

CHAPTER 3

HAS MESSIAH COME BEFORE?

If these are signs of the **second coming** of Messiah in today's events, does that mean Messiah has come before?

According to the Jewish statement of faith, the coming of the Messiah is a future event:

‘I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may tarry, still I await him every day.’

If we are still waiting for a coming Messiah then by definition he has not already come.

However, there is a passage in the Talmud which says that the **Messiah should have come** about 2000 years ago!

‘The world will exist 6000 years. 2000 years of desolation (meaning from Adam to Abraham), 2000 years of the Torah (meaning from Abraham to somewhere around the beginning of the Common Era), and 2000 years of the Messianic era (roughly the last 2000 years); but because our iniquities were many all this has been lost (i.e. the Messiah did not come at the expected time).’ (b Sanhedrin 97a-b)

The eleventh century rabbi, Rashi, gives an explanation for the non-appearance of Messiah by saying:

‘After 2000 years of Torah it was God's decree that the Messiah would come and the wicked generation would come to an end and the subjugation of Israel would be destroyed. But because our iniquities were many, all this has been lost.’

So, according to Rashi, Messiah should have come, but did not because of Israel's sins.

The 2000 years of Torah are held to date from Abraham, not Moses, so according to this Midrash, the Messianic era was supposed to begin around 2000 years ago. Michael Brown makes this date a bit more specific:

‘Most traditional Jews follow Rashi’s dating, putting the expected date of Messiah’s arrival at roughly 240CE. However, Rashi based his figure on a significant chronological error in the Talmudic tradition, probably the most famous error of its kind in rabbinic literature. It is a miscalculation of almost two hundred years! ’

(‘Answering Jewish objections to Jesus’ Volume 1, by Michael Brown).

This brings us back to roughly the time of Jesus.

CHAPTER 3

The prophecy of Daniel 9.25-26 also says that the Messiah should have come around the time of Jesus:

*‘Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after 62 weeks **Messiah shall be cut off**, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.’*

The ‘week’ here is the Hebrew word ‘shavua’ which can mean a period of 7 days or 7 years. In this case it is 7 years. So we are talking about a period of 7 + 62 sevens, which equals 483 years. At the end of this period of time משיח ואין לו יכרת

‘Messiah shall be cut off but not for Himself’. The Hebrew uses the word for Messiah and says that He will be cut off. The word used for ‘cut off’ (Hebrew כרת) is used quite frequently in the Torah with the idea of being cut off from the people because of sin (as a judgement). For example:

‘But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.’ (Numbers 15.30-31)

When Yeshua was on the cross He was ‘cut off’ from the people as the sin of the world was placed upon Him. But He was without sin Himself so the prophecy adds the phrase which is hard to translate לו ואין (v’ein lo). Literally this means ‘there is nothing to him’. This is translated in the Authorised Version ‘but not for himself’ implying that the Messiah dies not for His own sins, but for

the sins of others. This ties in with the prophecy of Isaiah 53.6: 'The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all'.

Therefore, according to the prophecy of Daniel, Messiah should have come 'seven weeks and sixty two weeks' after the command to restore and build Jerusalem and before the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. Rashi claimed that the prophecy was referring to King Agrippa, the last Jewish king at the end of the Second Temple period. The reasoning for this is that Jewish kings were anointed and the Hebrew term 'mashiach' means anointed. However, the 'anointing' implied in the word 'mashiach' was for legitimate kings in the line of David, and could not be applied to Agrippa who was a carnal wicked king and a descendant of Herod, the Edomite, not of the line of David. Moreover, the subject of the prophecy given to Daniel by Gabriel was the redemption of the Jewish people, the status of Jerusalem and the Temple. Agrippa had nothing to do with this redemption and his life or death would have been completely irrelevant to this prophecy. The historians Josephus and Photius put the death of King Agrippa II many years after the destruction of the Second Temple, somewhere between 93 and 100 CE. So Daniel 9.26 has to be about someone else.

The event of Daniel 9.26 was to happen between the command to rebuild Jerusalem and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. There are two possibilities for the start point (the command to rebuild Jerusalem): either the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1.1-4) or the decree of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2). In his book, 'The Coming Prince', Sir Robert Anderson uses the latter date. He fixed this date as March 14, 445 BC and calculated the date from there to 'Messiah the Prince' as $7+62 \times 7 \times 360 = 173,880$ days. He worked out the date of the birth of Jesus as the autumn of 4BC. Based on Luke 3, which tells us that Jesus began His ministry in 15th year of Tiberius Caesar when He was 'about 30 years old', he calculates the beginning of Jesus' ministry to be August in 28 CE, and fixes 32 CE as the year of the crucifixion.

The end point of this part of Daniel's prophecy has to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple to the Romans in 70CE. Whatever conclusion we come to about the start point, this prophecy in Daniel indicates that Messiah should have come before the destruction of the Second Temple.

This conclusion does create a problem for the Jewish interpretation of the coming of the Messiah, as this quotation from Maimonides indicates:

‘Daniel has made known to us the knowledge of the end times. However, since they are secret, the wise rabbis have barred the calculation of the days of Messiah’s coming so that the untutored populace will not be led astray when they see that **the End Times have already come but there is no sign of the Messiah.**’

(Igeret Teiman, Chapter 3 p.24)

From this statement, it appears that Maimonides believed that Daniel had knowledge of the time of the coming of the Messiah and that that time has now passed. Because of this, rabbis should not teach about this subject in case people are troubled by the fact that these events have happened and the Messiah did not appear.

This is what Rachmiel Frydland discovered as a yeshiva student in pre-war Poland:

‘I knew that the secrets of Israel’s redemption and the Messianic Days lay hidden in the book of Daniel. I also knew that some of the great Talmudic and post-Talmudic Rabbis had plunged into the study of this book and even plummeted the hidden secrets of its symbolic signs and ciphers. The Talmud and Midrash, discussing Israel’s redemption, often refer to the book of Daniel as the revealer of the secret time of Messiah’s coming. However at the yeshiva I was ominously reminded of a warning and a curse pronounced against those who try to figure out the end. The Talmud says:

‘May they drop who try to figure out the end; for they say, ‘Since the time of his (Messiah’s) coming has already arrived, yet he did not come. Therefore he will not come at all’. (Sanhedrin 97b)

The study of our greatest sages brought them to the conclusion that if the dates in the Scriptures are correct, the Messiah should have come in the first century of our era, or thereabouts. In a Talmudic portion it is written concerning the timing of the Messianic Age:

‘The school of Elijah taught: The world is to be for six thousand years; two thousand years without Torah; two thousand years with Torah and two thousand years Messianic times (Midrash Rabba Gen.98.3).’

(What the Rabbis know about the Messiah by Rachmiel Frydland).

While all other attempts to make sense of the prophecy of Daniel 9.26 fail to identify who this 'Moshiach' is, it makes perfect sense when applied to Yeshua.

Genesis 49.10. Another indication that the Messiah should have come is found in the ancient prophecy in Genesis in which Jacob blesses his sons and gives the most significant word not to his oldest son, Reuben, nor to his favourite son, Joseph, but to his fourth son, Judah:

*'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet **until Shiloh come**; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.'* (Genesis 49.10)

In this prophecy Jacob is saying that Judah would have rulership as happened through the line of kings descended from his descendant, David. He also prophesied that through his line 'Shiloh' would come. There are Jewish writings, which teach that 'Shiloh' **שילה** is the Messiah, for example this one from 'Yalkut', a collection of rabbinic explanations of the Bible:

'Until Shiloh shall come; He is called by the name of Shiloh because all the nations are destined to bring gifts to Israel and to King Messiah, as it is written, 'In that day shall the present be brought to the Lord of hosts.' (Yalkut 160)

The Targum of Palestine translates Genesis 49.10 as 'Kings shall not cease, nor rulers from the house of Judah nor sopherim (scribes) teaching the Law from his seed, till the time that the King the **Messiah** shall come who will arise from Judah. How beautiful is the King the **Messiah** who will arise from Judah.'

The sceptre in this verse is the Hebrew word 'shebet', **שבט** the tribal staff which belonged to each tribe as an ensign of their authority. Thus the tribal identity of Judah would not pass away, as happened to other tribes, until Shiloh or Messiah comes. It was from the tribe of Judah that the line of kings that descended from King David came. Even after the Babylonian captivity, Judah continued to have lawgivers (see Ezra 1.5-8).

In the early years of the Roman occupation of Judea, the Jewish people still had a king in their own land. Moreover, they were to a large extent governed by their own laws, and the Sanhedrin exercised its authority. But in the span of a few years in around 11 CE, Archelaus, the king of the Jews was dethroned and banished. Coponius was appointed Roman Procurator, and the kingdom of

Judea, the last remnant of the former nation of Israel, was formally debased into a province of Syria (see Josephus' Antiquities 17, chapter 13.1-5).

At this time the Sanhedrin lost its power of passing the death sentence. According to the Talmud, this was considered an ominous development because the 'sceptre had departed from Judah' and the Messiah had not come:

'When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, a general consternation took hold of them; they covered their heads and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming, "Woe unto us, for the sceptre has departed from Judah and **the Messiah has not come.**"' (Talmud, Bab., Sanhedrim, Chapter 4, fol. 37, recto)

This would have been about the time that Jesus appeared in the Temple as a 12 year old boy (Luke 2.41-50). The Messiah had come!

For another half century the Jewish people retained the semblance of a provincial government structure, but in 70 CE all semblance of Jewish national sovereignty disappeared when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the armies of the Roman General Titus.

If Jesus is the Messiah, then the prophecy of Jacob way back in Genesis was fulfilled in a remarkable way. The Messiah came before Judah lost its national identity, just as Jacob foretold. He completed his mission as the Suffering Servant Messiah 40 years before the destruction of the Second Temple, even giving a prophetic warning of that coming event in Luke 19.43-44:

"For the days will come upon you (Jerusalem / the Temple) when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you and your children within you to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

There are other passages in the Hebrew prophets believed to be about the Messiah, which say He should come during the days of the Second Temple. These include Malachi 3.1:

'Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,'" says the Lord of hosts.'

Also Haggai 2.7-9:

“... ‘I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts. ... ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

In conclusion, according to the Jewish writings quoted above, the Messiah should have already come.

If Jesus is not the Messiah this raises a problem. If He is the Messiah, then He came at the right time, around 2000 years ago. He came before the destruction of the Second Temple, to be cut off (die a violent death), not for Himself (not for his own sins), but for the sins of others. In doing this He fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 9.26 as well as other prophecies of Messiah suffering as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

For all this to happen He had to come at the right time. Earlier we quoted Rashi, who said the Messianic Age had not come ‘because our iniquities were many’. Shaul (Paul) tells us that was precisely why Messiah did come! To save us from our sins and make the way for God to forgive us and give us eternal life:

‘You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Messiah died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah, through whom we have now received reconciliation.’ (Romans 5.6-11)

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