

ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**The Role of the Messiah in the Messianic Apocalypse and the Gospel of Matthew**

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by

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## **The Role of the Messiah in the Messianic Apocalypse and the Gospel of Matthew**

The word "Messiah" originated from the Hebrew word "Māšîaḥ," which means "anointed one." It has great significance in both Judaism and Christianity, and as a result, the identity of the Messiah has been a subject of interest for people with different interpretive persuasions of the messianic prophecies in scripture and other religious texts like the Dead Sea Scrolls. In Judaism, the Messiah is expected to possess uncommon military might and leadership experience that will enable him to restore the throne of David to its former glory. The anointing of this Messiah, like David was anointed, would empower him for this great endeavor and restore the nation of Israel to its place of prominence as the blessed and favored people of God. On the other hand, Christians have a radically different view of the Messiah. They believe that Jesus, born into a poor family, is the promised Messiah who brought salvation without any display of military might. This salvation is available to both Jews and Gentiles.

The aim of this research paper is to explore the subject of the Messiah's role in the Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521) text of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This exploration is conducted in light of the Christian understanding of the Messiah as covered by a few selected texts in Matthew's Gospel. The study seeks to explore the similarities and differences between the Messiah of the Messianic Apocalypse and that of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel was selected for this study because many scholars believe that he wrote primarily to a Jewish audience who were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Various academic resources, bible commentaries and books were also consulted and formed the foundation for this paper.

According to Vermes (2011), the Messianic Apocalypse is often referred to as the "Resurrection fragment" consisting of sixteen fragments. It is dated to the beginning of the first century BCE. However, Vermes did not believe that the use of the word "apocalypse" was fitting

or justifiable for the text. He did acknowledge that the texts were poems that mentioned a messianic figure, but these mentions were without the addition of Aaron or Israel. Thus, it is challenging to determine what type of Messiah is being referred to. There were also references to biblical passages from Psalms and Isaiah. The idea of resurrection is linked to the concept of the Kingdom of God in a similar way to the Gospels.

Perrin (2008) sought to explore the potential parallels between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament in relation to Jesus' identity as the Messiah. He did this by focusing on the explicit claims of Jesus' divine sonship and the implicit notion of how Jesus' actions and deeds indicate his identity as Israel's awaited Messiah. Part of the adopted approach was to examine the Old Testament and New Testament evidence for divine sonship and to discuss the pre-Christian messianic figure in 4Q521.

Perrin's exploration of the title of Jesus as the Son of God was a key aspect in drawing parallels with the Dead Sea Scrolls. He first established that the New Testament evidence portraying Jesus as the Son of God in the gospels alone was very extensive. He also pointed out that the importance of the claim is clear from the fact that three out of the four gospel writers included it as an integral part of their message's programmatic statements (Mark 1:1; Luke 3:38; John 20:31). The assertion was that Jesus was evidently declared to be the Son of God, and no one else bore that title. Perrin concluded that another of the Dead Sea Scrolls-4Q426, was full of examples of one who would bear the title Son of God and it is similar to the same Son of God of the gospels.

However, when it came to 4Q521, Perrin explained that 4Q521 was a fragmentary text that described events that would occur in the time of the revelation of the Messiah, and

concluded that There was a direct correlation between the acts described and the identification of the Messiah in the gospel of Matthew. For example, Perrin noted that,

Col. ii of fragments 2 and 4. Here the text opens with the explicit reference to the authoritative role of "His (i.e. the Lord's) Messiah," and proceeds with two distinct lists delineating the divine events expected to occur. The first list draws most likely upon Ps. 146:7-8 and anticipates the release of prisoners, restored sight for the blind and lifting up of the downtrodden. The second list in part draws upon Isa. 61:1 and proclaims healing for the critically wounded, resurrection of the dead and delivery of good news to the afflicted (pp.224-225).

Turner (2008) in his commentary on the NT book of Matthew discussed the matter of Christology by stating that Jesus was called the Messiah in the very first verse of the Matthew's Gospel at the end of the genealogy (Matthew 1:17-17). The next mention was at the time describing the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus in Matthew 1:18. He emphasized how the various connections of Jesus to being the Messiah or Christ was purposeful to show the strong link Jesus had with Israel's history and hopes. A messiah was defined as someone who was specially anointed by God for a specific service or office.

Turner continued to emphasizing the Messiahship of Jesus in Matthew by stating that the title occurred as a royal title in some biblical texts and especially in the Old testament, but that the Christian understanding of a Messiah who would be lowly, suffer and eventual be killed on a tree was something foreign to the Judaism of Jesus' day. This was evidenced in the doubt expressed by John the Baptist when he sent his disciples questioning if Jesus was the actual Messiah. However, Jesus reaffirmed the nature of His Messiahship by displaying healings and

miracles that helped the poor and the broken. This then was the report that Jesus wanted the disciples of John to give to him.

It is interesting to note that the deeds of Jesus and what he affirmed in view of John the Baptist's disciples were somewhat in the same spirit of the words concerning the deeds of the Messiah in 4Q521. Unlike a military ruler who uses violence to conquer the opposition and release prisoners, Jesus releases prisoners from the spiritual prison of demonization or demonic possession depending on the bible translation. Jesus restored sight to spiritually and physically blind, he uplifted the downtrodden and preached the good news of the kingdom to the poor who had no stake in the kingdoms of the world. Jesus radically challenged the culturally established understanding of what the Messiah was supposed to be and do.

Turner (2008) concluded that though the Messiah is crucified, he overcame the grave and death, and was given all authority as was documented in Matthew 28:18. A potential key to Matthew's unique view of Jesus as Messiah is in connection of "Messiah" to "Son of God" in two passages (Matthew 16:16; 26:63-64). This is in line with Perrin's observation of the title of Jesus as the Son of God to be a key aspect of parallelism with the Dead Sea Scrolls. Jesus was the true Son of God, but it is most likely that the sect at Qumran did not have a clear vision of a crucified Son of God.

Nonetheless, According to Perrin (2008), both the Christian Messiah and the messiah of 4Q521 were expected to usher in and establish a period of great health and welfare, and this would have the signs of restored health, good news for the poor, and the raising of the dead. Both texts exhibit a dependency on selected prophecies from the book of Isaiah that refer to the blind receiving sight, deaf hearing, and the preaching of good news to the poor. The most significant

point of convergence between Matt. 11:5 and 4Q521 is the bold assertion that the dead will be raised up. In this regard, both texts mirror one another closely in that the statement of resurrection is immediately followed by the claim that the poor will have good news preached to them.

Collins in his 1994 article also emphasized the works of the messiah as recorded in the 4Q521. One thing that immediately stands out is that just like the Messiah Jesus, the messiah of the 4Q521 performs miraculous works. For instance, Fr.2 had a verse that asserted that, “Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power.” It is also said in Fr.2 that the messiah is, “he who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, strengthens the bent.”

The Messiah of the New Testament went about doing many miraculous good works which involved liberating captives and is especially demonstrated in the expelling of demons from the victims they had held captive. He also opened the eyes of the blind, caused the lame to work, and did many other good miraculous works.

During the time of Jesus on the earth, there seemed to have been the prevailing belief and expectation of the Jews that their Messiah was coming and that he would have the ability to perform special signs and miracles such as those listed in the 4Q521. This sentiment is captured in Matthew’s gospel in the story of the healing of a man who was blind and dumb (Matthew 12:22-27). The man was bound by an evil spirit that was responsible for his predicament, but Jesus was able to heal the man by the casting out of the evil spirit, and after which the man was able to both speak and see. What was remarkable was the observing crowd asking, “Can this man really be the Son of David?” France (2007) in his commentary on the gospel of Matthew noted

that the question about if Jesus were the Son of David was actually the crowd discussing if Jesus was the Messiah.

France's exegesis of the book of Matthew connected the title "Messiah" as not describing the human background of Jesus but rather his theological status. The usage of "Christ" as the "surname" of Jesus was more of a modern usage which was not the original intent in the Gospel. It was rather a powerful title that depicted Jesus as the long-awaited deliverer of God's people. Consequently, in the Messiah Jesus, the Jewish people's history had now come to its climax. France further noted that "Son of David" occurred several times in the gospel of Matthew and was used as a title indicative of the messianic role of Jesus. This title was linked to king David and showed the central role he played in the genealogy of Jesus. Moreover, the "Son of David" was linked to the promise of 2 Samuel 7:12-16 in which it was shown that the kingdom would be established with David's son.

France, in exegeting Matthew 15:21-28, further highlighted the link between Jesus as the Messiah and the signs that were to accompany that role. It cannot be overemphasized that these signs were similar to those indicating the messiah of the Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521). Matthew 15:21-28 covers the story of a woman who needed Jesus to deliver her daughter from the demons tormenting her. What was striking about this encounter was how the woman addressed Jesus. France noted that although the woman was a Gentile, she repeatedly addressed Jesus as the Son of David while asking for mercy. This was similar to the pattern of the two blind men of Matthew 9:27 who were healed after addressing Jesus with the same title. However, the woman added the title "Lord" alongside "Son of David," and this may have been Matthew's way of indicating that the woman was more than simply polite; she had some knowledge of Judaism and by using the Jewish messianic title, she hoped to attract the interest of a Jewish teacher who

would not have expected such a title in a foreign context. The conclusion was that perhaps using this flattering title unwittingly drew attention to the strangeness of a Gentile plea for help from the Jewish Messiah.

In the book *The Scepter and the Star*, the author notes that the Messiah was introduced in the first line of fragment 2 ii, where it is said, “heaven and earth would obey the Messiah.” The author continues by asserting that the texts of the fragments match the anointed figure of Isaiah 61, but that the resurrection of the dead is something reserved for God alone. The main idea is that the Messiah who heaven and earth would obey is an anointed eschatological prophet that is Elijah or a prophet like him.

In conclusion, while the sect at Qumran did have expectations of a Messiah, it is very unlikely that they had a picture of someone like Jesus in mind. However, there are strong parallels between Jesus the Messiah and the messiah of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many of which border on miraculous works, being a good teacher, fostering holiness and righteousness, feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, liberating the captive, judging the wicked, blessing the righteous, and the question of raising the dead. There is no doubt that Matthew’s Gospel clearly identifies Jesus Christ as doing all these things.

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