to the Messiah, still remained inscrutable. And the people would once again consign their faith in the Messiah to dreamlike fantasies, concentrate on the observance of the Law, and hope for the world to come that did not have to wait for the coming of the Messiah.

The messianic idea thus could neither be abandoned nor embraced so long as Judaism was rooted in the belief in the divine revelation of Scriptures and in the teachings of the two-fold Law. The rootage determined the branches and their fruit.

Modern Notions

With the emergence of the modern western world, the authoritative grip of Scriptural and two-fold Law relaxed. A liberal form of Judaism, which transmuted the messianic idea, made its appearance in 19th century Germany. No longer committed to literal revelation and freed from the bind of the two-fold Law system of salvation, spokesmen for this liberal movement gave the messianic an historical and directional meaning. Judaism, so they claimed, taught the coming of a messianic age through the processes of historical evolution and development. Jews were looking to an age of human fulfillment, not to the coming of an individual. God's kingdom would be ushered in by man's efforts to construct an ideal world. The prophets, so they noted, had had such a vision of the direction of history, a vision that had been mangled and distorted by the proof-texting technique in the interests of other-worldly salvation and of a personal Messiah.

This notion of a messianic age as the outcome of history proved to be very appealing, for it enabled Jews to westernize without abandoning Judaism. If Judaism was neither literal revelation, nor binding law, but an evolutionary and developmental process, the forms and concepts of earlier modes were instructive and inspirational, but were not mandatory.

Western Judaism effected one transmutation, Zionism another. At the turn of the century, the overwhelming majority of Jews lived in Eastern Europe. Unlike their western co-religionists, they had scant hope for emancipation. Subjected to harsh and discriminatory legislation, expelled from most of Russia, and hemmed into a narrow pale of Settlement, the Jews of Russia and Poland desperately sought a way out of their misery and humiliation. Jewish intellectuals were too westernized to settle for the traditional answers, and too bruised to expect emancipation from the Tzarist regime.

Excited by the nationalist ideologies intoxicating the intellectual elites throughout all of Europe, but most especially in the multi-national, disintegrating empires of Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Russia, and stirred by the unique achievement of the Jewish people—an historical

accomplishment unequalled by any other—gifted and sensitive leaders such as Herzl, Pinsker, and others championed the idea of Jewish nationalism. Committed to the national spirit as the *elan vital* of the Jewish people, and assigning to Judaism only a secondary role, these leaders saw shimmering through the religious notion of the Messiah a more elemental national consciousness. The messianic idea had kept the nation alive by focusing the hope of the scattered people on a restoration to their land and of their polity. What had preserved the Jews through the centuries had been neither the Law nor the promise of eternal life and resurrection, but an irrepressible longing to go home again. Paradoxically, those Jews most committed to the belief that God would send His Messiah were, and still are, the most antagonistic to the national idea.

The Jews of today thus reveal the full spectrum of the historical vicissitudes of the messianic idea. There are Orthodox Jews who believe in eternal life, the resurrection, and the coming of the Messiah as articles of faith. There are Conservative Jews with diverse opinions. There are Reform Jews who look to a messianic age. There are nationalist Jews who see the rebirth of Israel as the fulfillment of the messianic idea in the establishment of a secular, self-governing, and secure state. And there are Jews who have never given the matter much thought.

If then we turn to Christian experience we see how similar it has been to the Jewish. Once the Church had resigned itself to the fact that Jesus would not soon return, it concentrated on the Christ within, and the assurances that His presence gave the true believer that he could overcome sin and gain for himself eternal life and resurrection. The belief in the Second Coming was never abandoned, but the Church, no more than the Synagogue, was careless about the *bona fides* of would-be Christs. The Church, like the synagogue, had to contend with an external world that was as cruel as it was bewildering. Suffering Christians, like suffering Jews, wished that they could have the best of both worlds—this world and the world to come. For many, Christ within was not sufficient to still the pain, allay the hunger, erase the misery, and restore the shattered self-esteem. When hunger stalked the land, and war ravaged the fields, and plague snatched off the young and not so young, even pious Christians could not but hear the Second Coming in the resounding hoofs of the horses of the apocalypse dinning in their ears. Yet the Church, like the synagogue, was wary of even the clearest signs and omens, and they sought to expose the Antichrists who taunted the faithful with devilish signs. In each instance, the empirical proof was for the Church, as for the Synagogue, determinative. The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign; they looked for evidence that Elijah had come; they wanted a genealogy that could be checked; and above all, they wanted *their* authority to determine who was the Messiah to be acknowledged. The history of the Church shows that its leaders were no less circumspect.

For Jews, however devout, Messiah will never come. They will no more be able to distinguish him from a pretender than their forefathers could distinguish Jesus from other claimants. For the Christians the Messiah has indeed come, but it is questionable whether his Second Coming would be any more easily recognized by Christians than by the Scribes-Pharisees of yore. But perhaps in some mysterious way this is God's teaching about the Christ. Whether it be the internalized two-fold Law, the internalized Christ, or the internalized principle of God's governance of the universe and of man. God's *eternal* kingdom is within, an *internal* kingdom.

1 The revolutionary role of the Pharisees has hitherto been overlooked by both Jewish and Christian scholars. I have sought to develop the concept of the Pharisaic Revolution in the following studies: "The Internal City," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, V (Spring, 1966), 225-240; "The Pharisaic Revolution,"

Perspectives in Jewish Learning, II (1966), 26-5 ; "Prolegomenon" to *Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Oesterly and Rosenthal Loewe (New York: Ktav, 1969), pp. XI-LXX; "Ben Sira and the Non-Existence of the Synagogue," *In the Time of Harvest*, ed. D. J. Silver (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 321-354;

"Defining the Pharisees," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XL-XLI (1969-70), 205-49; Pharisaism and the Crisis of the Individual in the Greco-Roman World," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, LXI (July, 1970), 27-53. For prevailing scholarly viewpoints, see A. Michel and I. Le Moynes, "Pharisiens," Supplement au *Dictionnaire de la Bible* (Paris 1965), Fascicules 39-40, pp. 1022-1115; L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* Third Edition; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication, 1962); and especially S. Zeitlin, "Ha-Zedukim ve-ha-Perushim," *Horeb*, III (1936), 56-92, and his *Rise and fall of the Judean State* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962-1967), *passim*.

2 Cf. Josephus, an avowed Pharisee (*Vita* 7-12) on the centrality of eternal life and resurrection in the Pharisaic belief system; *Wars II*: 163-165 *III*: 371-376; *Antiquities XVIII*:14. Cf. also *Sanhedrin X-1-6*, where all of Israel are assured of a share in the world to come, except those who lose it one way or another.

3 Josephus, *Antiquities I*:228-232, tr. H. St. J. Thackeray (Loeb Edition; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), IV, 113-115.

4 Josephus, *Against Apion* 217b-218, tr. H. St. J. Thackeray (Loeb Edition; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), I, 351.

5 Cf. *Antiquities XVIII*:1-10, 23-25; *Wars II*:117-118.

6 Cf. *Vita* 20-23.

7 Cf. *Wars IV*:158-161.

8 One should also note the fact that nowhere in Agrippa's plea to the people to desist from rebellion does he deal with the messianic hope as one of the illusions held by the people. He merely stresses that God will not come to their aid. (*Wars II*:391-394.)

9 *Antiquities- XV*:1-4.

10 *Antiquities XVII*:.1-10, 23.

11 *Wars II*:258-265; *Antiquities XVIII*:116-119; *XX*:98-99.