

5. The Hope of the Christ

In the context of a biblical theology culminating in the day of the Lord, the resurrection, and a new heavens and new earth, the Scriptures develop a clear *messianic hope*, which was at the heart of the apostolic witness.¹ Likewise, the question of Jesus' messianic identity pervades the Gospels.² Such a wide usage, with a relative lack of internal debate, communicates a common understanding

¹ As is evident in Paul's conversion and immediate preaching in the synagogues "that Jesus was *the Christ*" (Acts 9:22). Likewise in Thessalonica, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is *the Christ*" (17:3). In general, he was "occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that *the Christ* was Jesus" (18:5). Likewise Apollos "powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that *the Christ* was Jesus" (18:28). The messianic identity of Jesus was a prominent theme in the apostolic witness (cf. Acts 2:36; 3:20; 8:5; 10:36; etc.), for "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as *the Christ*" (Acts 5:42, NASB).

² The presentation of Jesus as "the Christ" (Matt. 1:17; Luke 3:15; John 4:29), i.e., the one "who is called Christ" (Matt. 1:16), is the primary purpose of the recorded Gospels, as John says, "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is *the Christ*, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). So the angel told the shepherds at his birth, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is *Christ* the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Accordingly, Peter's confession was, "You are *the Christ*, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). So also Martha declared, "I believe you are *the Christ*, the Son of God, who is coming into the world" (John 11:27). Even the demons "knew that he was *the Christ*" (Luke 4:41). However, Jesus warned them and his disciples "to tell no one that he was *the Christ*" (Matt. 16:20).

Many questioned if John the Baptist "might be *the Christ*" (Luke 3:15), but he confessed freely, "I am not *the Christ*, but I have been sent before him" (John 3:28; cf. John 1:20). In the same way, the ministry of Jesus was marked by the controversy of the people asking, "Can this be *the Christ*?" (John 4:29). Some said, "This is *the Christ*" (John 7:41), because they reasoned, "When *the Christ* appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" (v. 31). However, many wondered, "Have the authorities really concluded that he is *the Christ*?" (v. 26, NIV). And they were afraid because "anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was *the Christ* would be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22, NIV).

On occasion the Jews confronted Jesus directly, "If you are *the Christ*, tell us plainly" (John 10:24). To which Jesus responded, "I told you, and you do not believe" (v. 25). Likewise, at his trial they demanded, "Tell us if you are *the Christ*, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). To which he replied, "Yes, it is as you say" (v. 64, NIV). Pilate later asked the crowd, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called *Christ*?" (Matt. 27:17). Even on the cross, people passed by and hurled insults, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is *the Christ* of God, his Chosen One!" (Luke 23:35). So also the criminals being crucified with him questioned, "Are you not *the Christ*? Save yourself and us!" (v. 39).

of the role and function of the Messiah within redemptive history.³ Jesus claimed to be “the Expected One” (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19, NASB), but what did this expectation generally entail?

The terms “Messiah” (Heb. *māšīaḥ*) and “Christ” (Gk. *christos*) simply mean “anointed one” or “consecrated one.”⁴ In the Old Testament, various “messiahs” or “christs” were anointed (usually with oil) for different roles and functions—for example, prophets (1 Kings 19:16; Ps. 105:15), priests (Ex. 29:7; Lev. 4:3–5; 5:16), and kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kings 1:39; 2 Kings 9:6). People were ordained to positions of leadership and then anointed to carry out their responsibilities. In this way there is an overlap of meaning between “appointing” and “anointing” (cf. Num. 1:50; 3:10; 27:16; 1 Sam. 8:1; Ps. 89:27; etc.).

Projected to its eschatological culmination, the Messiah/Christ is the one appointed and anointed by God to execute the day of the Lord, raise the dead, judge the wicked, reward the righteous, etc.⁵ Thus Peter summarizes the apostolic commissioning: “[God] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that [Jesus] is *the one appointed* by God to be judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). Paul likewise concludes redemptive history in his preaching to the Athenians: “[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice *by the man he has appointed*” (Acts 17:31, NIV). Similarly, Paul declares that on that day “God will judge the secrets of men *through Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 2:16, NASB).

³ Contrary to a generally convoluted expectation (cf. Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987]), or a generally nonexistent expectation (cf. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985]).

⁴ See V. P. Hamilton, “1255 מָשִׁיחַ (*māšāḥ*),” *TWOT*, 530–32; and “Χριστός,” *BDAG*, 1091.

⁵ Unfortunately, at a popular level the term “Christ” means little more than a sort of last name for Jesus. His proper name was “Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth” (John 1:45, NRSV; cf. Matt. 26:71; Luke 24:19; John 19:19). When his followers ascribed to him the name “Jesus Christ,” or “Jesus the Messiah” (Matt. 1:1,18; Mark 1:1, NLT), they had in mind a whole host of things that are generally absent from the consciousness of the modern church.

This phenomenon, however, is not new: “Although we cannot be sure, it seems that *Christos* became a proper name when the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah first moved into the Gentile world that did not understand the Jewish background of anointing and for whom therefore ‘the anointed one’ was a meaningless term. This is suggested by the fact that disciples were first called ‘Christians’ (*Christianoī*) in Antioch (Acts 11:26); and this word designates partisans of a certain group” (George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993; first published 1974 by Eerdmans], 133–34).

In this way the Messiah is understood as *the divine agent*. Representing and working on behalf of God, he is the ultimate mediator of redemptive history.⁶ Though God could have chosen to open the heavens and descend upon humanity directly, in an unmediated fashion, he decided according to his own wise counsel to administrate salvation through another. Divine agency is hence the core idea of messianic expectation (or “messianism”), which is seen in all aspects of biblical theology. As God will save his people, so the Messiah is the Savior (cf. Luke 2:11; Phil. 3:20; 1 John 4:14). As God will judge the earth, so the Messiah is the Judge (cf. Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 5:9). As God will redeem creation, so the Messiah is the Redeemer (cf. Gal. 3:13; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:15).

So the Messiah/Christ is the divine agent in the apocalyptic mediation of redemptive history (see figure 5.1). Therefore Jesus concludes, “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end*” (Rev. 22:13).⁷ Such a declaration is based upon the arbitration of divine recompense: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing *my recompense* with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (v. 12).

⁶ “We have seen that it is characteristic of New Testament Christology that Christ is connected with the total history of revelation and salvation, beginning with creation. There can be no *Heilsgeschichte* without Christology; no Christology without a *Heilsgeschichte* which unfolds in time. Christology is the doctrine of an ‘event,’ not a doctrine of natures” (Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 9).

⁷ Protological messianic agency would have thus been understood: “He was in the beginning *with God*. All things were made *through him*, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:2–3). Paul speaks even more explicitly: “There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom* are all things and *through whom* we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6). Likewise, when Paul said, “*By him* all things were created” (Col. 1:16), he meant “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities,” which were delegated according to messianic function, “that in everything he might be preeminent” (v. 18). Similarly Heb. 1:2: “In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, *through whom* also he created the world.”

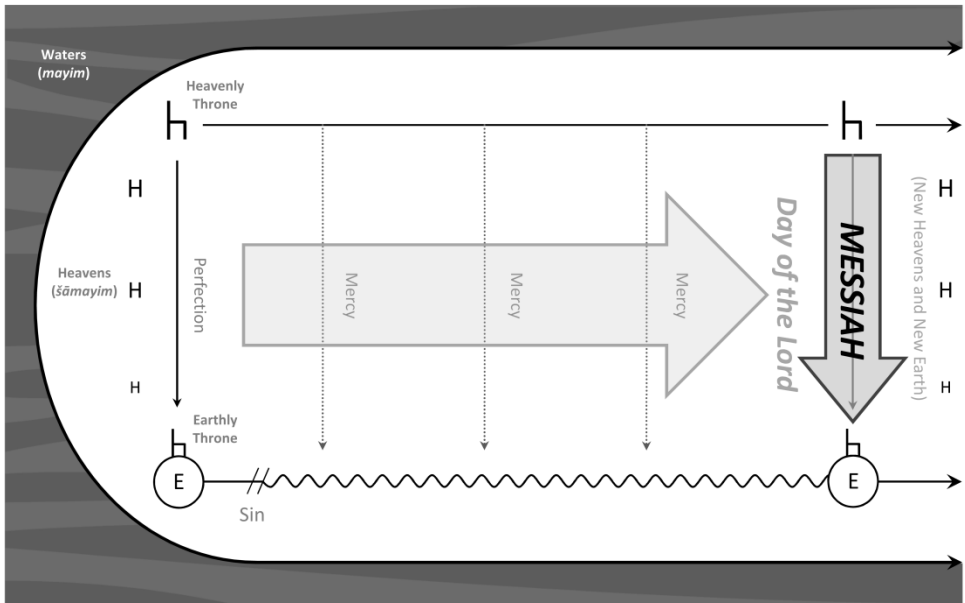


Figure 5.1 – The Messiah as the Divine Agent of Redemptive History

This synergy between God and his Christ is seen throughout the New Testament, especially in relation to the day of the Lord, thus producing the phraseology of “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10; 2:16), “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), and “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8). Likewise divine judgment, as in “the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10), is understood to be administrated through the Messiah—that is, “the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10). In this way the age to come will be a seamless collaborating to establish “the kingdom of Christ *and* God” (Eph. 5:5), for “the throne of God *and* of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him” (Rev. 22:3).

Since God and Messiah are united in their work, the “Spirit of God” and the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9) are one and the same (cf. Eph. 4:3–5). Those who know Messiah, know God, and vice versa (cf. John 8:19; 12:44–50; 14:7–11). And those who follow Messiah, follow God, and vice versa (cf. Matt. 10:32–33; 16:23–27). So those who become disciples by repenting at the preaching of the day of the Lord (cf. Matt. 28:18) are commanded to be baptized “in the name of the

Father *and* of the Son *and* of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19)—the Father will judge and restore creation through his Son by the power of his Spirit.⁸

Conversely, those who reject the Messiah, reject God (cf. John 15:23; 16:3)—“Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? . . . No one who denies the Son has the Father” (1 John 2:22–23). Thus, when persecuted for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus responds, “My Father is working until now, and I am working. . . . I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:17–19).⁹ The Messiah does what God does, and this agency was Jesus’ justification for violation of the Sabbath traditions. He then further justifies himself by detailing the eschatological conclusion of such agency:

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, *so also the Son gives life* to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has *given all judgment to the Son*, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly,

⁸ Though divinity is clearly implied, the messianic connotations of the Trinitarian formula are commonly lost to the modern church. The Trinitarian doctrine is inextricably bound to the eschatological denouement (cf. Rom. 8:15ff.; Phil. 2:9ff.; 1 Thess. 1:10), for the end comes when the Son “delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Therefore, “The whole Christian eschatology ends in this inner-trinitarian process, through which the kingdom passes from the Son to the Father. Eschatology accordingly is not simply what takes place in the Last Days in heaven and on earth; it is what takes place in God’s essential nature” (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 92).

⁹ Throughout the Scriptures, creation and redemptive history are described as the “work(s)” of God (cf. Gen. 2:2f.; Ex. 34:10; Deut. 11:7; Judg. 2:7; 1 Sam. 14:6; Ps. 19:1; 28:5; 33:4; 92:4; 102:25; 145:4f.; Prov. 8:21; Isa. 5:12; 10:12; 19:25; 28:1; 45:11; 64:8; Jer. 50:25; 51:10; Dan. 4:37; 9:14; Hab. 1:5; 3:2; Matt. 11:20ff.; John 4:34; 5:17,36; 9:3f.; 10:37f.; 14:10; Rom. 14:20; Phil. 2:13; Col. 2:12; Heb. 4:3f.; 13:21). Hence the Messiah is the *agent of divine work* who accomplishes the will of God (cf. John 5:17–37; 6:30–40; 10:25–38; 14:8–14; 15:23f.; 17:4).

Similarly, a man would “strip for work” in the ancient world by taking off his outer garment (cf. John 21:7), thus “baring his arms,” so to speak (cf. Isa. 52:10; Ezek. 4:7). Since God is the archetypal Worker, his Messiah, as a functional extension, is pictured as the revealed “arm of the LORD” (Isa. 53:1; cf. Isa. 30:30; 40:10; 59:16; 63:5). Consequently Jesus is identified as the messianic conduit of divine activity: “Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not *believe in him*, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has *the arm of the Lord* been revealed?’ [Isa. 53:1] . . . Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:37–41). Jesus responds by affirming his messianic agency: “Whoever believes *in me*, believes not in me but *in him* who sent me. And whoever *sees me* sees *him* who sent me” (vv. 44–45).

I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. . . .

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has *granted the Son also to have life in himself*. And he has *given him authority to execute judgment*, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:21–29)

The Scriptures develop this messianic expectation within an apocalyptic framework culminating in the last day.¹⁰ Though God could have simply come in power and restored creation without mediation, he chose to do it through a man whom he appointed, “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20; 23:35). Like a golden thread woven through the Scriptures, the “Chosen One” (Luke 9:35) embodies the hope of a new creation, for it is through the Messiah that all will be administrated.¹¹

There are two broad approaches in regard to how such a hope developed: the evolution of human expectation¹² and the development of divine oracle.¹³

¹⁰ Similarly, Jesus presented himself to Martha as the agent of the resurrection: “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. . . . Do you believe this?*” (John 11:25–26). To which Martha simply affirms, “Yes, Lord; I believe that *you are the Christ*, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (v. 27). So also Jesus declared to Thomas, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

¹¹ Being anchored in the *parousia* of Jesus, the faith and hope of the apostolic church was thus “irreducibly eschatological” (John T. Carroll, *The Return of Jesus in Early Christianity* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000], 4).

¹² For example, W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Evolution of The Messianic Idea: A Study in Comparative Religion* (London: Pitman & Sons, 1908); Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954); Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Completion of the Mishnah*, trans. W. F. Stinespring (New York: Macmillan, 1955); Joachim Becker, *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament*, trans. D. E. Green (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980); J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and Antti Laato, *A Star Is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

¹³ For example, Alfred Edersheim, *Prophecy and History in Relation to the Messiah* (London: Longmans, 1885); Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. S. I. Curtiss (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1891); Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1905); J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973); Gerard van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand

Though the two are, of course, intimately related, liberal commentators generally emphasize the former while conservatives usually stress the latter.¹⁴ My approach assumes the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, calling us to search them with the greatest of care—like the prophets, “inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he *predicted* the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:11).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MESSIANIC HOPE

Rather than a conglomeration of arbitrary prophecies, the Scriptures develop the idea of messianic mediation in a more intuitive and organic way. From the beginning of the redemptive narrative, the seed of the messianic idea is planted in the soil of fallen humanity, and it grows progressively according to the covenants God made with men, particularly Adam, Abraham, and David.¹⁵

The Adamic Messianic Hope

Assuming both the historicity of Genesis and the intentionally messianic orientation of the Old Testament canon as a whole,¹⁶ we find the first revelation of messianic mediation following the sin of Adam and Eve.¹⁷ Speaking to the serpent in the garden, commonly identified as the vessel of Satan,¹⁸ God says,

Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); and Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

¹⁴ See an introductory survey in Ronald E. Clements, “Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History?” *Horizons of Biblical Theology* 1 (1979): 87–104; and Clements, “The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament,” *JSOT* 43 (1989): 3–19.

¹⁵ Though the Scriptures do not expressly state that God made a covenant with Adam, many (especially within the Reformed tradition) have identified such a covenant in light of contrasts made in Hos. 6:7, Rom. 5:14, and 1 Cor. 15:22 (cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938], 211–18; and Westminster Confession of Faith [1647], chap. 7). Moreover, God’s relationship with Adam falls under the broader “covenant with creation,” so to speak (cf. Jer. 33:20–25 and Pss. 89:11; 104:5; 119:90; etc.).

¹⁶ See an introduction in Rydelnik, *Messianic Hope*, 65–82; and John H. Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” *JETS* 44, no. 1 (March 2001): 5–23.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, many modern scholars believe Jewish messianism arose as a response to social oppression during the exile and postexilic milieu, hoping for the restoration of the former glory of the Davidic kingdom. The Scriptures, however, are by definition of divine origin, and as such “Messianic prophecy was thus not a product of a human yearning for a better life, but the result of a ‘supernatural’ revelation” (Sailhamer, “Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” 6). Moreover, Sailhamer adds,

Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your *offspring* and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel. (Gen. 3:14–15, NIV)

This passage is often referred to as the “mother promise” from which all future messianic promises proceed,¹⁹ for God here makes an indirect promise to Adam and Eve, and their progeny, concerning the crushing of Satan’s head. It is also called the “protoevangelium,” or “first gospel,” since it is the first reference of good news to humanity in its fallen state.²⁰

Specifically, the singular, masculine pronoun “he” is used to describe the “seed” (Heb. *zera* ‘), or “offspring,” of the woman.²¹ This seed of the woman will

What I have tried to suggest is that it can be argued that the books of the OT are messianic in the full NT sense of the word. The OT is the *light* that points the way to the NT. The NT is not only to cast its light back on the Old, but more importantly, the light of the OT is to be cast on the New. The books of the OT were written as the embodiment of a real, messianic hope—a hope in a future miraculous work of God in sending a promised Redeemer. This was not an afterthought in the Hebrew Bible. This was not the work of final redactors.

I believe the messianic thrust of the OT was the *whole* reason the books of the Hebrew Bible were written. In other words, the Hebrew Bible was not written as the national literature of Israel. It probably also was not written to the nation of Israel as such. It was rather written, in my opinion, as the expression of the deep-seated messianic hope of a small group of faithful prophets and their followers. (Ibid., 23)

¹⁸ As in the NT (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), intertestamental literature identifies the Edenic serpent as Satan (cf. 4 Maccabees 18:8; *Jubilees* 3:17ff.; *Psalms of Solomon* 4:11), and *Apocalypse of Moses* 16:4–5 specifically relates the serpent as the “vessel” of Satan: “The devil said to him [the serpent], ‘Do not fear; only become my vessel, and I will speak a word through your mouth by which you will be able to deceive him [Adam]’” (OTP 2:277).

¹⁹ See Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5.

²⁰ The referencing of Genesis 3:15 as the *protoevangelium* is attributed to Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 135–202), *Against Heresies*, 3:23.7 and 5:21.1. However, a messianic reading of Gen. 3:15 is seen in the translation of the LXX (see R. A. Martin, “The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Gen 3:15,” *JBL* 84 [1965]: 425–27) and the earliest Aramaic translations of Genesis. Compare Jewish Targums of Pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti, and Fragmentary (see John Skinner, “The ‘Protevangelium,’” *Genesis*, ICC [New York: Scribner, 1910], 80–88), where Satan is defeated in the age of the messianic kingdom (see also M. B. Shepherd, “Targums, the New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah,” *JETS* 51, no. 1 [March 2008]: 45–58). These early readings suggest a common messianic interpretation of the OT stemming from Genesis.

²¹ Since *zera* ‘ is always in singular form in the Hebrew Bible, Gen. 3:15 also introduces us to the idea of “corporate solidarity,” that is, “The *one* who represents the group and the *many* who are represented are equally a part of the same single meaning intended by the author” (Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, 25). In other words, many offspring can be represented by the single offspring of Adam and Eve, which is then carried through the rest of the OT covenants (cf. Gen. 17:7; 2 Sam. 7:12;

crush the serpent's "head" (Heb. *rō`š*), which is symbolic of both life and authority.²² In this way we have the birth of the basic messianic reality—a human being will be born who will mediate God's punishment of Satan and his offspring, or spiritual progeny.²³ The messianic hope is thus fundamentally *genealogical* in nature, which creates a baseline of expectation for future covenants and prophetic oracles.²⁴

The relationship of the satanic "head" to the messianic "heel" further portrays the imagery of *military conquest* commonly used in the Old Testament (cf. Josh. 10:24; Ps. 47:3; 89:23), as David sang: "I pursued my enemies and *crushed* them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I *crushed* them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath *my feet*" (2 Sam. 22:38–39,

Gal. 3:16,29). Thus the English word "offspring," being a collective singular noun, is an adequate translation for *zera`* (contrary to "descendant[s]"). Unfortunately, the Greek *genos* is also used as a messianic title, "Offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16, NIV). So it seems the translation of Heb. *zera`* [Gk. *sperma*, LXX] is best left as "seed," which also carries protological associations (cf. Gen. 1:11,12,29) commonly assumed in the mind of the ancient reader.

²² The Hebrew language has no specific word for "head," but rather *rō`š* refers to the "upper part," e.g., the "heads" of the mountains (Gen. 8:5), the "head" of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4), the "heads" of the clans of Israel (Num. 1:16), the "head" of the tribes of Israel (1 Sam. 15:17), etc. (see W. White, "2097 ראש [*rō`š*]," *TWOT*, 825–26). Consequently, the "head" of the serpent could naturally be interpreted governmentally.

²³ Contrary to the non-messianic interpretation of John Skinner (ICC), Claus Westermann (CC), Ephraim Speiser (AB), and John Walton (NIVAC). See John Sailhamer's insightful discussion of this passage in *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 106–9. "Consequently, more is at stake in this brief passage than the reader is at first aware. A program is set forth. A plot is established that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his 'seed.'" (p. 107).

²⁴ Thus messianism is characterized by Walter Kaiser as "epigenetical," a biological term meaning "the progressive development of an embryo from an undifferentiated egg cell" (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], s.v. "epigenesis").

The unity that Scripture exhibited was not static—a flat-Bible type of uniformity; it had an organic or epigenetical aspect to it that defied an easy categorization or simplification. Even in its earliest OT statements, that divine word . . . had within it seminal ideas that only later amplifications would unfold from the germs of thought that were just barely visible when first announced. That is why the metaphor from biology is an apt one: prophetic truth had an organic, epigenetical nature. The fixed core of ideas connected with the promise-plan of God and the representative of that promise remained constant. But as time went on, the content of that given word of blessing, promise, or judgment grew in accordance with seed thoughts that were contained within its earliest statements, much as a seed is uniquely related to the plant that it will become if it has life at all. (Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, 27)

NIV).²⁵ Hence we have a protological vision for the rebellion of Satan being brought into militant submission.²⁶

With a clear reference to “that ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2), the Scriptures declare the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 to be an eschatological reality. As the “Christ” (Rev. 20:4,6), Jesus will bring Satan into forceful submission by binding him in Hades for a thousand years and then throwing him, with the wicked, into Gehenna forever (cf. Rev. 20:10,14; 21:8; 22:15). Moreover, Jesus identifies himself protologically as the “Alpha” (Rev. 22:13), who will “repay each one for what he has done” (v. 12). Thus we see the “living seed” of Genesis 3:15 finding full fruition in the day of the Lord, Gehenna, and the resurrection.²⁷ In this way the messianic seed of Adam is prophesied to be the arbiter of God’s apocalyptic day (see figure 5.2).²⁸

²⁵ See also the fuller discussion of OT language that references Genesis 3:15—including “head crushing,” “broken enemies,” “stricken serpents,” and those who “lick the dust” and are “trampled underfoot”—in James Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 30–54.

²⁶ For more on the hermeneutical issues surrounding Gen. 3:15, see T. D. Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of the Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 19–39.

²⁷ As Jewish theologian Adolph Saphir summarized,

The Protoevangelion; the first promise is justly so called, because it contains the Gospel in germ. Scripture, or rather the Revelation, of which it is a record, is an organic growth; not an aggregate of successive teaching, added in a mechanical way, but a development of “living seed.” Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world; especially His central work of Redemption. Hence every part of God’s revelation is complete, containing the seed. . . . And so far from our having fully comprehended it, only the end will explain the beginning; only the Millennial age will disclose Genesis. When Satan is finally bruised under our feet we shall understand the Protoevangelion. (*Christ Crucified: Lectures on I Corinthians II* [London: James Nisbet, 1873], 2–3)

²⁸ See also the timeless exposition of Gen. 3:15 by E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, trans. T. Meyer and J. Martin, vol. 1 (orig. 1872; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1956), 14–29.

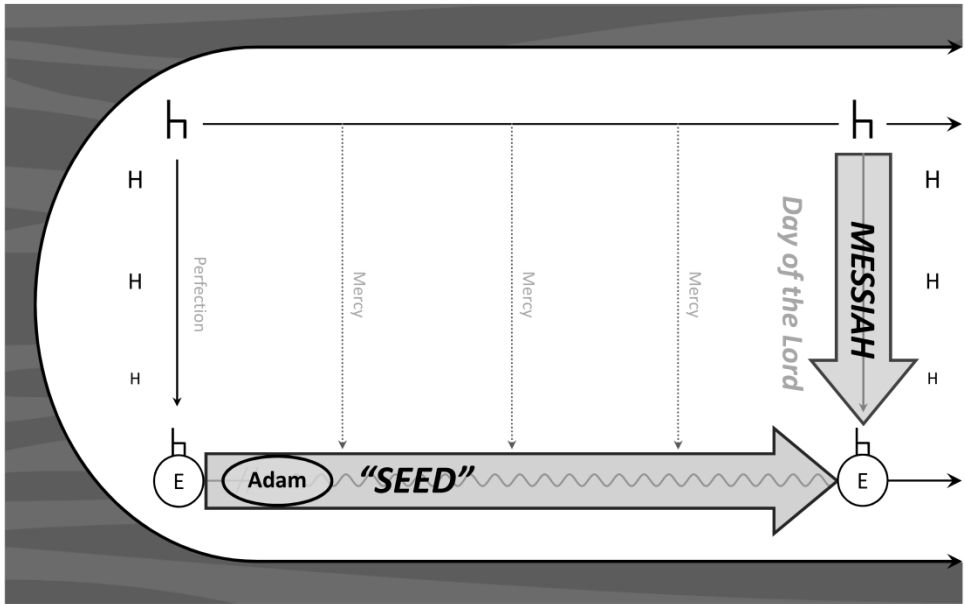


Figure 5.2 – The Adamic Seed as the Divine Agent of Redemptive History

The Old Testament is rife with messianic imagery that references and builds upon Genesis 3:15. David prophesies a messianic “Lord” (Ps. 110:1) at the right hand of God: “He will *crush kings* on the day of his wrath” (v. 5, NIV); indeed, “He will *shatter heads* over the whole earth” (v. 6, NLT). So the Messiah will be the means by which “God will *crush the heads* of his enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins” (Ps. 68:21, NIV). As Jeremiah warns, “Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will *burst upon the head* of the wicked” (Jer. 23:19). And Habakkuk prophesies, “You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You *crushed the head* of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck” (Hab. 3:13).

Solomon echoes the cursing language of Genesis 3:14 (“dust you shall eat”) when he speaks of “the royal son” (Ps. 72:1): “He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will *lick the dust*” (Ps. 72:8–9, NIV). This Edenic imagery is also reiterated in Isaiah’s vision of the new heavens and new earth in 65:17–25. “The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and *dust shall be the serpent’s food*” (v. 25). So too Micah prophesies concerning the day of the Lord:

The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants,
as the result of their deeds. . . .
Nations will see and be ashamed,
deprived of all their power.
They will lay their hands on their mouths
and their ears will become deaf.
They will *lick dust like a snake*,
like creatures that crawl on the ground.
They will come trembling out of their dens;
they will turn in fear to the LORD our God
and will be afraid of you. (Mic. 7:13–17, NIV)

Moreover, the heel-to-head imagery is seen when the Messiah treads the “winepress” of the nations on “the day of vengeance” (Isa. 63:4), saying, “In my anger I have *trampled my enemies* as if they were grapes. In my fury I have *trampled my foes*” (v. 3, NLT). Similarly, it is through the messianic “sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2) that “the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw” (v. 1, NLT), for the Lord says to the righteous, “You will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet” (v. 3, NLT).

References and allusions to Genesis 3:15 also abound in the New Testament. Jesus tells his disciples, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to *tread on serpents* and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you” (Luke 10:18–19). And no one would have missed the implications of John’s imprecatory preaching: “You brood of *vipers*! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). Jesus reiterates this accusation against the Pharisees (cf. Matt. 12:34) and relates their common destiny with the devil in Gehenna: “You *serpents*, you brood of *vipers*, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (Matt. 23:33).

Moreover, the Pharisees are implicated as “sons of the evil one” (Matt. 13:38), or “children of the devil” (1 John 3:10), whom Jesus exposes as descendants of the lying serpent in the garden: “You are of your father *the devil*, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer *from the beginning*, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Similarly, Revelation 12–13 is an apocalyptic recapitulation of the Adamic promise, with a “woman” giving birth (12:2) to a “male child” (12:5), and a

“great dragon” (12:3)—that is, “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan” (12:9)—seeking to devour the child (12:4).²⁹ However, the “beast” (13:1) who is “given authority” by the dragon/serpent (13:4) receives a “fatal head wound” (13:3) as a sign of the ultimate and final head-crushing of Gehenna.³⁰ So the vision concludes, “If anyone worships the beast and its image . . . he will be tormented with fire and sulfur. . . . And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever” (14:9–11).³¹

Paul’s references to Genesis 3 abound. For example, he exhorts the Roman church to resist wicked deceivers, whose “smooth talk and flattery” (Rom. 16:18) is akin to that of Satan in the garden. Then he admonishes them “to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil” (v. 19), an obvious reference to the forbidden tree, for “the God of peace will soon *crush Satan under your feet*” (v. 20). By “soon” he has in mind the coming of Christ and the day of the Lord (cf. Rom. 2:5; 3:6; 4:17; 5:9; 6:5; 8:18–23; 10:9; 11:25–27; 13:12; 14:10–12). Moreover, the “God of peace” (16:20) is understood in light of the messianic passages wherein peace is proclaimed and established upon the earth under the Messiah’s rule (cf. Ps. 37:11; Isa. 9:7; 52:7; 60:17; 66:12; Hag. 2:9; Zech. 9:10) and the wicked are tormented forever without peace (cf. Isa. 48:22; 57:21; 66:24).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul asserts that in Adam “came death” (v. 21), and death’s reversal will come in the resurrection “in Christ” (v. 22). This will initiate the destruction of all satanic “dominion, authority and power” (v. 24, NIV), as Christ will reign “until he has put all his enemies *under his feet*” (v. 25). In light of the discussion of Adam and the entrance of sin, this seems to be a clear reference to the messianic heel of Genesis 3:15. Paul then goes on to loosely quote Psalm 8:6: “God has put all things in subjection *under his feet*” (v. 27). Paul understands the poetic commentary of Genesis 1 to find ultimate fulfillment in the age to

²⁹ Here it seems that *drakōn megas* (Rev. 12:3) draws from use in the LXX where *drakōn* translates Heb. *tannîn*, i.e., “serpent” (Ex. 7:9ff.; Deut. 32:33; Job 7:12 [cf. 20:16; 26:13]; Ps. 74:13; 91:13; Amos 9:3; Jer. 51:34). See the discussion of OT usage in W. Foerster, “*δράκων*,” *TDNT*, 2:281–83.

³⁰ “God must be the unmentioned agent of the beast’s ‘wound.’ . . . Such a wound on the head of the grand nemesis of God’s people reflects Gen. 3:15, especially when seen together with Rev. 12:17” (Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 687–88).

³¹ Note that the “worship” of the dragon (13:4; also referred to as the serpent in 12:9), and vicarious worship of the beast (13:4,8,12,15; 14:9,11), is the culmination of sin, which accords with the account of the original satanic sin in the pseudepigraphic *Life of Adam and Eve*, 12–16.

come, when the seed of Adam, “the last Adam” (v. 45), brings all things into forceful submission to God as it was in the beginning.³²

Paul also draws from the head-to-heel imagery of Genesis 3:15 in Ephesians 1. After introducing our blessing and redemption “through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (v. 7)—trespasses which, of course, entered on account of Adam—Paul sets forth the conclusion of the grand narrative of redemptive history:

[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his kind intention which he purposed in Christ, that in the fullness of the times in the household administration, *to bring together again under the headship of Christ* all things in the heavens and on the earth. (Eph. 1:9–10, AT)³³

The “household administration” (Gk. *oikonomia*) is in reference to God the Father (being the agent in vv. 3–8) ruling over the heavens and the earth, which are elsewhere inferred as God’s “house” (cf. 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:48).³⁴ The fullness of the “times” (Gk. *kairos*) is understood in terms of the “appointed times” of redemptive history, climaxing in the day of the Lord (cf. Ps. 102:13; Dan. 8:19; Hab. 2:3; Acts 1:7; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 11:18). The “all things” in the heavens and on the earth is a direct reference to creation, within which the “bringing together under the headship” of Christ (Gk. *anakephalaioō*, derived from *kephalē*, i.e., “head”),³⁵ invokes the imagery of Genesis 3:15, since the world

³² Psalm 8:4–6 is also quoted messianically in Hebrews 2:6–8. It is clear that “putting everything in subjection under his feet” (v. 8) references God’s subjection of “the world to come” (v. 5) by means of the Messiah. The “bringing many sons to glory” (v. 10) and the forceful submission of Satan under the heel of Christ will surely come to pass, even though “at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (v. 8).

³³ On the history and difficulties of translating this passage, see Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 63–70. The author’s translation roughly accommodates the NASB (*oikonomia* = “administration,” cf. BDAG, 697–98) and the NIV (*anakephalaioō* = “bring together under one head,” cf. BDAG, 65). On the latter, see esp. Clinton Arnold’s translation of 1:10b, “to bring everything under the headship of Christ, everything in heaven and everything on earth, in Christ” (*Ephesians*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 88).

³⁴ “In the Greek world *οἰκονομία* was regularly used for God’s ordering and administration of the universe. Here in 1:10 it also appears to have that active force (cf. also 3:9), while elsewhere (cf. 3:2; 1 Cor 4:1; 9:17; Col 1:25) it refers to Paul’s apostolic role and office” (Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1990], 31–32). Note a similar logic in Eph. 3:14–15, “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his *whole family* in heaven and on earth derives its name” (NIV).

³⁵ Though the translation of this phrase has a long and contentious history (see H. Schlier, “ἀνακεφαλαιόομαι,” *TDNT*, 3:681–82), its meaning is fairly straightforward within a biblical worldview and a cruciform-apocalyptic theology. The first part of the passage (Eph. 1:3–8) primarily

in this age is under the rebellious headship of Satan, so to speak (cf. Luke 4:6; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19).

All of this is rearticulated in Paul's following prayer (referencing Psalm 8), wherein the church would know Christ and the hope of his calling (Eph. 1:17–18), would know the power of the resurrection of Christ as a firstfruits (vv. 19–20), and would know the enduring dominance of Christ over all creation (vv. 20–23):

He demonstrated this power in the Messiah by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavens—far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put everything *under His feet* and appointed Him as *head over everything* for the church, which is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way. (Eph. 1:20–23, HCSB)

Such references to Psalm 8 also provide a simple protological context for the common New Testament phrase “Son of Man,” which is applied messianically by Jesus some eighty times in the Gospels.³⁶ In Psalm 8:4, “son of man” (Heb. *bēn-’ādām*) refers to the progeny of Adam, since the Hebrew word for “man” and “Adam” are the same. In this way the “Son of Man” is simply the ultimate “Son of Adam,”³⁷ an approach to the messianic title that cuts through much debate and confusion.³⁸

The phrase is commonly used in relation to eschatological judgment—“He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27; cf. Matt. 9:6; 12:32; 13:41; 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Luke 17:24–26).³⁹ Likewise

references the work of the cross, while the second part (vv. 9–14) speaks primarily of the day of the Lord—both of which are “according to the purpose of his will” (v. 5), i.e., “the mystery of his will, according to his purpose” (v. 9).

³⁶ The protological context also explains its varied usage in the OT, both messianic (cf. Dan. 7:13; Ps. 80:17; 144:3) and non-messianic (cf. Num. 23:19; Job 25:6; Dan. 8:17; and some ninety references in Ezekiel). Just as the OT prophet is a “son of Adam,” so also the Messiah is *the* “Son of Adam.”

³⁷ “The phrase *bēn ’ādām* can be understood not only as ‘a human being’ but also as ‘son of Adam’” (D. E. Aune, “Son of Man,” *ISBE*, 4:578).

³⁸ The origin and meaning of this phrase “Son of Man” goes part and parcel with the contentious debate over Christology in general; see e.g., Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 143–57; and C. Colpe, “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου,” *TDNT* 8:400–477.

³⁹ This resolves the seeming contradiction of usage between Old and New Testaments, as Ladd expressed, “We have already seen that ‘son of man’ is not an uncommon idiom in the Old Testament, simply designating humanity. This usage has frequently been appealed to, to explain some of the

it is used in relation to protological restoration — “at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory” (Matt. 19:28, NRSV; cf. Matt. 12:8; John 1:51). Thus it is the righteous seed of Adam — that is, the “Last Adam” or “Second Man” (1 Cor. 15:45,47)⁴⁰ — who is “appointed the heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2), meaning all that was originally allotted to Adam.⁴¹ He will be anointed judge of all of Adam’s progeny — “the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5).⁴² Moreover, this genealogical approach falls in line with the other messianic titles of “son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1; cf. Luke 19:9; Gal. 3:16) and “son of David” (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; etc.).⁴³

gospel idioms. . . . However, this quite fails to explain the eschatological use of ‘Son of Man’ in the Gospels” (*Theology of the New Testament*, 145–46).

⁴⁰ See Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. D. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 90–100, esp. the “typological substratum of the Son of Man sayings,” which is rooted in Christ as the “Second Adam” (p. 97).

⁴¹ See also Cullmann’s discussion on Paul’s contrast of Adam and Christ as related to the son of man concept in Judaism (*Christology of the New Testament*, 166–181). For example,

His whole theology and Christology is so completely embedded in eschatology that he calls the “Second Adam” the “Last Adam” (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ, 1 Cor. 15:45) or the “coming Adam” (ὁ μέλλων, Rom. 5:14). Even if Paul does not directly refer to Dan. 7 in connection with statements about the “Man,” he does share the view that Christ will come on the clouds of heaven. He writes in 1 Thess. 4:17 that we (together with those who have fallen asleep) “shall be caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” This expectation must go back to Daniel’s picture of the Son of Man “coming on the clouds.” (p. 166)

See also the little known but useful commentary (though debatable concerning his approach to original sin) of Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. T. A. Smail (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956).

⁴² Conversely, we see in Gen. 3:15 a protological foundation for a theology of the Antichrist, the satanic “seed” and the *huios tēs apōleias*, “son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3)—a phrase akin to “son of man,” being also applied to historical antichrists (cf. Judas in John 17:12) as well as the eschatological culmination. They are all children of destruction because the devil and his seed are destined to “go to destruction” (Rev. 17:8) on the day of destruction (cf. Isa. 13:9; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Peter 3:7)—thus, “It is the last hour, and as you have heard that *antichrist is coming*, so now *many antichrists have come*” (1 John 2:18). Without a protological base of expectation for the “Christ,” we have no basic framework for the culmination of *sin* in “Antichrist,” i.e., the “man of *sin*” (2 Thess. 2:3, NKJV), who typifies the Edenic deception by speaking “like a serpent” (Rev. 13:11, *GOD’S WORD Translation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995]).

⁴³ The rendering of “son of Adam” in light of protological messianic expectation is further reinforced by the functional equation of “son” and “seed” in the OT (e.g., Gen. 4:25; 21:13; 1 Chron. 17:11; Isa. 57:3; Dan. 9:1). Therefore the use of “son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1) would logically be equated with the promised “seed” of Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:7f.; Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:29), and the “son of David” (Matt. 1:1; 12:23; par.) would be seen in light of the covenanted “seed” of David (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:4; John 7:42; Rom. 1:3). Likewise the “son of Man” would have been understood *primarily* in the context of

The Abrahamic Messianic Hope

The genealogical orientation of Genesis 4–11 is self-evident. Rather than a story with genealogies in it, it is more of a genealogy with stories intermingled. The hope of Adam and Eve rests in the birth of a righteous child. Immediately after the curse of death (Gen. 3:19), therefore, Adam names his wife “Eve” (meaning “life”), in faith that she would become “the mother of all living” (v. 20), so reversing the effects of the serpent’s deceit.⁴⁴

Likewise, when Cain is found unrighteous in murdering his brother, the hope is transferred to Seth, for “God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel” (Gen. 4:25, NKJV). The subsequent genealogy is a reflection of their hope in the imminent childbearing, which would reverse the curse of Genesis 3:17–19.⁴⁵ So Lamech names his son “Noah,” saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands *arising* from the ground which the LORD has cursed” (Gen. 5:29, NASB). Seth and Noah are the only children in the genealogy whose naming is given commentary, and this commentary is most clearly and simply understood in messianic terms.⁴⁶

Moreover, the imminence of this genealogical-messianic hope is understood within the broader apocalyptic framework of the day of the Lord.⁴⁷ As Enoch,

the promised “seed” of humanity’s parents. The NT genealogies (Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 3:21–38), which are by nature designed to *prove messianic descent*, further confirm this (note the same Greek phrase, *biblos geneseōs*, used in Matt. 1:1, Gen. 2:4, and Gen. 5:1, LXX).

⁴⁴ Stephen G. Dempster notes,

In light of the immediate context, the triumph of the woman’s seed would suggest a return to the Edenic state, before the serpent had wrought its damage. . . .

Thus should be understood as the first echo of the penalty, in which the woman is given a personal name by Adam. For the first words after the divine judgment are words of hope. Adam names his wife “Eve,” “for she is the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3:20). . . . In the context it shows Adam reclaiming dominion in faith through *naming* his wife *the mother*, which cannot help but allude to the more specific role she will have as the one who will provide a seed who will strike the serpent. (*Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 68–69)

⁴⁵ See T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 101–13.

⁴⁶ Though non-messianic, see the helpful socio-historical, linguistic study by Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993).

⁴⁷ “A central purpose of the eschatological framework of the Pentateuch is to bring the whole of Genesis 1–11 into the realm of Israel’s own history and thus prepare the way for an understanding of

“the seventh from Adam” (Jude 14),⁴⁸ prophesied, “See, the Lord is coming with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to convict everyone of all the deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude 14–15, NRSV).⁴⁹

Following “the genealogy” (Gen. 10:1, NKJV) of Noah and his sons, we see “the genealogy” (11:10, NKJV) from Shem to Abram. The calling of Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 is simply a continuation of the messianic-genealogical narrative.⁵⁰ While the nations gave birth to continued wickedness unto divine condemnation (cf. 11:3–9), God called Abram to faith in the birth of the Seed, which would lead to the divine blessing of all the nations—“*In your seed* all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:18, NASB; cf. Gen. 12:3; 17:7; 18:8).

As discussed in chapter 4, Abraham would have understood the blessing of God ultimately to entail eternal life in the land of the living (cf. Gen. 1:28; 3:22). Though lacking the maturity and detail of the apocalyptic language, Abraham understood the fundamental outcome of the covenant: the salvation of humanity, the restoration of original glory, the judgment of the wicked, and the mediation of a messianic seed. God would create “a great nation” (Gen. 12:2), and through

concepts such as the *Kingdom of God* in terms of the concrete realities of creation” (John Sailhamer, “Creation, Genesis 1–11, and the Canon,” *BBR* 10, no. 1 [2000]: 89).

⁴⁸ It is assumed that Jude cited an oral tradition derived from the historical Enoch and that this tradition was redacted into the pseudepigraphic books of Enoch (see Gleason L. Archer, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 430).

⁴⁹ Citing 1 *Enoch* 1:9: “Behold, he will arrive with ten million of the holy ones in order to execute judgment upon all. He will destroy the wicked ones and censure all flesh on account of everything that they have done, that which the sinners and the wicked ones committed against him” (*OTP*, 1:13–14).

“The most interesting divergence in Jude’s quotation is the insertion of *kyrios* (‘Lord’). The term ‘Lord’ is not in any of the other versions, representing Jude’s Christological interpretation of the judgment. In applying a text that referred to God’s judgment to Christ, Jude followed the precedent of other New Testament writers (cf. 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:7; Rev 19:13,15; 22:12)” (Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 *Peter*, *Jude*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003], 471–72).

⁵⁰ The inclusion of such genealogies must at least be understood as messianically motivated at a canonical level. The general lack of any messianic reference in most commentaries concerning these genealogies is regrettable; see Robert R. Wilson, “Genealogy, Genealogies,” *ABD*, 2:929–32; and R. K. Harrison, “Genealogy,” *ISBE*, 2:424–28.

that nation he would bring forth one to mediate his blessing and cursing to all the nations (see figure 5.3).⁵¹

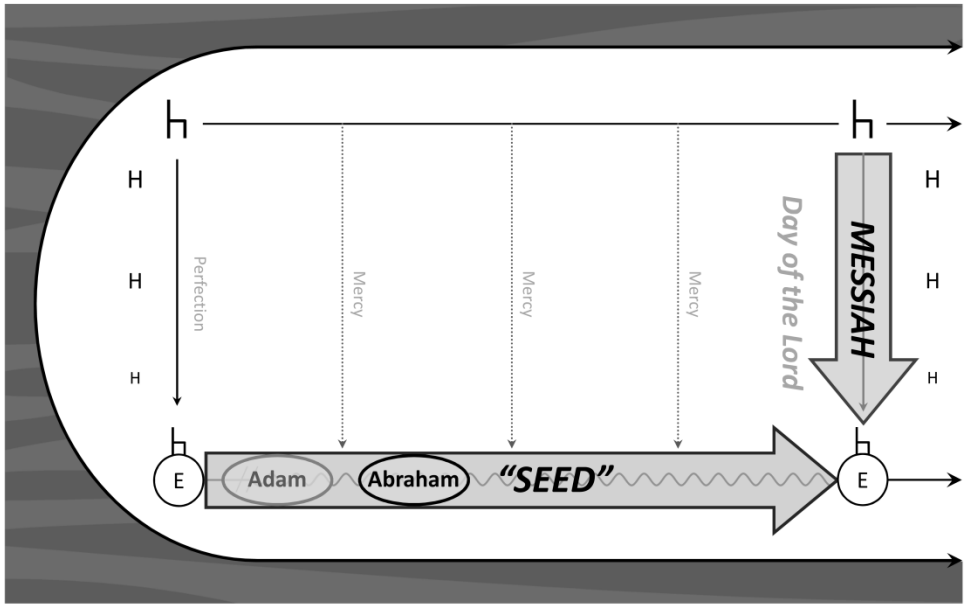


Figure 5.3 – The Abrahamic Seed as the Divine Agent of Redemptive History

Circumcision as the “sign” of the covenant (cf. Gen. 17:9–14) was likewise understood genealogically.⁵² Circumcision was instituted after “Abram” was renamed “Abraham,” prophesying his becoming “the father of a multitude of nations” (17:5), thus calling “things that are not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17, NIV), as Paul put it. Circumcision was the consecration of the biological means of the messianic birth through the severing of the foreskin, hence constituting the “sign of the covenant” (Gen. 17:11). *How prophetically apropos*. Far more than an ethnic marker or cultural ritual, circumcision was an act of faith by which the Seed was expected to come forth, and through which the promise of the Seed

⁵¹ “This promissory call is the first recorded speech since God’s word of judgment at the Tower of Babel, resulting in the creation of the nations (11:5–6,9). This new word to Abram counters the old since it provides for the redemptive plan of ‘all peoples’ (v. 3). By making his descendants a ‘great nation’ (v. 2) who will be a ‘blessing’ (v. 2), the Lord will bring salvation to the scattered nations” (K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005], 105).

⁵² See the “Excursus on Circumcision” in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 23–24.

was indeed carried on (cf. Gen. 21:2; 26:4; 28:14; 35:11), since the Seed was literally “in the loins of his ancestor” (Heb. 7:10).

Throughout the Psalms and Prophets, the Abrahamic covenant and its messianic vision are expounded. The “royal son” (Ps. 72:1) will have “dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (v. 8; cf. Ps. 89:25), a clear reference to the land allotment within the Abrahamic covenant — “I will give to you and to your *offspring* after you the land of your sojournings” (Gen. 17:8; cf. Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18).⁵³ Similarly, “He shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:10). So the Messiah will rule over the nation of Israel, from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River (cf. Ex. 23:31; 1 Kings 4:21–24), administrating divine blessings and glory to all the nations of the earth. Consequently, “All nations will be blessed *through him*, and they will call him blessed” (Ps. 72:17, NIV).

Such a vision is also projected in Isaiah 11, wherein a “Branch” (v. 1) grows ultimately from the Abrahamic root, executing judgment upon the earth (vv. 3–7). “He will raise a banner for the *nations* and gather the exiles of *Israel*” (v. 12), and “of him shall the *nations* inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious” (v. 10). Similarly, if we interpret Psalm 2 traditionally, God speaks to the Messiah: “Ask of me, and I will make the *nations* your inheritance, the *ends of the earth* your possession” (v. 8, NIV). Thus, as “the God of Israel” (Ex. 5:1; Num. 16:9; etc.)⁵⁴ and

⁵³ Concerning Paul’s quotation of these texts in Gal. 3:16, many accuse him of “creative exegesis.” However, C. John Collins has made a strong case that Paul is not stretching the text and its messianic orientation, since verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns are used differently in reference to *zera* being interpreted as singular versus collective. See “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of an Exegete Was Paul?” *TynBul* 54, no. 1 (2003): 75–86; and Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–48. See also T. D. Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48, no. 2 (1997): 363–67.

⁵⁴ Note the prominent use of the phrase “God of Israel” (ultimately derived from the Abrahamic covenant) in Ex. 5:1; 24:10; 32:27; 34:23; Num. 16:9; Josh. 7:13,19f.; 8:30; 9:18f.; 10:40,42; 13:14,33; 14:14; 22:16,24; 24:2,23; Judg. 4:6; 5:3,5; 6:8; 11:21,23; 21:3; Ruth 2:12; 1 Sam. 1:17; 2:30; 5:7f., 10f.; 6:3,5; 10:18; 14:41; 20:12; 23:10f.; 25:32,34; 2 Sam. 7:27; 12:7; 23:3; 1 Kings 1:30,48; 8:15,17,20,23,25f.; 11:9,31; 14:7,13; 15:30; 16:13,26,33; 17:1,14; 22:53; 2 Kings 9:6; 10:31; 14:25; 18:5; 19:15,20; 21:12; 22:15,18; 1 Chron. 4:10; 5:26; 15:12,14; 16:4,36; 17:24; 22:6; 23:25; 24:19; 28:4; 29:10; 2 Chron. 2:12; 6:4,7,10,14,16f.; 11:16; 13:5; 15:4,13; 20:19; 29:7,10; 30:1,5; 32:17; 33:16,18; 34:23,26; 36:13; Ezra 1:3; 3:2; 4:1,3; 5:1; 6:14,21f.; 7:6,15; 8:35; 9:4,15; Ps. 41:13; 59:5; 68:8,35; 69:6; 72:18; 106:48; Isa. 17:6; 21:10,17; 24:15; 29:23; 37:16,21; 41:17; 45:3,15; 48:1f.; 52:12; Jer. 7:3,21; 9:15; 11:3; 13:12; 16:9; 19:3,15; 21:4; 23:2; 24:5; 25:15,27; 27:4,21; 28:2,14; 29:4,8,21,25; 30:2; 31:23; 32:14f.,36; 33:4; 34:2,13; 35:13,17ff.; 37:7; 38:17; 39:16; 42:9,15,18; 43:10; 44:2,7,11,25; 45:2; 46:25; 48:1; 50:18; 51:33; Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:19f.; 11:22; 43:2; 44:2; Zeph. 2:9; Mal. 2:16; Matt. 15:31; Luke 1:68.

“the God of the whole earth” (Isa. 54:5; cf. Mic. 4:13; Zech. 4:14), he will bless both Jew and Gentile through the Abrahamic Messiah; and in this way “the nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory” (Jer. 4:2, NASB).⁵⁵

In such a light, the New Testament writers assume the Abrahamic covenant to be inherently messianic. Hence Paul can state, as if in passing, that “the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be *heir of the world* did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13). Likewise, Peter relates “the Christ appointed for you” (Acts 3:20) with “the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed’” (v. 25). In this way the “God of Abraham” (Gen. 28:13; Ex. 3:6; Ps. 47:9) will anoint the “son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1; cf. Luke 3:34) with power and glory, and the nations will rejoice (cf. Ps. 67:4; 97:1; Isa. 24:14–16; 42:10–12)—singing “Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory!” (Ps. 72:19).

The Davidic Messianic Hope

The genealogical-messianic expectation continues through the biblical narrative from Abraham to David (cf. Gen. 46:8–24; Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chron. 1–2). Though there is much to be said concerning messianic promise and prediction between the two, the Messiah is summarily known as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1).⁵⁶ Though much time and space within the narrative is devoted to Sinai and the Law, these happened “because of transgressions *until the Seed* to whom the promise referred had come” (Gal. 3:19, NIV).⁵⁷ Because the

⁵⁵ The centrality and significance of ethnicity in redemptive history will be discussed further in chapter 6.

⁵⁶ For commentary on the commonly referenced messianic predictions between Abraham and David—e.g., the “Judaic Prediction” (Gen. 49:8–12), “Balaamic Prediction” (Num. 24:15–19), “Mosaic Prediction” (Deut. 18:15–18), and “Hannaic Prediction” (1 Sam. 2:1–10)—see Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 1:57–130; Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, 47–79; and Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, 50–76.

⁵⁷ Though Moses himself created a prophetic pattern of deliverance, reinforced by prophecy (cf. Deut. 18:15–18), as Klausner describes,

It was also inevitable that the people should feel compelled to accord the very greatest glory and honor to the exalted and grandiose personality of *the first deliverer*. This was the man Moses, this the great deliverer, who not only ransomed Israel from all its *material* troubles and from *political* servitude, but also redeemed it from its ignorance and its spiritual bondage. He was not only a guide and leader of the Israelite people; he was

story gets right into the thick of the trees, so to speak, some think the larger messianic forest-view gets lost, which is simply not the case. The larger redemptive narrative remains in the background of consciousness, giving context to the stewardship of the Law, land, monarchy, temple, etc.⁵⁸

The Davidic covenant extends the protologically based, messianic hope into its historical context. Second Samuel 7 (cf. 1 Chron. 17) forms the prophetic pathway upon which the rest of the Scriptures run. Though not initially referenced as a “covenant,” the interaction between God, Nathan, and David is later termed as such by David himself (2 Sam. 23:5); by Ethan, the Solomonic temple musician (Ps. 89:3); and by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 33:21). Following Genesis 3 and Genesis 12, 2 Samuel 7 is arguably the most important chapter in the Scriptures concerning messianic expectation.⁵⁹ So Nathan prophesies:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your *offspring* [Heb. *zera* ‘, “seed,” KJV/NKJV] after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish *the throne of his kingdom forever*. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. (2 Sam. 7:12–14)

Psalms 89 provides the most direct and comprehensive commentary concerning how the words of 2 Samuel 7 were understood by David and his successors:

I have made a covenant with My chosen;
I have sworn to David My servant,
I will establish *your seed* forever
And build up *your throne* to all generations. . . .
But I shall *crush* his adversaries before him,
And *strike* those who hate him.

also a lawgiver and prophet. The exalted picture of Moses necessarily, therefore, impressed itself upon the spirit of the nation and became a symbol of the redeemer in general. (*Messianic Idea in Israel*, 16; italics in the original)

Note the prevalent rabbinic tradition of Moses as a messianic prototype (Ibid., 17–18).

⁵⁸ The nature and purpose of these will be discussed further in chapter 6.

⁵⁹ “Third in importance only to the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 and the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:2–3 is 2 Samuel 7 (see also 1 Ch 17; Ps. 89), God’s promise to David. This chapter sets the tone for the promise-plan of God throughout the rest of the OT” (Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament*, 78).

My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him,
And in My name his horn will be exalted.
I shall also set his hand on *the sea*
And his right hand on *the rivers*.
He will cry to Me, "You are *my Father*,
My God, and the rock of my salvation."
I also shall make him *My firstborn*,
The highest of the kings of the earth. (Ps. 89:3–4,23–27, NASB)

The imagery of Genesis 3 is naturally evoked in the references to a seed and the crushing of adversaries. Likewise, the handling of the sea and rivers would be understood in Abrahamic terms—"Our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel" (v. 18). Beyond these, the Davidic Seed will be anointed as "the highest of the kings of the earth," thus assuming supreme administration of the age to come. So the divine agent of God's apocalyptic salvation will be the messianic Seed of Adam, Abraham, and David (see figure 5.4).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See the apocryphal 2 Esdras 12:32–34:

This is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until *the end of days*, who will arise from *the offspring of David*, and will come and speak with them. He will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will display before them their contemptuous dealings. For first he will bring them alive before *his judgment seat*, and when he has reproved them, then he will destroy them. But in mercy he will set free the remnant of my people, those who have been saved throughout my borders, and he will make them joyful until the end comes, *the day of judgment*, of which I spoke to you at the beginning. (NRSV; italics added)

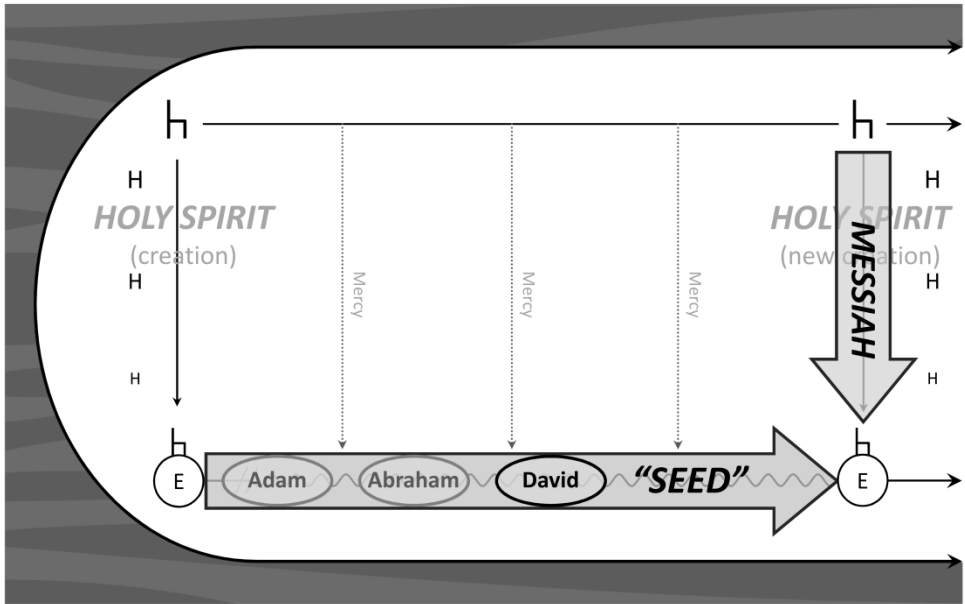


Figure 5.4 – The Davidic Seed as the Divine Agent of Redemptive History

As seen in the diagram, the Spirit of God is the ultimate agent of both creation and redemption. Therefore the Messiah's agency is understood to be under the auspices of a "Spiritual" anointing. In this way God administers his day through his Messiah by means of his Spirit. So Isaiah foresaw:

There shall come forth a shoot *from the stump of Jesse*,
 and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
 And *the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him*,
 the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 the Spirit of counsel and might,
 the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. . . .
 And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
 and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. (Isa. 11:1–4)

Similarly Isaiah prophesies: "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" (Isa. 42:1, NIV). And speaking the words of the Messiah, he says, "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me*, because the LORD has *anointed me* to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me . . . to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:1–2).

Thus the Holy Spirit is the ultimate causative agent of the day of the Lord, the new heavens and new earth, the resurrection, and the messianic institution and administration—all of which is assumed in light of the Spirit's original agency in creation. Such a messianic interpretation of the anointing of the Spirit is undoubtedly the context within which Jesus' baptism was understood (see Matt. 3:16 and parallels), when "the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove" (Luke 3:22).

As the mediator of divine governance, the Messiah is ultimately concerned with the conveyance of divine character. Therefore, since God himself is just and righteous, so also "In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks *justice* and speeds the cause of *righteousness*" (Isa. 16:5, NIV). Similarly, "He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with *justice and righteousness* from that time on and forever" (Isa. 9:7, NIV).⁶¹

Jeremiah likewise declares, "I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute *judgment and righteousness* in the earth" (Jer. 23:5, NKJV).⁶² Note that the parallel in Jeremiah 33:15 is followed by a reference to the overarching "covenant" with creation, securing the hope of a new heaven and earth under the governance of the Davidic Messiah: "Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of

⁶¹ Since the Davidic Covenant is genealogically based, subsequent prophecies often refer to David and his Seed as one—e.g., "*My servant David* shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. . . . They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and *David my servant* shall be their prince forever" (Ezek. 37:24–25; cf. Ps. 18:49f.; Isa. 55:3ff.; Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5). Though David himself may indeed rule over Israel forever in the resurrection—as Abraham himself will indeed inherit the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 13:15; 15:8; 17:8)—it will be under the universal governance of the Seed which comes from his own body.

⁶² Since the context of this passage, both before and after, is the restoring of the Jews "out of all the countries" (Jer. 23:3,8) of their banishment, the governance of the "righteous Branch" is assumedly over those countries (a common theme throughout the prophets, cf. Joel 3:2ff.; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:2ff., etc.). Thus a universalized translation of Heb. *'eres* (v. 5) as "earth" (KJV, NKJV) instead of "land" (NASB, ESV, NRSV, NIV, NLT) is preferred.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them" (vv. 25–26).⁶³

At the heart of the Davidic Covenant is also the concept of the Messiah's *divine sonship*. Note the centrality and repetition of the Messiah being called God's "son":

- "I will be his father, and he will be *my son*." (2 Sam. 7:14, NIV)
- "The LORD said to me, 'You are *my Son*; today I have begotten you.'" (Ps. 2:7)
- "He shall cry to me, 'You are *my Father*, my God.'" (Ps. 89:26)

The Davidic association of divine sonship is likewise seen in the angelic declaration concerning Jesus' birth: "He will be great and will be called the *Son* of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father *David*, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33).

Hence the messianic title "Son of God" is primarily derived from the Davidic covenant.⁶⁴ He is the descendant of David, whom God approves and deems righteous to rule as his vicar over the earth.⁶⁵ As such, the phrase "Son of God" is

⁶³ The relating of the "righteous Branch" of David (Jer. 33:15) to the establishing of the "day and night" (vv. 20,25; cf. Gen. 1:5) should not be overlooked. Here we have a glimpse into the assumed protologically based worldview of the Scriptures. As such, the Davidic Covenant and the "covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth" are inherently tied together under the sovereignty of God. As surely as there will be an eternal new heavens and new earth (their redemption being implied in "covenant"), so also will there surely be a Davidic Branch representing and mediating the divine character, cf. "LORD Our Righteousness" (v. 16, NIV), throughout the earth.

⁶⁴ "The idea of the messianic Son of God goes back to the promise to David with reference to his descendants who should succeed him on the throne of Israel, and it looks beyond the immediate descendants of David to that greater descendant who should be the messianic Son of God in the fullest sense of the word" (Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 160).

⁶⁵ Note the correspondence with 4 Ezra, the only intertestamental work that uses "son" in reference to the Messiah (7:28f.; 13:32,37,52; 14:9):

The days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who inhabit the earth. They shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. When these things take place and the signs occur that I showed you before, then *my Son* will be revealed. . . .

And Zion shall come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands. Then he, *my Son*, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness. . . .

essentially a messianic title associated with the Davidic King, rather than an ontological phrase concerned with divinity versus humanity.⁶⁶ Of course, there is overwhelming evidence for the divinity of Jesus and his ontological identification with God Almighty.⁶⁷ This is not the main point of the phrase, however, nor is it what people thought of when the heavens opened at Jesus' baptism, the Spirit descended, and the voice spoke, "This is *my Son*, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17, NIV). The same declaration is repeated on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), which was later rehearsed by Peter (2 Peter 1:16–18) and interpreted as "We have the *prophetic word* more fully confirmed" (v. 19). The prophetic oracles are primarily concerned with redemptive history, and so also are the messianic titles "Son of God," "Son of Man," etc.

Just as no one can explore or know what is in the depths of the sea, so no one on earth can see *my Son* or those who are with him, except in the time of his day. (2 Esdras 13:29–32, 36–37, 52, NRSV; italics added)

⁶⁶ See Ladd, "The Son of God," *Theology of the New Testament*, 158–69. Note that in second-temple Judaism the phrase "Son of Man" would have communicated divinity more than "Son of God" (cf. Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* [New York: New Press, 2012], 25–101).

⁶⁷ Of the many lines of evidence, there is 1) the self-declaration of Jesus, identifying with the divine name: "Before Abraham was, *I am*" (John 8:58; cf. Ex. 3:14); 2) the declaration of the Jews: "You, a mere man, claim to be God" (John 10:33, NIV), in response to Jesus saying, "I and the Father *are one*" (10:30; cf. John 14:6–9); 3) the declaration of Thomas directed to Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28); 4) Jesus' common acceptance of worship (cf. Matt. 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 5:23; 9:38; 20:28); note the radical devotion of the early church as to the divine (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1–3; 1 Thess. 1:1–3; Titus 1:1–4); so Pliny the Younger wrote to the emperor Trajan that Christians "sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god" (Letters 10.96, LOEB ed.); 5) "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21); 6) "I am the LORD, and besides me there is *no savior*" (Isa. 43:11; cf. Isa. 45:21), cf. "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a *Savior*, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20; cf. Luke 2:11; 1 John 4:14); 7) the invocation of the divine name in healings and exorcisms (cf. Matt. 7:22; Acts 3:6; 16:18; 19:13); 8) the Pauline reference to the *shema*: "There is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4; cf. Deut. 6:4), followed by "There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (v. 6; cf. Isa. 42:5); 9) the Pauline declaration of Jesus being "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6), followed by "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (v. 10; cf. Isa. 45:23) and "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father" (v. 11; cf. Isa. 42:8); 10) the identification of "wisdom" as the divine consort (cf. Prov. 3:19; 8:22ff.; Wisdom of Solomon 6:12; 7:25f.; 9:10f.) with Jesus in John 1:1–18; see also the equivalence of "word" and "wisdom" in intertestamental Jewish "Wisdom Tradition," cf. "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made" (Ps. 33:6).

See discussions of divinity and Christology in Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

Thus we see the linguistic equation of the titles “Messiah” and “Son of God” in Peter’s declaration, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16, NLT), likewise echoed by Martha, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (John 11:27, NRSV). The high priest also charged Jesus, “Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63, NRSV). Demons even came out of people shouting, “You are the Son of God,” because “they knew he was the Messiah” (Luke 4:41, NLT). The Gospels themselves were indeed written “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (John 20:31, NRSV), and are designed to communicate “the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1, NLT). So too Paul uses the phrase “Son of God” functionally, in tandem with “Messiah” (cf. Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13).

Moreover, the consistent use of “Messiah,” “Son of God,” and “Son of Man” *together* in the same passage (cf. Matt. 16:13–17; 26:63–64; John 1:49–51; 3:14–18; 5:22–27) argues strongly for a simple, commonly assumed messianic expectation that incorporated various linguistic expressions—including, for example, “Son of David” (Matt. 9:27; 21:9), “Root of David” (Rev. 5:5; 22:16), “Root of Jesse” (Rom. 15:12; cf. Isa. 11:10), “Morning Star” (2 Peter 1:19; Rev. 22:16), “Expected One” (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19, NASB), “Firstborn” (Ps. 89:27; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:6), “Prophet” (Deut. 18:15; John 6:14; 7:40), “Shepherd” (Ezek. 34:23; John 10:11; 1 Peter 2:24), “Teacher” (Isa. 30:20; Matt. 23:10; John 13:13), “Arm of the Lord” (Isa. 51:9; 53:1; John 12:38), “Savior” (Luke 2:11; Phil. 3:20; 1 John 4:14), “Judge” (cf. Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 5:9), “Lord” (Luke 2:11; Acts 2:36; Jude 14), “Chosen One” (Isa. 42:1; Luke 9:35; 23:35), “Servant” (Isa. 42:1; 52:13; Matt. 12:18), “Holy One” (Ps. 16:10; Mark 1:24; John 6:69; Acts 2:27), and “Righteous One” (Isa. 53:11; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14).⁶⁸ All of these messianic titles draw from oracles in the Old Testament, which also include other titles not mentioned in the New Testament—for example, “Shiloh” (Gen. 49:10), “Star” (Num. 24:17), and “Branch” (Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Zech. 6:12).⁶⁹

The abundance of messianic descriptions is based on the simple underlying genealogical expectation of a “seed” from the line of Adam, Abraham, and David

⁶⁸ Note also those titles which are developed in relation to the “Servant” (Isa. 42:1; 49:6f.) who suffers (Isa. 52:13ff.); i.e., “High Priest” (Heb. 3:1; 4:14f.; etc.; cf. Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:13), “Mediator” (1 Tim. 2:5; cf. Isa. 59:16; Ezek. 22:30), and “Lamb of God” (John 1:29,36; cf. Isa. 53:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Rev. 5:6).

⁶⁹ See n. 56 above.

who would mediate God’s apocalyptic salvation (see figure 5.5). The many messianic titles are not mysterious, disconnected revelations, but rather simple descriptors of a simple genealogically based messianic expectation.

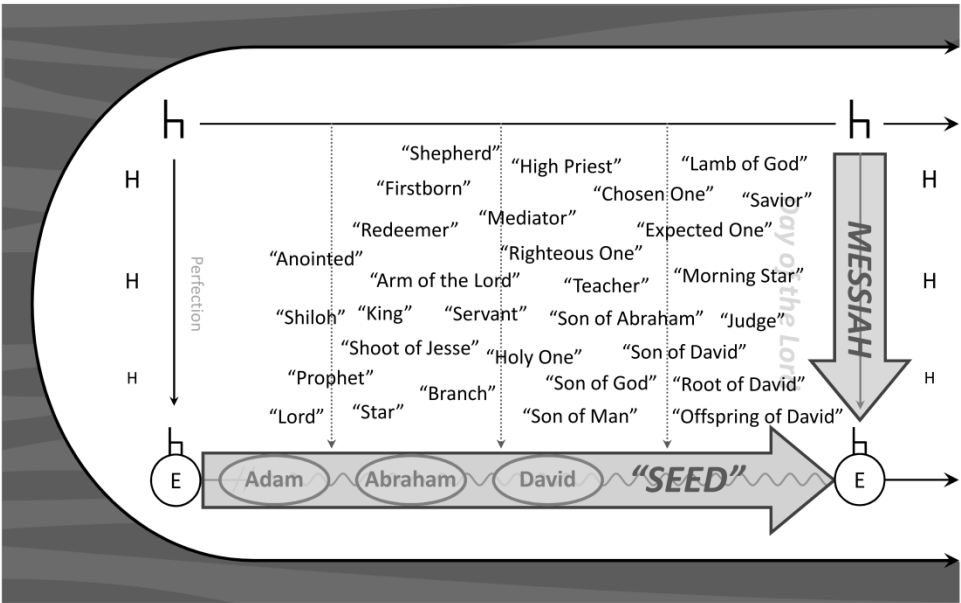


Figure 5.5 – Genealogically Based Messianic Titles throughout the Scriptures

THE CRUCIFORM-APOCALYPTIC MESSIANIC HOPE

The New Testament begins with “the *genealogy* of Jesus the *Messiah*, the son of *David*, the son of *Abraham*” (Matt. 1:1, NASB). Jesus of Nazareth was “called Christ” (v. 16) by those who followed him, and many “put their faith in him” (John 7:31; 8:3; 11:45). As discussed above, this faith involved mediation of the basic tenets of Jewish apocalypticism: the day of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, a new heavens and new earth, etc. What then is to be made of the *crucifixion* of the Messiah? Does such an event reinterpret or even overturn the previous messianic expectation?

Jesus and his disciples neither rejected nor rescinded any of the major elements of their Jewish worldview. Jesus’ death and resurrection were simply understood as *additional elements* of messianic function, which were somewhat

hidden and uncommon to first-century expectation.⁷⁰ Thus Jesus had to open the minds of his disciples “to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45), explaining to them “*everything* written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (v. 44). That which was missing was the expectation that “the Messiah would have *to suffer* all these things before entering his glory” (v. 26, NLT).⁷¹

In the context of the disciples’ discussion concerning the redemption of Israel (v. 21), the eschatological nature of the Messiah’s glory was never questioned.⁷² In second-temple Judaism, “glory” was the common apocalyptic catchword.⁷³ Jesus was simply adding to the disciples’ expectation that “the Christ *should suffer* and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:46–47). Such repentance and forgiveness of sins were understood by the apostolic tradition in light of the Messiah being “judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42; cf. Acts 17:31). Hence the Messiah’s suffering and resurrection was an addition to the common expectation of the mediation of divine judgment and salvation.

The apostolic witness bears out this straightforward approach to the death of the Messiah. The apocalyptic expectations built upon the divine covenants remained ever-present in the apostolic mind. Thus Peter outlines in Acts 3 that God’s Christ would suffer (v. 18), repentance would be preached (v. 19), and the Christ would be sent again (v. 20) for the restoration of all things (v. 21). Peter then justifies such an approach by quoting Deuteronomy 18:15 that God would “raise up for you a prophet like [Moses]” (v. 22) who would fulfill the Abrahamic

⁷⁰ Though not entirely unusual (cf. 4 Maccabees 6:28; 17:21–22), as Joachim Jeremias made clear,

The oft-repeated assertion that it is inconceivable that Jesus should have ascribed atoning power to his death, that such statements belong rather to the “dogmatic” of the Early Church or of the apostle Paul, is astonishing to anyone who knows the Palestinian sources. Conceptions of the atoning power of death play a large part in the thought of Jesus’ contemporaries. Every death has atoning power—even that of a criminal if he dies penitent. An innocent death offered to God has vicarious power of atonement for others. The sources compel the conclusion that *it is inconceivable that Jesus should not have thought of the atoning power of his death.* (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin [London: SCM Press, 1966], 231; italics in the original)

⁷¹ The various elements of this exposition will be discussed further in chapters 7 and 8.

⁷² It is the eschatological/apocalyptic glory referenced throughout the prophets (cf. Isa. 11:10; 24:23; 35:2; 40:5; 60:1ff.; 66:18f.; Jer. 33:9; Ezek. 43:5; Dan. 7:14; Hab. 2:14) and reiterated throughout the New Testament (cf. Rom. 5:2; 8:18; 1 Cor. 15:40ff.; 2 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 1:18; Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 4:13; 5:1; Jude 24; Rev. 21:11).

⁷³ See Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* [London: SCM Press, 1972], 32.

blessing (v. 25). Such a blessing and raising up of the Messiah is interpreted according to redemptive history, finding its fulfillment in both the cross and the day of the Lord: “When God raised up his servant, he *sent him first* to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26, NRSV).⁷⁴

In this way the divine program involves *the messianic mediation of both divine mercy and divine judgment*. God will have mercy on humanity through his Messiah, and he will judge humanity through his Messiah. So the apostolic tradition is summarized in Hebrews 9:28: “*Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*”⁷⁵

Jesus interpreted his own death in the same way. In light of the eschatological kingdom (Luke 22:16,30), he says, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). This new covenant is understood in sacrificial terms—that is, “in my blood”—and consequently it is essentially “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28). Superseding the sacrificial aspects of the Mosaic covenant (to be discussed further in chapters 7 and 8), this new covenant in no way affects “the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12) made

⁷⁴ Contrary to the common opinion that the “raising up” refers to the resurrection, and thus the blessing would be ethnically oriented, i.e., to the Jew first and then the Gentile (cf. Acts 13:46). Such an idea had not yet been revealed to the apostles (cf. Acts 10ff.), and therefore Peter’s reference to the raising up of Jesus is more likely in reference to the divine sending and to redemptive history as a whole. As David G. Peterson rightly observes,

Does the expression “*raised up his servant*” (*anastēsas*) refer to Jesus’ first appearance on the stage of history, as the prophet from Nazareth, or to his resurrection from the dead? The verbal link with v. 22 and the quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15 might suggest the former. . . . The use of the word “*first*” (*prōton*) implies the sort of sequence portrayed in Isaiah 49:5–6, where the Servant of the Lord is used to “restore the tribes of Jacob” so that they can be ‘a light for the Gentiles’ and bring God’s salvation ‘to the ends of the earth’” (cf. Acts 1:6; 13:46–48; 26:16–18). In other words, that significant “Servant Song,” which reveals the way in which God will ultimately fulfill his promise to Abraham, appears to lie behind the final challenge of Peter’s sermon. In this sequence of thought, the raising up of Jesus more naturally refers to God sending him as his Servant, to fulfill the divine plan for Israel and the nations. The messianic blessing includes all the benefits of Jesus’ saving work outlined in vv. 19–21, together with the gift of repentance (“*by turning each of you from your wicked ways*”). (*The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 184–85)

⁷⁵ Note the logic of the author in Heb. 9:27–28: Just as there is a two-part “appointment” (Gk. *apokeimai*) for sinful man (death and judgment), so also is there a corresponding two-part “appointment” for the Righteous Man (sacrifice and salvation). Moreover, both appointments are emphasized juxtapositionally, the first appointment being in reference to bearing sin and the second appointment being “without reference to sin” (v. 28, NASB).

with the forefathers. The new covenant simply provides atonement for that which the Mosaic covenant lacked (cf. Acts 13:39; Heb. 9:13–14). Therefore, “[Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

Similarly, the gift of the Holy Spirit was thus understood in light of the common messianic expectation concerning the anointing of the Messiah (cf. Isa. 11:1–3; 42:1; 61:1). As Peter declared at Pentecost, “Exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father *the promise of the Holy Spirit*, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33). The gift of the Spirit was given to confirm the mediation of divine mercy in the cross before the mediation of divine judgment at “the great and glorious day of the Lord” (v. 20, NIV). Indeed, “God has made him both Lord and Christ” (v. 36). Accordingly, Peter concludes, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). The Holy Spirit was poured out as a confirmation of the apostolic witness concerning the Messiah’s role in the atonement of the new covenant and the apocalyptic hope of the day of the Lord (see figure 5.6).

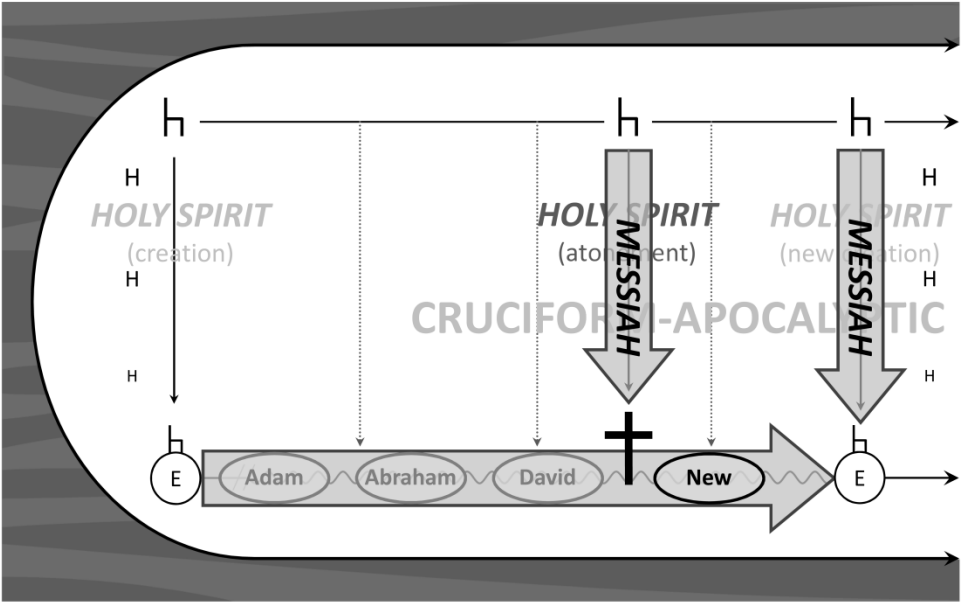


Figure 5.6 – The Gift of the Holy Spirit within Cruciform-Apocalyptic Messianic Hope

Paul can thus summarize his discussion concerning the mercy and “perfect patience” of God “to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:16) in this way: “For there is one God, and there is *one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Tim. 2:5–6). God has chosen to mediate both atonement and resurrection through the one man, Jesus the Messiah.

Likewise, Paul outlines in Romans 5: “While we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6, HCSB). And since God “shows his love for us” by the fact that “Christ died for us” (v. 8), “much more shall we be saved *by him* from the wrath of God” (v. 9). So the mediation of reconciliation and salvation is holistically accomplished through God’s Messiah: “For if, when 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 rejoice in God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ, *through* whom we have now received reconciliation” (vv. 10–11, NIV). Of course, all of this reconciliatory mediation is understood in its broad apocalyptic context: “As one trespass [of Adam] led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness [of Christ] leads to justification and life for all men. . . . so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to *eternal life through Jesus Christ* our Lord” (vv. 18,21).

Since the Jewish apocalyptic vision of eternal life remained unchanged by the sacrificial interpretation of the death of the Messiah, the apostolic witness remained tenable within first-century Judaism. Hence the apostles “did not cease teaching and preaching that *the Christ is Jesus*” (Acts 5:42). Likewise Paul “devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that *Jesus was the Christ*” (Acts 18:5, NIV). And Apollos “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that *the Christ was Jesus*” (Acts 18:28).

The simplicity and continuity of the apostolic method and message are demonstrated clearly by Paul in Thessalonica: “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:2–4). The fact that the apostolic witness was readily received by so many Jews (cf. Acts

2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 11:19; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4; 18:8; 19:10; 21:20; 24:24; 28:24) argues strongly for an unaltered Jewish-apocalyptic background for the cruciform-messianic message.

CHRISTOPLATONIC CHRISTOLOGY

As previously mentioned, the term “Christ” is little more than Jesus’ proper name in much of the popular mind.⁷⁶ In the early church, however, one’s identity as a believer was dictated by his or her faith and confession that Jesus was “the Christ.” As John says, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God” (1 John 5:1). The distortion of messianic expectation robs people of their identity as children of God. Moreover, it robs people of their boldness in bearing the Christian name, as Peter says, “If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Peter 4:16, NIV). The name that we bear as followers of Jesus inherently confesses our messianic hope.⁷⁷

Though in modern times the term “Christ” has been generally marginalized to Christian jargon, this does not mean Christians have lost all sense of messianic expectation. Rather, their hopes have simply become *pervorted*. All human beings—whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or naturalist—hold to some form of an “agent of salvation.” This can be generalized to humanity as a whole, as with naturalism (or at least to its higher intellectual echelon); or to various incarnated avatars, as in Hinduism; or to historical “awakened ones,” as in Buddhism; or to a single eschatological messianic figure, as in Islam (i.e., the Mahdi).

As Christianity merged with Hellenistic thought, its messianic expectation began to conform to the worldly hopes of salvation within Greek mythology and philosophy. Since salvation in Hellenism is generally interpreted as escaping materiality unto eternal immateriality, the Christ became the grand “Agent of Escapism,” so to speak. Jesus was understood as the divine means of achieving incorporeality, which is the defining mark of Gnosticism. George Ladd outlined well the relationship between Platonism and gnostic Christology:

⁷⁶ See n. 5 above.

⁷⁷ Unfortunately, Christians are often like “Rothschild” descendants, knowing nothing of their financier heritage and often associating their name with street-sweepers and the like. The nobility and confidence in our heritage as “Christians” is rooted in our apocalyptic understanding of Jesus as “the Christ” (cf. 1 Peter 4:12–16).

The view found in Plato and in later thinkers, influenced by him, is essentially the same cosmological dualism as is found in later Gnosticism. Like Gnosticism, Platonism is a dualism of two worlds, one the visible world and the other an invisible “spiritual” world. As in Gnosticism, man stands between these two worlds, related to both. Like Gnosticism, Platonism sees the origin of man’s truest self (his soul) in the invisible world, whence his soul has fallen into the visible world of matter. Like Gnosticism, it sees the physical body as a hindrance, a burden, sometimes even as a tomb of the soul. Like Gnosticism, it conceives of salvation as the freeing of the soul from its entanglement in the physical world that it may wing its way back to the heavenly world. Two further elements found in Gnosticism do not appear in the Platonic philosophers: that matter is *ipso facto* the source of evil, and that redemption is accomplished by a heavenly redeemer who descends to the earth to deliver the fallen souls and lead them back to heaven.⁷⁸

Though Gnosticism was infantile during New Testament times, its emergence was met with severe opposition. At the end of his life, Paul wrote Timothy: “Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is *falsely called* ‘knowledge’ [Gk. *gnōsis*], for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.” (1 Tim. 6:20–21; cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). Concerning its application to Christology, John calls Gnosticism “the spirit of the Antichrist,” warning, “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is not of God” (1 John 4:3, NKJV).

Because of its utterly destructive impact on the faith, identity, and behavior of the believer, Jesus himself gives the gravest condemnation of gnostic Christianity when addressing the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6,15), of which he “hates” both their “works” and “teachings” — threatening, “I will come to you soon and *war against them* with the sword of my mouth” (v. 16).⁷⁹ According to Irenaeus (c. 130–200), the early church’s authority on Gnosticism, the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolas of Antioch (cf. Acts 6:5),⁸⁰ who strayed from the faith and became “an offset of that ‘knowledge’ falsely so called.”⁸¹ The church in Thyatira

⁷⁸ George E. Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 13–14.

⁷⁹ The destructive nature of Gnosticism expresses itself in two seemingly contradictory ways: extreme asceticism and extreme indulgence. They are congruent, however, in their *devaluation* of the body and materiality in general; see A. M. Renwick, “Gnosticism,” *ISBE*, 2:484–90.

⁸⁰ *Against Heresies*, 1.26.3 (ANF, 1:352).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3.11.1 (ANF, 1:426). The same testimony is corroborated by Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 7.24 (ANF, 5:115), and Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.29 (NPNF2, 1:161).

is also generally believed to have harbored Gnostics, having “learned [Gk. *ginōskō*] what some call the deep things of Satan” (Rev. 2:24).⁸² It is this gnostic, “deep-revelatory” approach to the Scriptures, later mitigated and propagated *en masse* by the Alexandrian school of thought, that perverted the simple messianic faith in Jesus for centuries ensuing.⁸³ Though Gnostics genuinely believe they hold a superior truth, their faith has actually been *ruined* (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Tim. 2:14), and for this reason Jesus and those who follow him despise it.

Though gnostic Christology is enticing on the front end, its end is painfully predictable. As the divine agent of escapism, Christ Escapist takes believers to immaterial heaven through death and finalizes redemptive history at his return by annihilating materiality. Moreover, he calls his followers to “gnostic martyrdom” by forsaking “the world” (i.e., materiality and the body) unto death. So Clement of Alexandria, the first to equate asceticism and martyrdom, said:

Whence, as is reasonable, the [true Christian] gnostic, when Called, obeys easily, and gives up his body to him who asks; and, previously *divesting himself of the affections of this carcase . . .* He in truth, bears witness to himself that he is faithful and loyal towards God. . . .

If the confession to God is martyrdom, each soul which has lived purely in the knowledge of God, which has obeyed the commandments, is a witness

⁸² “Since in the message to Thyatira the prophetess Jezebel, who teaches within the community (2:20), is accused of teaching the same vices, viz., eating meat offered to idols and practicing fornication, it is generally assumed that she and her friends and followers belong to the same group as the Nicolaitans. But whereas the false apostles, who spread the teaching of the Nicolaitans in Ephesus were migrant missionaries, Jezebel and the adherents to the teaching of Balaam belong to the communities of Thyatira and Pergamum. Thus the Nicolaitans seem to be an integral part of these churches” (E. Schüssler Fiorenza, “Apocalyptic and Gnosis in the Book of Revelation and Paul,” *JBL* 92, no. 4 [December 1973]: 568). See also D. F. Watson, “Nicolaitans,” *ABD*, 4:1106–7).

⁸³ So Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner commented,

The Stoics and Cynics taught that salvation from the evil in this world is to be sought and found in *salvation from the world itself*, that is, in flight from the storms and passions of this world. Christianity, which was compounded of Judaism and Greek philosophy, has a redeemer of the world, but along with this there are also ascetics who are saved from the evil in the world by flight from the world to desert places and monasteries. Judaism, seeking redemption from the personal evil in this world, found it in *improvement of the world* by a personal Messiah alone. (*Messianic Idea in Israel*, 24; italics in the original)

Apostolic Christianity was *not* “compounded of Judaism and Greek philosophy,” but rather retained its simple messianic expectation with the addition of a messianic atonement.

both by life and word, in whatever way it may be *released from the body*, — *shedding faith as blood along its whole life till its departure*. . . . He is blessed; not indicating simple martyrdom, but *the gnostic martyrdom*, as of the man who has conducted himself according to the rule of the Gospel, in love to the Lord (for the knowledge of the Name and the understanding of the Gospel *point out the gnosis*, but not the bare appellation), so as to leave his worldly kindred, and wealth, and every possession, in order *to lead a life free from passion*. . . .

In living, then, living well is secured. And he who in the body has devoted himself to a good life, is being sent on to *the state of immortality*.⁸⁴

It is this gnostic call based upon gnostic Christology that gave birth to the monastic movement in the deserts of Egypt, which spread throughout the church, dominated its life for over a thousand years, and continues to entice people to this very day. Though not wholly evil (the Spirit and the Scriptures are inherently sanctifying and much good has been accomplished by various monastic individuals throughout church history), monasticism does represent a substantial perversion of the gospel and of a theology of the cross, which calls men and women to embrace the goodness of creation, to hope for its apocalyptic restoration, and to lay down their lives in love *in the midst of an ungodly world* for the salvation of the lost.

Conversely, as dominionistic Christoplatonism developed, Jesus became functionally known as the grand “Agent of Dominionism,” as it were. As Christ Dominionist, he calls his followers to become agents of divine sovereignty upon the earth. Thus the church is the “kingdom,” and its leaders are “little christs,” who function as secondary agents of dominionistic salvation.⁸⁵ This side of

⁸⁴ *Stromata*, 4.4 (ANF, 2:411–12); italics added. See also Origen’s “secret martyrdom” in *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 21.

⁸⁵ Often the messianic agency is functionally merged so that the ecclesiastical/political leaders become the primary agents, as Eusebius understood Constantine to be head over all (cf. *Oration in Praise of Constantine*, esp. 16–18). For example:

Not one of those whose words once were heard with awe and wonder, had announced the glorious advent of *the Saviour of mankind*, or that new revelation of divine knowledge which he came to give. Not Pythius himself, nor any of those mighty gods, could apprehend the prospect of their approaching desolation; nor could their oracles point at him who was to be *their conqueror and destroyer*. What prophet or diviner could foretell that their rites would vanish at the presence of *a new Deity in the world*, and that the knowledge and worship of the Almighty Sovereign should be freely given to all mankind? Which of them foreknew *the august and pious reign of our victorious Emperor*, or

gnostic Christology gave birth to Christendom during and after the Constantinian era.⁸⁶ So Eusebius of Caesarea (court theologian of Constantine and “radical Origenist”⁸⁷) outlined,

Thus, as he was the first to proclaim to all the sole sovereignty of God, so he himself, as sole sovereign of the Roman world, *extended his authority over the whole human race*. Every apprehension of those evils under the pressure of which all had suffered was now removed; men whose heads had drooped in sorrow now regarded each other with smiling countenances, and looks expressive of their inward joy. With processions and hymns of praise they first of all, as they were told, *ascribed the supreme sovereignty to God*, as in truth the King of kings; and then with continued acclamations *rendered honor to the victorious Emperor*, and the Caesars, his most discreet and pious sons.⁸⁸

his triumphant conquests everywhere over the false demons, or the overthrow of their high places? (*Oration in Praise of Constantine*, 9.4–5 [NPNF2, 1:592–93]; italics added)

⁸⁶ Jürgen Moltmann observes,

In its christology, Christ was not merely the head of the church. He was also the king of heaven and the pantocrator, thereby legitimating the Christian *imperator* and his empire. As “the anointed of the Lord,” the Orthodox emperor had a messianic charge to spread the kingdom of God on earth. *For in the Christian empire God’s plan in history was fulfilled*. . . .

In this way, theology aligned both the Christian church and the Christian state towards the kingdom of God; and in this respect it was “an imperial theology,” whether it is viewed in its transcendental or its eschatological configuration. Parallel to the church, the emperor was accepted as sacred representative of God’s rule over the world. (*The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. M. Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 54; italics added)

⁸⁷ As G. F. Chesnut notes in regard to Eusebius,

As a radical Origenist, he rejected the apocalyptic idea of a future millennial kingdom of Christ on earth in favor of a more Platonic concept of immortal life in some supercosmic realm. But he also believed that this present cosmos would come to a cataclysmic end at some point several generations (or at most several centuries) after his own time. In a kind of “expanded eschatology” the events of the apocalyptic end times were spread out over hundreds of years. The Pax Romana which began under the emperor Augustus was identified by Eusebius with the eschatological kingdom of peace (Isa 2:1–4; Mic 4:1–4), while the emperor Constantine and his descendants were “the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:18), the eschatological rulers who were to govern Rome, the fourth kingdom (Dan 2:31–45), until the final tribulation, when the world would be destroyed and the last judgment held. (“Eusebius of Caesarea,” *ABD*, 2:675)

⁸⁸ *Life of Constantine*, 2.19 (NPNF2, 1:505); italics added. See a similar presentation of Constantine as divine salvific agent in 1.5f.; 1.24; esp. 1.43; 1.46; 2.12 [as Mosaic type]; 2.28; and 2.42. The “Caesars” refer to Constantine’s three sons—Constantinus, Constantius, Constans—whom Eusebius goes on to describe, “In the course of this period, his three sons had been admitted at different times as his colleagues in the empire. . . . Having thus reared a threefold offspring, a *Trinity*, as it were, of pious

The church welcomed Constantine when he came to power because it had already been primed by the end of the third century through the spread of Christoplatonism.⁸⁹ Though monastic-escapist believers and Christendom-dominionistic believers were often antagonistic toward one another (a pattern common till today), Augustine brought the two together (see figure 5.7). The Messiah is both the agent of dominionism for the church militant and the agent of escapism for the church triumphant. Though quite conflicted, this twofold messianic function, expressed practically as “popery and monkery” (as Luther put it), varied little over the next millennium.⁹⁰

sons, and having received them severally at each decennial period to a participation in his imperial authority, he judged the festival of his Tricennalia [thirtieth anniversary of his reign] to be a fit occasion for thanksgiving to the Sovereign Lord of all” (4.40 [NPNF2, 1:550]; italics added).

⁸⁹ This point is well demonstrated by Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 191–207.

⁹⁰ So Luther chided,

But one should do to them [papists and monks] as they do to our people and demand that they recant their abominations and prove it by casting off all the abuses that have prevailed against faith and good works in their churches among their people, so that one could know them by their fruits (Matt. 7:16). Otherwise, one cannot believe their mere words and gestures, that is, their sheepskins. Arius, too, should have recanted in the same way, confessed his error, and actually attacked his former doctrine and conduct, as St. Augustine did his Manichaeism, as many people are now doing with their former popery and monkery, among whom, by the grace of God, I can number myself. (“On the Councils and the Church [1539],” *LW*, 41:85)

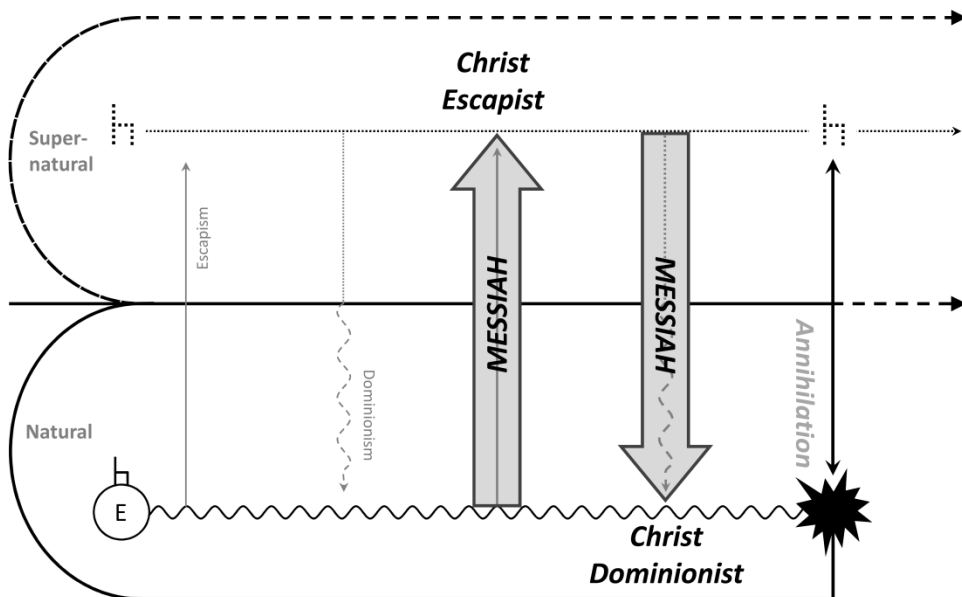


Figure 5.7 – The Conflicted Messianic Hope of Augustinian Christoplatonism

Though the dispensationalist movement restored to Christology a Jewish eschatological emphasis, it retained the Platonic escapism. Jesus’ mission as “king of the Jews” is generally unrelated to his heavenly Gentile mission. Therefore we have a doubly confusing messianic expectation: *Christos tōn ethnōn* (Christ of the Gentiles) vs. *Christos tōn Ioudaiōn* (Christ of the Jews). For this reason dispensationalists have emphasized the inane idea of a pretribulational rapture.⁹¹ The Messiah comes twice at the end of the age according to his two messianic roles—secretly the first time to take the Gentile church to immaterial heaven and openly the second time to rule over the Jewish kingdom on earth. So Lewis Sperry Chafer delineated:

A clear distinction should be observed between the Scriptures which announce the coming of Christ into the air to receive His Bride, the Church, unto Himself thus to end her pilgrim journey in the world and those Scriptures which announce the coming of Christ to the earth in power and great glory, to judge Israel and the nations and to reign on David’s throne

⁹¹ See a rebuttal to the notion of a pretribulational rapture in George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); and Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973).

from Jerusalem. The first event is in no way whatsoever a part of the second event; it is Christ's way of delivering His people from the *cosmos* world before the divine judgments fall upon it.⁹²

Thus Chafer concluded "that in the first event the movement is upward from earth to heaven, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 . . . and that in the second advent the movement is downward from heaven to earth, as in Revelation 19:11–16."⁹³ So we see dualistic messianic functions according to the dualistic plans of salvation (see figure 5.8).⁹⁴

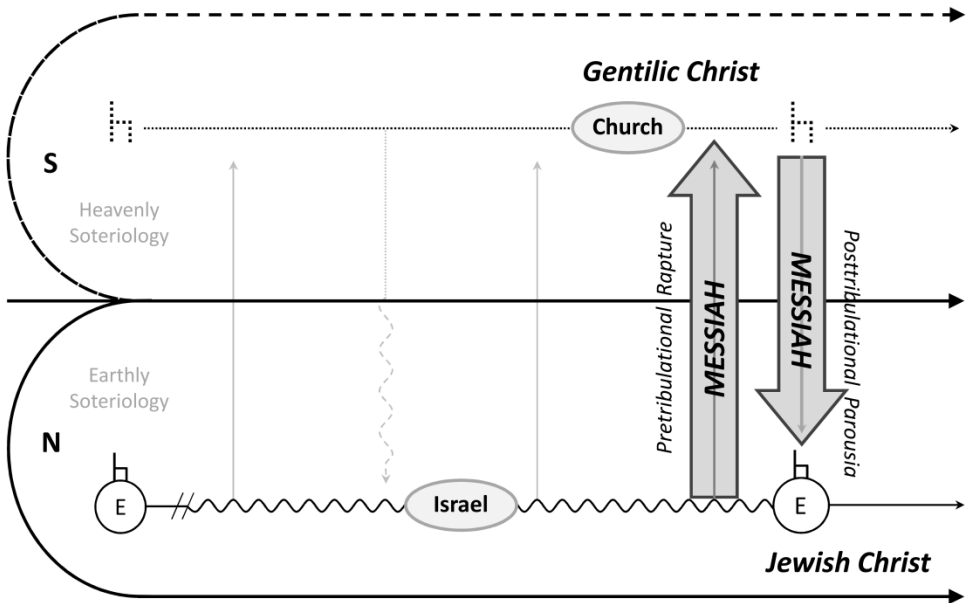


Figure 5.8 – The Dualistic Messianic Hope of Dispensational Christoplatonism

⁹² *Systematic Theology*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 288.

⁹³ *Ibid.*; though with qualification: "These events, though not always clearly distinguished in every Scripture, are naturally classified by the character of the conditions and incidents accompanying them" (*Ibid.*). Chafer goes on to awkwardly classify each of the major messianic passages according to their respective plans of salvation (pp. 289–310).

⁹⁴ Accordingly, the cruciform-messianic function is equally divided. The Messiah comes to make two new covenants, one with the Gentile church at the cross (which is substantially embodied in the pretribulational rapture—i.e., saving believers from the wrath of God) and the other with the Israelitic kingdom at the second advent; see Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:310–44, esp. 325; John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant with Israel," *BSac* 103 (1946): 16–27; and Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 105–24. See a history of dispensational interpretation of the new covenant in Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *BSac* 152 (1995): 431–56.

Messianic expectation within inaugurationalism is quite similar to its dominionistic predecessor, except with reference to its eschatological conclusion. Within Christendom, Christ's dominionistic mission finds complete fulfillment through the church in this age. Within inaugurationalism, Christ's dominionistic mission finds partial fulfillment through the church in this age and ultimate fulfillment at the second coming.⁹⁵ This Christological "already/not yet" tension is articulated by Oscar Cullmann:

The Kingdom of God will come only at the end of time, but, like the Church itself, the lordship of Christ belongs to the interim between his ascension and return. Thus, as distinguished from the Kingdom of God, the lordship of Christ has already begun. . . .

Just as this lordship has a beginning, so it has also an end. According to the New Testament, the end cannot be described in terms of a date, but it can be described in terms of an event, the return of Christ. The lordship of Christ began with his ascension and will end with his return. . . .

This final act recapitulates in a concentrated and definitive form everything which has already happened before and everything that is taking place in the present—above all the victory over Satan and the "powers." . . .

The period of the Church coincides perfectly with the period of Christ's lordship—also in terms of the characteristic tension between present and future and in terms of what we have said about the invasion of the new aeon.⁹⁶

However, the New Testament everywhere distinguishes different motives and agendas for the first and second comings of Christ. The first is fundamentally to bear sin (cf. John 12:47; 1 Peter 3:18), while the second is ultimately to bring salvation (cf. Heb. 9:28; 1 Thess. 1:10). Indeed Christ has been given all authority in this age (cf. Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:21), sitting at God's right hand (cf. Acts 2:33; 1 Peter 3:22), but he rules over creation in this age *in mercy* (cf.

⁹⁵ Note Cullmann's diagram in *Christ and Time* (trans. Floyd V. Filson [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950], 188) of concentric circles with the "reign of Christ" equaling the combined circles of the "church" and the "world"—the obvious conclusion (though skillfully evaded) would be that Jesus' mission in this age is to expand the church circle so as to include the world circle, which is likewise the mission of the second advent.

⁹⁶ *Christology of the New Testament*, 224–26.

Eph. 2:4–7; Rom. 2:4–5), *waiting* to make his enemies his footstool (cf. Heb. 10:13; Acts 3:19–21). Inaugurationism perverts and conflates the agenda of the Messiah into *one homogenous-dominionistic mission* (see figure 5.9).⁹⁷ The Messiah came the first time to inaugurate the divine takeover, and he will appear the second time to finish it. Such homology wholly ruins the basic nature of the New Testament gospel, leaving the church with a proclamation that is neither cruciform nor apocalyptic.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ George E. Ladd demonstrates well the theological train wreck caused by realized eschatology:

Confession of His Messiahship is at the same time confession of the presence of the Kingdom of God, for it is the mission of the Messiah to bring the Kingdom of God to men. At this point, we must understand that there was for the disciples a problem in the recognition of our Lord's Messiahship even as there was a problem in their recognition of the presence of the Kingdom of God.

We have discovered that the popular expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God meant that [*sic*] the end of the Age and the manifestation of God's rule in power and glory, when all evil would be purged from the earth. However, Jesus taught that the Kingdom had come but in a new and unexpected form. Although the old Age goes on, the Kingdom of God has invaded the realm of Satan to deliver men from his rule. This was the mystery, the new disclosure of the divine purpose in the mission of our Lord. . . .

His mission, as well as His Messiahship, was a "mystery"; it was not to bring the evil Age to its end and inaugurate The Age to Come. It was rather to bring the powers of the future Age to men in the midst of the present evil Age; and this mission involved His death. Therefore when the crowds tried to make Him king, He withdrew. . . . Even as they rejected His offer of the Kingdom because it was not what they were looking for, so they rejected His Messiahship because He was not the conquering, ruling monarch they desired.

Finally, however, the inner circle of the disciples began to realize that in spite of the fact that the Kingdom was not present in mighty power, in spite of the fact that Jesus was not to be a Davidic King, He was nevertheless the Messiah and the Kingdom was indeed present in His person and mission. . . .

Once they had realized that He was the Messiah, even though in a new and unexpected role, Jesus instructed them as to His further purpose. His purpose was not that of a national restoration of Israel. On the contrary, He would create a new people. . . .

The Greek word, *ekklesia*, is the word most commonly used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to Israel as the people of God. The very use of this word suggests that our Lord purposed to bring into existence a new people who would take the place of the old Israel who rejected both His claim to Messiahship and His offer of the Kingdom of God. (*The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], 109–12)

⁹⁸ If only Ladd had followed through on "the messianic secret" — "In the future he will be the glorious King (Mt. 25:34), and his Kingdom will then be manifested in great power (Mt. 13:41–43; Lk. 22:29–30). But meanwhile, his messiahship involved not a throne but a cross, not glory but humility, not reigning but dying. His present role is that of the Suffering Servant; only in the future will he be the glorious messianic King. The messianic concept, as entertained by the people, must undergo a radical

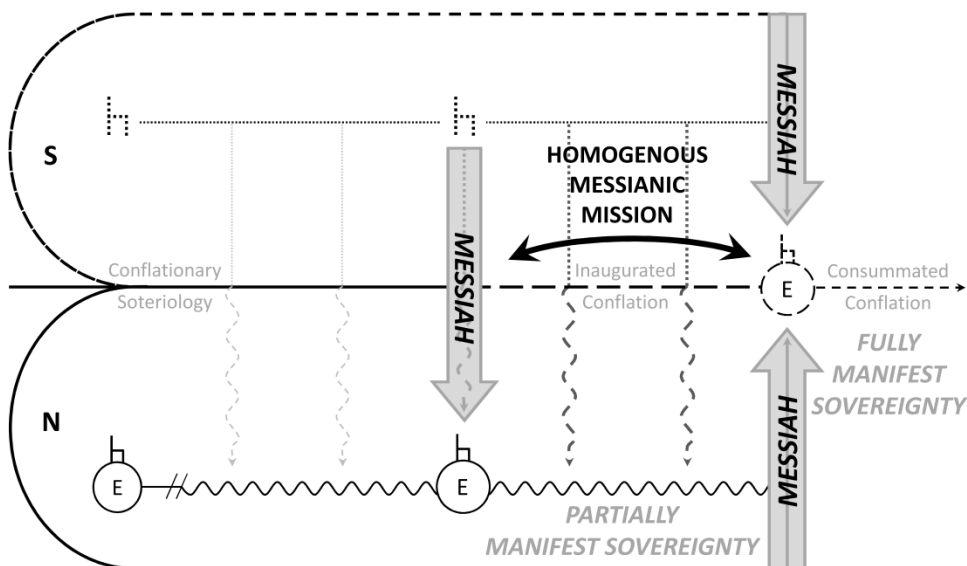


Figure 5.9 – The Homogenous Messianic Hope of Inaugurational Christoplatonism

In conclusion, our faith in Christ Jesus and his return is the very source of our hope. It is “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) which fuels the church in its race of faith unto the day of Christ. Furthermore, living in a world “without God and without hope” (Eph. 2:12, NLT), the church is in desperate need of a restoration of biblical hope. Those who get consumed by various Christoplatonic perversions are left with a tawdry hope, often resorting to the strength of depraved human beings who walk in the delusion of a self-imposed messianic complex.⁹⁹ Yet even

transformation. . . . For he was the Messiah; but he must suffer before he should enter his glory (Lk. 24:26)” (*Theology of the New Testament*, 180).

⁹⁹ So Moltmann,

Very early on, renunciation of hope for the parousia was the price paid for Christianity’s integration into the Roman empire. In their worship and their persecutions, the first Christian congregations prayed passionately: “Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come soon” (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). But the Constantinian imperial church began to pray *pro mora finis*—that the end might be delayed—hoping thereby to recommend itself as a religion that supported the state and preserved the world. People who are trying to fit into the world and to gain its recognition are bound to dispense with hope for the messianic kingdom which will change and renew everything. They have to do without the vision of an alternative future in the kingdom of Christ. But for people who embark on a true conversion which takes them out of what they are, present hope for the coming of Christ and his kingdom is important. They need this sustaining staff of hope, in order to free themselves from the present and to confront it freely (1 Cor. 7:31). They no longer love “the nature of this world,” which is injustice and violence, but begin to “love the appearance of the Lord.” (*Way of Jesus Christ*, 313–14)

this hope wanes in light of the twentieth century's two world wars, its host of diabolical dictators, various genocides, and rampant multinational-corporate greed (forgetting not the criminal usury of its financiers)—compounded by the threat of famine, overpopulation, terrorism, and nuclear war—not to mention the myriad of energy crises, financial crises, health crises, ecological crises, and the burgeoning global breakdown of the family unit.

Having lost our true messianic hope, we have no real answers for a world wallowing in confusion and despair. Moreover, having put our hope in this life, we have thrown in our lot with a pie-eyed world and have fallen under the curse of the apostle Paul: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, *let him be accursed*. O Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22, NKJV).¹⁰⁰ Conversely, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have *loved His appearing*" (2 Tim. 4:8, NASB).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ It is assumed Paul is here referencing those who reject the resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12ff., 32ff.), which rests upon an apocalyptic messianic hope (cf. 15:20ff., 45ff.). Thus it is implied that those who do not love the Lord do not cry, *Maranatha!* Akin to the close of the New Testament, i.e., "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20), the Aramaic expression references longing for the age to come. See *Didache* 10.6, "May grace come, and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent. *Maranatha!* Amen" (Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, updated ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], 263).

¹⁰¹ Anthony Hoekema concludes well:

This same lively expectation of Christ's return should mark the church of Jesus Christ today. If this expectation is no longer present, there is something radically wrong. It is the unfaithful servant in Jesus' parable who says in his heart, "My lord delays his coming" (Luke 12:45). There may be various reasons for the loss of this sense of expectation. . . . Whatever the reasons may be, the loss of a lively, vital anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ is a sign of a most serious spiritual malady in the church. Though there may be differences between us on various aspects of eschatology, all Christians should eagerly look forward to Christ's return, and should live in the light of that expectation every day anew. (*Bible and the Future*, 110–11)