IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE PREDICTED MESSIAH? A HISTORICAL-EVIDENTIAL APPROACH TO SPECIFIC OLD TESTAMENT MESSIANIC PROPHECIES AND THEIR NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to establish if critically acceptable historical-evidential reasons exist for believing that Jesus Christ is the direct fulfillment of the specific OT messianic texts included in the study. The study presupposes many of the conclusions of historical-critical scholarship and employs historical-evidential criteria to evaluate the evidence and attempt to establish the historical warrant for affirming such belief. Secondarily, this study seeks to find minimal facts related to these specific OT prophetic texts. To qualify as a minimal fact, two conditions must be met: (1) there must be more than adequate scholarly evidences usually consisting of several critically ascertained lines of argumentation; and (2) there must be agreement among the majority of contemporary scholars about the historicity of the event or the specific claim the minimal fact affirms.

This investigation envisions the existence of three possible outcomes for each prophecy examined: (1) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient historical evidence establishes the claim as probable, (2) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable, and (3) sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.

The historical-evidential approach employed by this study yields the probability of two direct fulfillments and the emergence of fifteen minimal facts. The author thus concludes that the historical evidence supports the probability that the two specific OT passages affirmed in this study, (2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Micah 5:2), directly prophesy regarding some aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry. On three other occasions (Psalm 2:7; Psalm 16:10; Malachi 3:1), a distinct possibility exists that these texts directly prophesy regarding some aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry.
DEDICATION

Foremost among those who have contributed to this work is my wife Suzan. You have, by faith, waited patiently through the years for me to complete my doctoral degree. Without your encouragement during moments of despair or fatigue, I certainly would have chosen an easier way. The dedication of this dissertation to you as a testimony to your patience, love and endurance seems a woefully inadequate way to express my love and gratitude. Better days are coming soon. I love spending life with you!

Doug
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PART I INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

Background and Preliminary Considerations

Is Jesus of Nazareth the ultimate anointed messianic king (נְשִׁי / Χριστός) who was to rule Israel from the throne of David as predicted by the Old Testament (OT) prophets? Since circa AD 30, a number of people proudly, some even defiantly, claimed that Jesus is this Messiah. In some cases, his followers made these claims despite persecution, threats, and even martyrdom by antagonists who were vehement in their opposition to the growing sect. According to biblical data, John the Baptist (JTB) was the first to provide public witness affirming that Jesus was the fulfillment of OT prophetic messianic predictions. He identified Jesus as the anointed one (Mark 1:10; John 1:32; Q 3:21–22).

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3 James McConkey Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 20. Throughout this dissertation, NT references will be weighed in accordance with accepted standards for textual and historical evaluation. Although not an exhaustive list, these standards include: independent or multiple attestation, criterion of dissimilarity, contextual
Jesus himself affirmed his status as Χριστός during interviews with the High Priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin by overtly stating, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62b, English Standard Version). The implication is that by evoking the image of the transcendent “son of man” appearing in Daniel 7:13–14 Jesus was claiming status as both the predicted Messiah and the judge of those present during this trial. Pontius Pilate also inquired about Jesus’ status when he asking, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And Jesus answered him, ‘You have said so’ (Mark 15:2b). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed Jesus as the fulfillment of OT promises (Acts 3:18–25), especially those related to messianic suffering. Later, at the house of Cornelius, Peter again referred to the prophets while describing Jesus as judge and redeemer (Acts 10:42–43). In 1 Peter 1:10–12, providing salvation as a distinctly messianic function is also attributed to Jesus; Peter contends this was foretold by the prophets. Stephen ties prophetic prediction to Jesus: Stephen specifically is reported as mentioning, the coming of the Righteous One, (Acts 7:52) which, in context, can only be referring to the crucifixion Jesus.

The work of the apostle Paul is of major importance for this study because of his repeated references to the OT prophets. Saul of Tarsus was one of the primary persecutors of believing Jews. His persecutions began shortly after the formation of the new Jewish sect (Christians) and

credibility, and the criterion of embarrassment. Also considered are factors such as eyewitness testimony, whether the documents are primary or secondary in nature, archeological evidence, and current critical scholarship.

4 Unless otherwise noted Bible passages rendered in English use the English Standard Version.

5 Mark 14:62 appears in one of the most well attested passages in the NT. Jesus apparently identifies himself as the transcendent figure and judge who receives the kingdom described in Daniel 7:13–14. This figure receives a kingdom and dominion over all peoples.

6 Paul also affirms the suffering of the Messiah in a creedal hymn (1Cor 15:3) that seems to predate his own writing and probably stems from the earliest Palestinian Christian thoughts about the Messiah. Ben Witherington, III, Jesus, Paul and the End of the World (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 191.
its initial expansion into the regions surrounding Judea. His conversion experience profoundly changed both the direction of his life and his religious belief system (Gal 1:11–17; 1Cor 15:8). The cornerstone of Paul’s arguments advocating Jesus as the Messiah are the words of the OT prophets; these figure prominently in several of his recorded speeches in Acts 13:27; 26:22ff; 28:23, Romans 1:2–3; 3:21, and 1 Corinthians 15:3–4. When Paul became the persecuted rather than the persecutor, his interlocutors pressed him for answers as to the basis for his affirmation of Jesus as the predicted Messiah. Paul’s responses routinely included reasons based on fulfilled OT prophecy. The normative Jewish interpretations of the early first century would not unambiguously have delineated Jesus as the Messiah. Even so, Paul almost certainly expected any Jew with the requisite knowledge of the Tanakh to follow his arguments and reach the same conclusion.\(^7\)

Several of the early Christian fathers add their voices to those of Peter and Paul by supplementing the biblical data concerning the vital role OT prophecy plays as an apologetic tool. They did this when demonstrating the truth of the Christian religion and its assertions about the messianic status of Jesus. Two examples will suffice to support this observation. The first extant apologetic documents of the church are those of Justin Martyr (Justin), in which prophecy frequently is appealed to as evidence for the truth of Christianity.\(^8\) Another influential writer, Origen, in his well-known work Against Celsus, employs OT prophecy to defend the Messiah being born of a virgin within the house of David. Interestingly, in this case OT prophecy is used

\(^7\) This seems to be the implication of Acts 26:27. Paul speaks as though belief in the prophets equals belief that Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies. Similarly, Paul confirms this assertion by citing OT prophecy stating that those who reject his argument are both unable to perceive and dull (Acts 28:26–27).

to argue in a way reminiscent of Paul’s letters because the Jew Celsus believes in predictive prophecy, but rejects Christianity.

And these arguments I employ as against a Jew who believes in prophecy. Let Celsus now tell me, or any of those who think with him, with what meaning the prophet utters either these statements about the future, or the others which are contained in the prophecies? Is it with any foresight of the future or not? If with a foresight of the future, then the prophets were divinely inspired; if with no foresight of the future, let him explain the meaning of one who speaks thus boldly regarding the future, and who is an object of admiration among the Jews because of his prophetic powers.9

The goal at this juncture of the dissertation is not to provide an exhaustive list of apologetic data, but to bring attention to the early and wide-ranging use of fulfilled prophecy as a legitimate apologetic tool. It is ironic that many within Christendom as well as agnostics and atheists, now dismiss a once valuable and often deployed apologetic evidence for Christianity. The proposed remedy for this condition is a revitalization of the study of messianic prophecy for apologetic purposes by applying contemporary historical critical methods to these ancient oracles and drawing conclusions based on strict verification criteria. Criteria-verifying conditions include: (1) primary fulfillments, (2) critical dating, (3) the impossibility of staging fulfillments, (4) minimal facts,10 and (5) justifiable historical descriptions, based on probabilities as indicated by adequate historical data.


10 Habermas asserts that minimal facts are “well-evidenced, usually for multiple reasons, and they are generally admitted by critical scholars who research this particular area.” Gary R. Habermas, “Evidentialist Apologetics,” in Five Views on Apologetics, ed. Steven B Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 100. In addition, he gives priority to the “well-attested grounds” since the opinions of scholars can be mistaken or the “intellectual climate changes” For a more complete definition see Definition of a Minimal Fact below. Throughout this work, the term minimal facts will be italicized because of their methodological significance in the study.
Statement of the Problem

This study will seek to establish if critically acceptable historical-evidential reasons exist for believing that Jesus is the direct fulfillment of the specific OT messianic texts included in the study. This investigation envisions the existence of three possible outcomes for each prophecy examined: (1) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient historical evidence establishes the claim as probable, (2) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable, and (3) sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.

Significance of the Problem

The problem under investigation seeks to identify and to examine critically acceptable historical-evidential reasons for believing that Jesus is the direct fulfillment of the OT messianic texts. Questions about the status, nature, and person of Jesus have been the subject of many scholarly investigations. A significant lacuna exists in critical scholarly data, however. The lacuna lies in the treatment of the relationship of Jesus to his purported fulfillment of major OT prophetic predictions. This scholarly void is at least partly attributable to the a priori anti-supernatural rationalist arguments of the Enlightenment. In his now infamous “ugly broad ditch” statement, G. E. Lessing presses the issue of how “accidental truths of history could never become necessary truths of reason.” Although not outright denying the possibility of supernatural events, Lessing apparently considers assertions of the supernatural historically indemonstrable because of their dissimilarity to natural events. The difficulty involved in

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12 Ibid. Lessing, borrowing Aristotle’s phrase, describes history and assertions of the supernatural as “μεταβασις εις άλλο γενος.”
justifiably “jumping the ditch” between the historical and the metaphysical, or the contingent and the necessary, remains key to understanding the reasons for this lacuna. It also reveals the reticence of scholars to exegete and interpret data that are inherently ambiguous and subject to hermeneutical manipulation.\textsuperscript{13}

Lessing was not the first to point out the ambiguity of historical descriptions as indicators of supernatural activity, or even the difficulty of an unqualified identification of primary fulfillments of prophecy. Celsus reproached the idea of Christians employing prophecy as an apologetic defense, based on his contention that “prophecies agree with ten thousand other things more credibly than with Jesus.”\textsuperscript{14} What is the evidential and factual basis of these claims? It is incumbent on skeptics including Celsus, in the spirit of true scholarship, historically-evidentially, “to have demonstrated with regard to each particular prophecy that it can apply to other events with equal or greater probability than to Jesus.”\textsuperscript{15} Bare assertions of absolute certainty made

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\textsuperscript{14} Origen, “Origen Against Celsus,” in \textit{Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second}, Cont. Celsus 2:28.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
about alleged historical events are misplaced. Rationale, historical, and empirical data must support such claims, regardless of the advocated position.

Recent scholarship and the popular media are no less critical of the possibility of genuine predictive prophecy. Most recent discussions have centered specifically on the related issue of biblical inerrancy, the impossibility of miracles, or speculative eschatological issues. Few outside of the Internet press have actually dealt directly with specific messianic prophecies.

With these difficulties in mind, what may one conclude? If demonstrated historically-evidentially probable that Jesus’ life and claims are the fulfillment of certain OT messianic prophecies, such fulfillment would lend credibility to his claim as King of the Jews. It would also support claims made of his resurrection, a future second coming, and the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. If the positive claims of Jesus regarding his messiahship are probabilistically true and, therefore, warranting belief, so must his equally potent assertions of eternal punishment for those who fail to heed his call to repent and follow him. If certain events of Jesus’ life and ministry (“accidental truths of history”) are demonstrated as probabilistically true, those events imply supernatural agency and, consequently, a rationally necessary being actualizing those historical truths.

The Study’s Contribution to Professional Knowledge and Practice

The initial survey of the literature pertaining to this dissertation has revealed few modern full-length scholarly works that treat OT prophecies and their purported NT fulfillment from a critical, exegetical, and historical-evidential perspective. Further, none has attempted to reduce

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the data to minimal facts. The available works treating prophecy date from the early church fathers, followed by centuries during which few additional insights were offered. Scholarly interest in OT messianic prophecy resumes in the nineteenth century, followed by important corpora of twentieth-century works. In proportion to other theological interests, however, few full scholarly treatments exist.

In contrast, several recent studies on the life and resurrection of Jesus employ historical-evidential and minimal-facts criteria or other forms of critical scholarship to advocate that he was a real historical person, a miracle worker, an itinerant preacher, an apocalyptic prophet, and resurrected from the dead. The lacuna in current literature is a treatment of OT prophecies that link aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry to purported fulfillments from the perspective of historical-evidential criteria and critical scholarship by attempting to sift the data for the historical bedrock.

Critical scholarship disallows presuppositions such as the authority and inerrancy of the Bible or evangelical presuppositions on the dating and authorship of texts. With few exceptions, contemporary treatments of OT prophecy tend to be overly broad or written for popular

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21 Ibid. The term “bedrock” is one employed by Licona in his expansive study on the historical Jesus.
audiences. These deficiencies do not necessarily make these treatments incorrect, but an in-depth analysis of the facts, supported by concomitant intellectual restraint, should produce a composition that will begin to fill the lacuna associated with this subject. The study will open up new research possibilities for messianic prophecy, and thus will contribute to the theological and scholarly advancement in the field.

In addition to the theological and scholarly contribution of the study, the apologetic contribution is noteworthy for three reasons. First, with few exceptions, skeptical scholars have avoided predictive prophecy as subject matter in scholarly works because of naturalistic assumptions based on \textit{a priori} rejection of miracles as a possible explanation for otherwise unexplained phenomena. Second, other writers have eschewed anything labeled prophecy because of the gullibility of the public, manipulative approaches adopted by some televangelists, or authors overstating their conclusions. Third, conclusions drawn from historical descriptions are neither certain, exhaustive, nor unassailable; as a result, they leave the researcher open to

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22 One recent exception to this statement is Herbert W. Bateman, IV, Darrell L. Bock, and Gordon H. Johnston, \textit{Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King} (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012).

23 Three of Hume’s quotes are important in relation to the rejection of miracles. First, “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.” Second, “The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), ‘That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.’” Third, “For \textit{first}, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.” David Hume, \textit{An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Selections from a Treatise of Human Nature} (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1921), 120–122.

criticism. Nevertheless, this lack of certainty does not eliminate the possibility that disciplined research into many historical events yields valid and substantial knowledge of those events. Apologetically, the author will seek during the course of this study, to overcome all three of these problems with appropriate methodological neutrality.

**An Overview of the Components of the Dissertation**

*Key Elements*

This dissertation proposes to conduct an analysis of particular OT texts and their NT counterparts that Christians claim are both messianic and primarily fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The available literary, historical, and archeological methods will be utilized to verify or disprove these claims. The process will begin with a literature review, in Chapter 2, that will include works from a broad spectrum of scholarship addressing the specific issues of messianic prophecy. The works will be discussed in light of their methodology and especially as they relate to evidential approaches to the question of fulfillment. This portion of the work will also include critical analysis of the relationship between historiography and prophecy as miracle, since predictive prophecy, if it exists, is a sub-species of miracle.

The heart of the dissertation, Chapters 3–7: “Exegesis, Analysis, and Synthesis,” will approach the texts in three phases. First, the work will be narrowly focused on specific allegedly predictive OT messianic texts and their alleged NT fulfillment texts. Second, exegetical analysis of relevant biblical and historical data will isolate relevant evidence. Some of this evidence may rise to a level of certainty that qualifies as minimal facts. In the final chapter, evidence rising to this level will be separated and highlighted in relation to data not as clearly attested. Specific OT

25 See footnote 10.
prophecies and any relationship they may have to alleged NT fulfillments will be of primary significance at this final stage of the study.

Third, the conclusions gleaned from the historical evidence, including evidence rising to the level of *minimal facts*, will be applied to, and weighed against, plausible competing hypotheses proposed by other scholars. This component of the study will focus on evaluating theories (and their critiques) of the primary and best-known scholars who have addressed the *specific prophecy.*26 Elements of the texts that will be considered include rejecting the predictive component, denying the messianic character of the text, or disconnecting the prophecy from Jesus of Nazareth.

**Chapter 3 the First Group of Biblical Texts**

In reference to the five groups of biblical texts selected for this study. The first group of texts investigates the claim that the *terminus ad quem* for the coming of the Messiah must occur before Israel loses its status as self-governing (Gen 49:10) and before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (Ps 118; Hag 2:7, 9; Mal 3:1).

**Chapter 4 the Second Group of Biblical Texts**

The second group of texts probe the claim that the Messiah would spring from the linage of King David and, correspondingly, that Jesus is a descendant of King David (2 Sam 7:13; Isa 11:1–2; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23–24; and Hos 3:4–5). The NT genealogical data (Matt 1:1–17; Luke 2:4, 3:23 ff.) and Paul’s comments on the issue (Rom 1:3) are important during this phase of study.

26 The more general treatment of whether predictive prophecy is possible is appropriate as an element of the second component.
Chapter 5 the Third Group of Biblical Texts

The third group of texts relates to the geographical location associated with the birth and early life of the Messiah. Micah 5:2 will be examined to substantiate the claim that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, and the parallel claim that Jesus was born in this small village (Matt 2:1–12, Luke 2: 1–7).

Chapter 6 the Fourth Group of Biblical Texts

In the fourth set of passages, Jesus’ miracles in relation to the expectations of the messianic age, the Messiah himself, and the predictions of the OT prophets are analyzed. Jesus’ self-described titular nomens such as “prophet” (Luke 4:17–19), “son of man,” “son of the Blessed” (Mark 14:61–62), and “son of David” (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9; Mark 10:47) all bear implications for his assertion of a future “seated at the right hand of God” (Mark 14:62). The best, and perhaps only currently available, verification of whether these titles attributed to Jesus are justifiable, is an examination of whether Jesus performed the miracles that the OT prophets allegedly predicted would accompany the messianic age (Deut 18:15–18; Isa 29:18; 35:5–6; 61:1–2; Matt 9:35; 11:4–6; Luke 7:22–23).27

Chapter 7 the Fifth Group of Biblical Texts

The fifth group of biblical texts includes Psalm 2:1–12, emphasizing verse 7; Psalm 16, emphasizing verses 9–10; and Psalm 22:1–31, emphasizing verse 16. Psalm 2 is often interpreted as a description of the unique relationship Jesus claimed to have with the God the Father. Psalm 22 is allegedly messianic and some interpreters claim it reports circumstances related to the

27 That Messiah would have a ministry that includes miracles is the opinion of Norman Geisler among others. Norman L. Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 340.
crucifixion of Jesus. Finally, no investigation of allegedly fulfilled messianic prophecy in Psalms would be complete without a treatment of the resurrection claims made by Christians about Jesus. Psalm 16 contains language that may be indicative of the resurrection of Jesus. This portion of the work will not deal in depth with the actual NT data concerning the reported resurrection of Jesus because the resurrection proper has been extensively treated by other scholars. The connection between the alleged OT predictions and the reported resurrection of Jesus will be treated without an *a priori* rejection of its historicity.

**Reasons for Including Each Element**

Five criteria were used to select the texts for this dissertation. First, in combination, the biblical texts must potentially span the entire life of Jesus from his birth to purported resurrection. Second, a straightforward contextual reading of an OT text must envision the sort of event alleged to be its NT fulfillment. Third, a prophecy must have been made decades (or even centuries) prior to its alleged fulfillment. Fourth, all of the prophecies under investigation must be incapable of staged fulfillments, either individually or collectively. If the historicity of the event is probable, the most likely explanation given all the relevant evidence must be either the revealed foreknowledge of God, or another type of miracle, not mere chance, or collusion. Fifth, the prophecies selected must contain enough data to argue for or against Jesus as the probable

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No person or group of persons could possibly arrange for any one individual to fulfill the diverse group of prophecies selected for this investigation.
fulfillment based on evidence or, if necessary, inference to the best explanation. If adequate sources and data are not available for a specific text, it will be eliminated from consideration.

**Overview of Methodology, Key Terms, and Presuppositions**

**Basic Rationale**

This study will seek to establish if critically acceptable historical-evidential or factual reasons exist for believing that Jesus is the direct fulfillment of the OT messianic texts included in the study. The study proposes to answer this primary question by critically examining specific OT prophecies and their NT counterparts to determine what historical-evidential facts about these prophecies and their purported fulfillment can be established. The study will use criteria and methods that many contemporary scholars would accept as yielding methodologically valid evidence. If this objective is successful, the credibility of some of the facts will be distinguished by posing evidence or lines of argumentation that even skeptics and critical scholars will accept (minimal facts). The author will make every attempt to assume a neutral stance on each of the issues and interpret the evidence, according to the criteria outlined below. The results of the study will provide the reader with prudential verification, epistemic warrant for belief, and moral reasons for believing or rejecting Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies.

This author will employ several of the general methodological guidelines used by Michael Licona in *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. In doing so, however, the author acknowledges his “horizons” (i.e., preunderstanding), which are impossible to eliminate from the process. No historical investigation proceeds from a value-neutral

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30 See the definition of a scholar under, *Definitions of Key Terminology* (below).

31 Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*, 29–132. Licona lists six points that must be addressed for a fully developed historiographical approach: (1) method; (2) peer pressure; (3) submitting ideas to unsympathetic experts; (4) disclosing authorial horizons; (5) detachment from bias; and (6) accounting for historical bedrock (94).
position. Each historian comes to the text with bias and dispositions that incline his or her work one way or another. The most prudent approach is to develop a historiographical method that reduces opportunity for subjectivity, discloses the presuppositions and Weltanschauung of the historian, and submits the conclusions to the scrutiny of other scholars. The results of any investigation of this sort will not be exhaustive; however, if properly conceived and executed, the study should yield adequate historical-evidential justification for its conclusions.

In each of the cases analyzed in this study, probabilities will be determined by the methodology explicated by C. Behan McCullagh: “inference to the best explanation” for justifying historical descriptions.32 Although all seven criteria used by McCullagh will not apply in every case, all that do will be applied to the subject prophecies and their purported fulfillment.33 These seven criteria are:

1. The statement, together with other statements already held to be true, must imply yet other statements describing present, observable data. (We will henceforth call the first statement ‘the hypothesis’, and statements describing observable data, ‘observation and statements’.)

2. The hypothesis must be of greater explanatory scope than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must imply a greater variety of observation statements.

3. The hypothesis must be of greater explanatory power than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must make the observation statements it implies more probable than any other.

4. The hypothesis must be more plausible than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must be implied to some degree by a greater variety of accepted truths than any other, and be implied more strongly than any other; and its probable negation must be implied by fewer beliefs, and implied less strongly than any other.


33 Ibid., 19.
5. The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must include fewer new suppositions about the past which are not already implied to some extent by existing beliefs.

6. It must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, when conjoined with accepted truths it must imply fewer observations statements and other statements.

7. It must exceed other incompatible hypotheses about the same subject by so much, in characteristics 2–6, that there is little chance of an incompatible hypothesis, after further investigation, soon exceeding it in these respects.³⁴

When applied these criteria disallow speculative or novel conclusions that might require the setting aside of relevant evidence. They also demand that the probability that the advocated historical description will be displaced by another more plausible description be remote.

Evaluative Framework for Biblical Data

Biblical data will be analyzed using the grammatical-historical method.³⁵ The grammatical-historical method consists of interpreting the biblical text in its literal sense while allowing for theological implications, figurative language, the literary forms and genres, and specific historical sitz im leben. From the biblical authors’ perspective, this means the prophecies predict literal events, though the descriptions do not necessarily portray the events literally.³⁶

Milton S. Terry expresses appropriate sentiments and practices regarding this method:

Its fundamental principle is to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning that the writers intended to convey. It applies to the sacred books the same principles, the same grammatical process and exercise of common sense and reason, which we apply to

³⁴ Ibid., emphasis in the original.


other books. The grammatico-historical exegete, furnished with suitable qualifications, intellectual, educational, and moral, will accept the claims of the Bible without prejudice or adverse prepossession, and, with no ambition to prove them true or false, will investigate the language and import of each book with fearless independence.\(^{37}\)

After the lexical, grammatical, and historical data are collected from biblical texts, the second step of interpretation involves asking interpretative questions of those data and formulating a hypothesis capable of answering those questions. This need arises because prophetic language is often ambiguous.\(^{38}\) A case in point is the attribution of prophetic speech to Caiaphas, when he states, “You know nothing at all.[sic] Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” (John 11:49c–50). John (ironically) extends the meaning intended by Caiaphas beyond the concern for Roman retribution for messianic aspirations in Israel to include propitiation of the wrath of God. These secondary meanings presented by biblical data from both the Old and New Testaments must be given due consideration, even though they often transcend the understanding of the original oracle, author, and recipients. The data and hypothesis (this author’s interpretation) will then be coordinated with any historical data from extra-biblical sources, with priority given to the most-well-attested, earlier, and scholarly sources. No data will arbitrarily be given a privileged position.\(^{39}\)


\(^{38}\) The actual content of the original author’s conception cannot be fully known. Therefore the use of the grammatical-historical method in this dissertation will not prohibit either typology or *sensus plenior* understandings of texts.

\(^{39}\) The present author makes no affirmations of authorship for any canonical or other works unless explicitly stated. The use of traditional attributions and authorship are employed only for convenience.
Evaluative Framework for Historical Data

This study requires the analysis of texts and other historical evidence that are not a part of the books traditionally included in the Protestant canon. These include, but are not limited to, the Apocrypha/Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Roman historians, the Talmudic writings, and early non-canonical Christian works. The strategy for analyzing ancient texts and archeological evidence consists of pairing descriptions drawn from the biblical account with verifiable historical events. Historical and archeological data will receive the same treatment and status as the biblical documents in an effort to support and historically justify the conclusions generated by the study.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Evidence: Evidence is information drawn from personal testimony, a document, or a material object that in some way establishes facts or other indications capable of confirming or disconfirming an event or claim.

History: History is the genre, content, and description of past events expressed through many mediums of communication.  

Fulfillment: Fulfillment of an OT prophecy when applied in this historical-evidential study means literal direct fulfillment. Every component of the prediction must have historical-evidential grounds that indicate the event or action has transpired in a manner consistent with the original prediction. Specifically eliminated from consideration are fulfillment concepts such as progressive revelation and deeper meaning, typological fulfillment, double fulfillment, manifold fulfillment, theological fulfillment, and analogous fulfillment.

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40 History may include events of social, political, or other significant aspects of human existence, and should consist primarily of factual data extracted from primary or original source documents.

**Minimal fact:** A *minimal fact* will conceptually align with the definitions previously provided by Gary R. Habermas and Licona.\(^{42}\) Habermas contends that there are “at least two major prerequisites for an occurrence to be designated as a *Minimal Fact.*”\(^{43}\) First, more than adequate scholarly evidences usually containing several critically ascertained lines of argumentation must be available. Second, agreement must exist among the majority of contemporary scholars about the historicity of the event. In this study, the second criteria has been modified, as follows: there must be agreement among the majority of contemporary scholars about the historicity of the event or the specific claim the *minimal fact* affirms.

A *minimal fact*, when referring to a spoken prophecy could consist of, but need not be limited to agreement that: (1) a prophecy was spoken before the alleged fulfillment, (2) non-
canonical texts interpret the prophecy as messianic, (3) the prophecy is considered messianic by certain individuals or sects within Judaism, (4) the complete implication of the prophecy have not been fulfilled, (5) specific NT writers believed the prophecy was fulfilled; (6) specific post-apostolic sources believed the prophecy was fulfilled, and (7) other historical sources claim the prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus.

Scholar: A scholar possesses a terminal academic degree in a field of study relevant to this dissertation and is actively engaged in academic research and writing.

Authorial Presuppositions

The author maintains a realist view of history, one that allows for the possibility that properly conducted historical investigation into actual events may yield some or even adequate knowledge to determine the historicity of those events.

The author maintains that the correspondence theory of truth is the primary test of true descriptions of the world. Further, the correspondence theory must interact closely with the coherence theory and pragmatic livability, since truth actualized in time and space will display each of these elements.⁴⁴

The author will apply the basic laws of logic throughout the research.⁴⁵ The author maintains that any a priori rejection of a theistic worldview or supernatural activity invalidates the conclusions of a given study. Therefore, this study will initially accept the possibility of

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⁴⁵ Three key laws of logic include, (1) the law of identity: A is A; (2) the law of noncontradiction: A is not non-A; (3) the law of the excluded middle: either A or non-A, but not both.
miracles, but will require evidential support before concluding *a posteriori* that supernatural activity is a probable conclusion.

The author is a Christian. For purposes of this study, however, claims of privileged status for biblical documents such as divine inspiration, inerrancy, authorship, or date of writing, are suspended. To the extent possible, each text will be examined objectively.

*Summary of Important Literature*

This summary of the literature related to messianic prophecy and claims of its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth is limited in both scope and analysis. The purpose at this juncture is to demonstrate the author’s familiarity with the primary sources, not to provide a full literature review with critical evaluations (see the following paragraph).

In addition, this summary highlights the scarcity of modern scholarly works that even briefly address the topic; full-length treatments not written for the popular audience are scarcer still. No treatment of OT prophecy employing a historical-evidential approach or *minimal-facts* methodology has been uncovered by the preliminary search. A full literature review that includes critical evaluation of primary sources and other material integral to the dissertation will form the content of Chapter 2. Some of the works that are important to the study are commented on below.

*Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* is important to this study because of its detailed exposition of the progressively revealed and multi-layered nature of OT prophecy.\(^{46}\) Simplistic fulfillment claims are few; OT messianic prophecies rarely limit their perspective to a single indisputable referent. Most prophecies have temporally

\(^{46}\) Bateman, Bock, and Johnston, *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King*. 
near and far referents, but only one ultimate fulfillment is possible. This information sheds light on texts such as Genesis 49:10 where, despite a textual difficulty, traditional interpreters have often identified both David and Jesus as fulfillments of this oracle.

In addition, this work provides perspective on the general development of Jewish messianic thought with its differing strands as recorded in the literature of various sects within Judaism. Messianism was far from ubiquitous or of a monolithic nature in the minds of most Israelites prior to the growing discontent with the Hasmonean royal priesthood about 152 BC. After this date, messianism gained increasing significance and its influence felt during the life of Jesus. According to Herbert W. Bateman, Darrell L. Bock and Gordon H. Johnston, 152 BC delineates the approximate dating of earliest non-biblical sources at our disposal for studying messianic thought in the second temple period, while AD 70 and the period immediately after are the latest.

Another issue that this dissertation must address is how the NT writers used, appropriated, and applied the OT when attributing prophetic fulfillments to Jesus. There are difficulties encountered regardless of the method employed. Help addressing these difficulties is available in Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament. Before the contributing authors of this work explain their approaches to this issue, the introductory material poses five key questions that each scholar must answer during the course of his exposition:

1. Is sensus plenior an appropriate way of explaining the New Testament use of the Old Testament?
2. How is typology best understood?
3. Do the New Testament writers take into account the context of the passages they cite?

5. Are we able to replicate the exegetical and hermeneutical approaches to the Old Testament that we find in the writings of the New Testament? 48

These are important questions for the proposed study because each of the NT texts examined are in some way interpretations of the OT. Further, the research conclusions, such as those generated in this study, add yet another layer of interpretation. Nevertheless, in order to meet the minimal-facts criteria, the evidence must indicate a single direct referent.

Two works by Robert C. Newman are worthy of mention because of their direct relevance to the topic of OT prophecy. Fulfilled Prophecy as Miracle is a brief, but well-written defense of prophecy as a subspecies of miracle: something that can only be consistently produced by supernatural agency. Without an a priori rejection of miracles, the possibility of predictive prophecy must be given a fair hearing. In Newman’s second work, Prophecies about the Coming Messiah he highlights OT prophecies that he believes could not have been invented or staged by the NT church. Significant among these for this study is Psalm 22. Newman contends that this Psalm depicts a suffering person who has pierced hands and feet and is crying out in anguish as a result of his abandonment by God. Although some recent scholarship descents from this view, an examination is warranted to see if facts can be ascertained.

Part of this dissertation will involve interactions with non-biblical sources predating the historical Jesus. These include the Apocrypha/Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is also possible that Egyptian or other Near Eastern sources may contain information bearing on the issues of messianic understanding in relation to establishing facts about purported NT

fulfillment. In each of these cases modern and critical editions will be employed where applicable.

Sources studying the historical Jesus have received substantial attention by scholars such as Gary Habermas\(^49\) and Darrell Bock.\(^50\) Bock, in particular, deals with much of the nonbiblical literary evidence of the life of Jesus while providing a brief outline of the political and social history of the period.

This dissertation is not an extension of the *Third Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Nevertheless, it presupposes some of the conclusions of other scholars about the historical Jesus and will interact as needed with the texts produced by the Jesus Seminar. The text of *The Five Gospels*, in particular, will be utilized to help rank biblical sources and begin discussion about the historicity of the NT texts. The fellows of the Jesus Seminar are considered by many to be hypercritical in approaching the historical Jesus.\(^51\) Thus it is certain that any conclusions drawn from NT data in the current work that agree with those of the Jesus Seminar will be critically acceptable.

In summary, the literature that will be included in the study includes works that cover a broad spectrum of past and current messianic thought. Sources from evangelical, critical, and skeptical sources will be given consideration in the Chapter 2 (the Literature Review) and subsequent research.

\(^49\) Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 250. Habermas contends that there are at least 45 ancient sources for the study of the historical Jesus. Notably he focuses much attention on the early creedal statements within the four gospels and the undisputed Pauline letters. These creedal statements are the earliest expressions of how the church understood Jesus.


Conclusion

The proposed methodology for this dissertation involves the study OT of messianic prophecy and the purported NT fulfillments from a historical-evidential and facts-centered perspective as described earlier in this chapter. It must be emphasized that this method has not been fully developed for this type of application and is not the traditional approach to the topic of messianic prophecy. Rather than embracing an uncritical acceptance of the texts, relevant prophecies will be analyzed to discover if the events they depict can be established by meeting historical-evidential requirements and both the criteria defining minimal facts. Those events or assertions that can satisfy the criteria constitute the historical bedrock. They are not merely matters that must be accepted on the basis of faith or tradition.

It is this author’s opinion that the historical bedrock will provide solid apologetic evidence that Jesus is the direct fulfillment of specific OT messianic texts. Consequently, the intellectual rationale for believing otherwise will be narrowed, and honest fact-focused doubters, especially among scholars, will be compelled to reckon with the data.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview of the Literature Review

The literature dealing with the overarching phenomena of Hebrew prophecy as recorded in the OT is immense. The scope of this body of literature requires some narrowing in order to better suit the current purpose. First, the works must specifically treat messianic prophecy. Second, the scope of the literature is further constricted by including only works that have a definite apologetic interest or that do not approach the topic with uncritical presuppositions. These qualifications reduce the relevant literature to a manageable quantity. The copious number of volumes devoted to the study of biblical prophecy is justified by the vital role it plays in Christian thought and practice. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, commenting on the importance of prophecy and prophets in the Bible, note that Scripture contains more than 600 direct references to prophecy and prophets; approximately 27 percent of the Bible contains prophetic material.\(^\text{52}\)

\[\begin{align*}
\text{In contrast to the immense amount of literature dedicated to prophecy in general, and the vital role of messianic prophecy in the Bible, an extreme paucity of sources exist that approach the topic from an evidential, apologetic, and critical perspective. None combines all of these elements into a single thorough treatment. This noticeable deficiency is what the present study hopes to alleviate.}\end{align*}\]

The first section of the Literature Review highlights the progression of modern thought regarding OT messianic prophecy. The first section begins with works that forward reasons for the beliefs of Christianity in what might be termed the classic or traditional argument from prophecy and progresses toward its end with more critical and apologetic works. The second section of the Literature Review highlights authors and arguments that alter or eliminate the traditional approach to predictive prophecy. The third section of the Literature Review critiques and analyzes David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. His work contributed significantly to the establishment of the Enlightenment paradigm for skepticism about miracles; including prophecy as a species of miracle. To this point, the current work has made no attempt to demonstrate the possibility of miracles. However, third section of this chapter seeks to disclose the rationale for not rejecting miracles *a priori*.

*Elements in and Rationale for Section 1 of the Literature Review*

The basis for the traditional argument from prophecy is fairly straightforward. An OT prediction is tied textually to a NT fulfillment based on the reader’s presupposition of supernatural inspiration of the prophet, Christian traditional teachings, and perhaps some historical support. Other presuppositions include such concepts as the analogy of faith, reading the texts canonically (or possibly anachronistically), and belief that the autographs were inerrant. The result of this approach is unquestionably a circular course of reasoning. This course usually proceeds retrogressively from a perceived NT connection to an image drawn in OT prophecy, and results in a subsequent leap of faith to the conclusion that the same hand that drew the

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53 See the definition of fulfillment in “Definition of Key Terminology” Chapter 1.
prophetic image also molded the portrait or NT connection in historical realization.\(^{54}\) These connections, and their associated leaps of faith, all seem reasonable to the uncritical reader. This allows the fulfillment data to be cited in support of the contention that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Further, this course of reasoning makes three key assumptions: (1) the God of the Bible is the only One capable of genuine predictive prophecy; (2) the God of the Bible is both all-knowing and all-powerful; and (3) Jesus perfectly fulfilled OT predictions and therefore is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Son of the living God.\(^{55}\) The circularity is obvious.

A second frequently observed element in the traditional approach to OT prophecy and alleged NT fulfillments is the mistaken notion that interpretive perfection is within the reader’s grasp. In fact, no scholarly consensus exists on hermeneutical principles that must be applied to biblical literature, or on how each prophecy is rightly understood. The quintessential example of this error is, perhaps, the profusion of explanations purporting to solve the conundrum of Daniel 9:24–27. Several possible solutions to the problem of when the seventy weeks begin and when they end have been proffered. There are also several conflicting ideas as to when, if at all, breaks in the time sequence should be inserted. Some interpreters do not even accept the idea that literal time periods are actually intended. In addition, there is no consensus on a solution to the textual issue of whether the prophecy is actually messianic in the ultimate sense, at all. Nevertheless, many authors employing the traditional argument from prophecy dogmatically affirm something similar to Earle Rowell’s statement: “Daniel gives the exact year of Christ’s appearance as the


\(^{55}\) Ibid.
Messiah, and of His crucifixion.56 Perhaps Daniel’s prophecy does this, but as of yet no scholarly consensus, a leviori agreed-upon facts, have emerged to support such a claim.

Section 1 A Progressive Review of the

Traditional Argument from Messianic Prophecy

Alexander Keith: Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion

Alexander Keith authored a classic work on OT prophecy entitled, Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion. Keith presupposes an inspired biblical text and the concept of canon. The term “canon” here implies that prophetic texts are best understood when read from a perspective where later texts interpret or illuminate earlier texts. This method facilitates the reading of OT texts as preparatory, and the reading of NT texts anachronistically back into the OT documents. Stated another way, a canonical reading allows for the discovery of meaning that may not have been apparent to the original audience. For example, Keith maintains that the time of Jesus’ first advent was predicted in several different ways.57 First, for our current purpose, is his reference to Genesis 49:10 and the assertion that the Savior must come during the time that Judah remained as a united people with a reigning king.58 However, he offers no explanation of his proposed solution to the well-documented textual difficulty regarding the term שילה, neither does he explain his conclusion that this text refers to the person of the Savior. His conclusion remains an unsupported assertion. Much the same is evident when Malachi 3:1 is championed as a demand that the Messiah come into his (the second) temple before its destruction. Again, Keith


58 Ibid., 26.
avows that the prophecy regarding the glory of the second temple exceeding that of the first (Hag 2:9) is a messianic prophecy: it demands that the Messiah come before the demolition of the temple in AD 70. In addition, Keith adds to the flood of interpretations of Daniel 9:24–27. His interpretation of this passage is methodologically unclear and does nothing to clarify the already complicated morass of interpretations proffered in the literature.\(^{59}\)

In general, the alleged messianic nature of the prophecies Keith treats are the common stock of Christian belief. Negatively, however, he supplies little early Jewish interpretive data to support a historical-contextual messianic interpretation for his claims. To his credit, he does cite the lack of any credible contradicting testimony when alluding to the genealogies of Jesus, including some early church support.

The zenith of Keith’s research, ironically, is a footnote quoting four historical persons (Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus, and Philo) he believes affirm the approximate time of the Messiah’s appearance as predicted by the texts cited above.\(^{60}\) Each of these historians make direct mention of prophecies and they do interpret the prophecies as dealing with the first-century period. The problem with these sources, however, is they all remain vague in what they are claiming to reference in regard to specific Jewish prophetic texts. Much the same conclusion is drawn from Keith’s exposition of Christ’s birth, life, and death, and the character of the Christian religion. Everything presented is plausible and reasonable. However, facts that can be derived from his work on messianic texts are few. In the end, the critical reader comes away from Keith’s work with more questions than answers.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 27–30.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 30.
Eduard Riehm produced a work on messianic prophecy in 1876 that takes a distinct approach to the subject. For Riehm, the key to understanding prophecy was the historical sense, that is, how the prophet wished to be understood by his contemporaries. Riehm contends that “what we do not learn until the period of fulfillment cannot be in the prophecy itself.” He adamantly rejected any attempt to read the OT anachronistically from the NT perspective and he refused to affirm those who did. In his mind, the goal of the study of messianic prophecy was to work toward understanding the “germ” and then progress to understanding the “full flower.” The sense in which the prophets and their contemporaries understood the contents of the prophecies was to be kept separate from the reference ultimately intended in the counsels of God and later revealed through Christ.

Riehm also argues that prophecy was not so much a mosaic to be constructed as it was a multi-strand work of preparation; a living organism whose leaves grow mature and then fall away, with the final form being hidden until fully manifest in Christ. Thus, unfulfilled or partially fulfilled messianic prophecies were of little concern because they were controlled by history and historical context, and elucidated by history. They did not mandate exhaustive concrete fulfillment. Riehm contends that the OT forms that contained prophetic meaning were “mere drapery” (opaque drapery) the higher forms and development of messianic prophecy had

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taken away. Among the drapery were Jewish ceremony, the temple, and even the city of Jerusalem. In other words, the OT features were temporary forms, separate from the fully matured type. Consistently applied, this approach allows for prophetic fulfillment in Christ without a demand for the historicity of every aspect of the prophecy or prophecies being subject to evidential verification, except in their ideal sense.

Historically verifiable fulfillments are possible to see in some prophecies, but in order to properly understand fulfillment, the typological sense is paramount. Conversely, Riehm is critical of incorrect or allegorized interpretation that allowed Christ to be inserted in unlikely places and in ways that misconstrue the true historical sense of the prophetic text. In short, the historical sense on the one hand and the type on the other are both important aspects of prophecy.

The strength of Reihm’s work lies in his commitment to a proper historical sense for the texts, including making place for the individual psychology of the prophet. In addition, he affirmed that messianic prophecy developed along a continuum from germ to the full flower.

The weakness of Reihm’s work is the indistinct line of separation between what can be demonstrated as historically concrete in relation to messianic prophecy and what is merely the spiritualization of prophetic fulfillment through the “drapery” of the OT forms. Such forms include (1) Israelite nationalism; (2) the offices of prophet, priest, and king; and (3) the functions of temple cult. Reihm’s point about the ideal contained in the historical features of a given prophecy seems plausible as the essential demanding fulfillment. One question remains, however, with reference to Reihm’s work: What, if anything, can verify a claim if it is not concrete and historical? Verification of a type or ideal is so tenuous that virtually nothing of apologetic value can be salvaged. There is much value in what Riehm proposes and the present

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64 Ibid., 164–167.
study takes his approach with due deference. If, however, Jesus as a concrete historical person existed and is the ultimate antitype and ideal of OT messianic prophecy, then some concrete verification must be available. Otherwise, the honest skeptic is left without hope or direction.

_Franz Delitzsch: Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession_

A prominent scholar of the nineteenth century, Franz Delitzsch, approaches the topic of messianic prophecy from both a mildly critical and chronological perspective by treating them in historical succession. Delitzsch recognizes the difficulties involved in presupposing supernatural intervention as an explanation for prophecy and fulfillment. He devotes a sort section to help the reader understand his position. Essentially Delitzsch grants that affirmations of past supernatural activity are highly suspicious if present supernatural activity does not support its existence. Supernatural activity (“interchange” in his terminology) is a necessary inference if there is to be any communion between God and his creation. The presuppositions therefore that God exists and that redemptive communion is the goal of revelation carry the weight of the rest of his work.65

Delitzsch details the treatment of specific messianic prophecies, often using exegetical conclusions based on Hebrew texts, but with noticeable restraint in speculative extensions that go beyond what is reasonably supported. This exegetical restraint is an example of a gradually ascending paradigm that has contributed much to the scholarly treatment of biblical texts when compared to other less critical approaches.

A primary weakness of Delitzch’s work, as is the case with many others, is that he makes little attempt to support his conclusions or affirmations with historical or other sources external to the biblical texts. He provides limited interaction with opposing views or critical scholarship,

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which limits the use of this work as an apologetic tool. The approach chosen by Delitzsch is a testament to his faith, but does little to commend the Bible to the skeptic as authoritative and accurate.66

**Ed Hindson: “Messianic Prophecy”**

*The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* contains an article addressing messianic prophecy. Ed Hindson encapsulates the traditional argument as have few other works. As the title of the book suggests, the article is intended for a popular audience, not scholars. However, it is representative of how presuppositions play a paramount role in the traditional argument from OT messianic prophecy to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah.

The presuppositions surfacing in this article include the notion that Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection are all predicted in the OT. The NT events related to these aspects of Jesus’ life are presumed to be the best indicators of fulfillment and are factually related by inspired authors.67 This approach works as intended when read uncritically. When the intended reader is well-versed in critical methodology, however, questions emerge that require longer and detailed treatments of the topic. This truncation is perhaps the only shortcoming of the article. Given greater space, issues such as evidence external to the Christian Bible and whether a given claim of prophetic fulfillment, is legitimately messianic might have received treatment.68

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66 E. W. Hengstenberg authored another significant work treating OT messianic prophecy. It is not included in this review because he generally approaches the biblical texts with many of the traditional presuppositions. In some cases, he does reference historical sources to support his conclusions, but includes little critical interaction with these sources. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, trans. Theodore Meyer, Kindle ed., vol. 1 (Public Domain Books, 2010).


68 Such treatment is forthcoming in the proposed *Moody Dictionary of Messianic Prophecy* edited by Michael Rydelnik, in which Hindson contributes numerous detailed chapters.
One of the primary strengths of Hindson’s article is its recognition of the early apologetic use of OT prophecy as “proof” for believing the claims of Jesus and, subsequently, the preaching of the apostles. The NT records several occasions in which the OT prophets are appealed to as evidence for Jesus as the fulfillment of their prophecies; any treatment of the topic must take these sources seriously.

**Bernard Ramm: Protestant Christian Evidences**

Bernard Ramm decisively moved the discussion of messianic prophecy in the scholarly direction. Ramm acknowledges the multifaceted role of the prophet in the Hebrew economy. Unlike some critical scholars, past and present, he does not relegate the teaching and proclamations of the OT prophet to that of an ethical and spiritual symbol. A prophecy for Ramm, included genuine predictive elements that neither violated the human personality nor constituted an “amoral thrust of knowledge upon the prophet.”\(^{69}\) The foretelling was intended to influence the present conduct of the people; in that regard it constituted a behaviorally focused insight coming from an omniscient God.\(^{70}\)

Ramm also notes the importance of prophecy as an apologetic device for the Christian religion. The idea that prophecy functions as an apologetic device, he contends, is based on two primary OT passages: Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah 41. Deuteronomy 18:15–22 specifically promises that *Yahweh* will raise up a prophet like Moses. The key to distinguishing true prophets and prophecy from false prophets and prophecy, according to this passage, is whether the prophecies are actualized in human experience. If they are not, those prophecies are false.

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\(^{70}\) Ibid., 81.
Similarly, Isaiah 41:22–23 appeals to predictive prophecy as a test for distinguishing between the work of false gods and the authentic work of Yahweh.

One of the strengths of Ramm’s work is his interaction with the objections of critical scholars. Notes some of the most virulent among them, he affirms their claim that issues such as the vague nature of some prophecies, the possibility of artificial or staged fulfillments, and interpretive disagreement make certainty about fulfillments difficult. He also addresses the need for “concrete data” if fulfillments are to be verified. Ramm, however, does not go to the full measure that critical scholarship demands. That additional full critical measure would require approaching the biblical material as one would any other set of historical documents. For Ramm, the inspired quality of the biblical texts and the existence of the supernatural are still presuppositions rather than conclusions based on his research.

Kenny Barfield: The Prophet Motive

Kenny Barfield represents another step toward a scholarly, critical, and objective approach to OT prophecy and alleged fulfillments. Barfield devotes a short chapter to predictive prophecy as a key element in prophetic literature. The character of the prophet also receives treatment. Barfield observes that some of the OT prophets become unintelligible if predictive elements as verification of their status are a priori dismissed as impossibilities. Examples include Jeremiah 28:9 and Ezekiel 33:33. The same idea is generally applicable to the NT documents and personalities as well. For example, in his first public address, Jesus specifically claims to be fulfilling the predictions of Isaiah 61:1–2 (Luke 4:21). If this statement

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71 Ibid., 91 ff.

is somehow not true, or if the life of Jesus is not an actualization of the prophecy, Jesus himself becomes unintelligible.

Herein lies the difficulty with the study of OT prophecy as an apologetic for Christianity. Predictions and alleged fulfillments that are partial, generalized, or intangible are less than convincing in most cases, and rarely possess the weight of evidence necessary to be affirmed as fact. Barfield attempts to address these issues by making space for a discussion of the apologetic value of prophecy and introducing his principles for verification. Barfield lists six standards he claims are “reasonable criteria for assessing the claims of predictive prophecy.” These criteria, quoted below, closely align with those employed for the current work, with the exception of a commitment to interact with critical scholars.

1. The prediction should occur well in advance of the fulfillment. There should be no valid reason to suspect that the event occurred after-the-fact.

2. The prediction should be accurate. It must conform to historical fact.

3. Fulfillment should occur in an impartial manner. There should be no evidence of collusion or manipulation of the events.

4. The fulfillment should be obvious to a reasonable person. Absent bias toward either position, an individual should be able to weigh evidence on both sides of the argument and conclude that the predictions was made prior to an event and was later confirmed to have occurred through valid testimony. This does not suggest that the prediction has to be totally free from ambiguity, but that the fulfillment should be obvious.

5. Predictive prophecy should be dynamic. It must be ongoing, repetitive, and consistent. Anyone can be lucky, so, to eliminate the chance of an accidental fulfillment, the number of accurate predictions should be significant.

6. The prediction should suggest supernatural guidance. Prediction capable of being based on human reasoning or genius is not sufficient to establish one’s claim as a prophet.

73 Ibid., 31–32.

74 Ibid.
In his chapter focusing on messianic prophecy, Barfield highlights several cultural-historical characteristics that affect the way prophecy and the hope for a utopian golden age are envisioned. Barfield’s analysis gives the reader reason to believe that messianism is a universal phenomenon. First, he notes, the modern tendency to place hope for a resolution to mankind’s problems in the realms of education and science. Second, Barfield observes that despite this tendency, the idyllic superhuman figure often remains as part of the vision. Mankind is constantly seeking a messiah in some form. Second, Barfield describes the general disposition of the Jewish people toward some form of messianic expectation. The factuality of this assertion can be traced in the earliest historical records of Israel. Third, he cites the Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus to verify that the same general type of expectation was present in cultures far removed from Judea. Suetonius verifies this assertion when he writes,

A firm persuasion had long prevailed through all the East, that it was fated for the empire of the world, at that time, to devolve on some one who should go forth from Judaea. This prediction referred to a Roman emperor, as the event shewed; but the Jews, applying it to themselves, broke out into rebellion, and having defeated and slain their governor, routed the lieutenant of Syria, a man of consular rank, who was advancing to his assistance, and took an eagle, the standard of one of his legions. As the suppression of this revolt appeared to require a stronger force and an active general, who might be safely trusted in an affair of so much importance, Vespasian was chosen in preference to all others.75

Another well-developed aspect of Barfield’s book is the section dealing with Genesis 49:10, addressing whether adequate evidence exists to support a messianic interpretation of the text. Barfield marshals substantial evidence to support his position; the present work will draw upon this text in an attempt to establish what, if any, minimal facts exist.

75 C. Suetonius Tranquillus, Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars; An English Translation, Augmented with the Biographies of Contemporary Statesmen, Orators, Poets, and Other Associates (Medford, MA: Gebbie & Co., 1889), Ch. 4. Barfield also cites the well-known passage from Tacitus Historiae, in which general messianic prophecy and expectation is attributed by the general Jewish population to mean rulers from Judea. However, Tacitus believes it referred to Vespasian. Cornelius Tacitus, Historiae (Latin) (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 1911), 5.13.
Barfield, however, is not immune to some of the same weaknesses as those who use the traditional argument in its less critical form. He attempts, unsuccessfully, to establish the time of the Messiah’s coming by appealing to Daniel 2 and 9. The reason for skepticism about proofs from Daniel 9 have been documented above, and the same type problem exists with his appeal to Daniel 2. First, the date of the composition of the book of Daniel is disputed. Most critical scholars reject as authentic Daniel’s purported authorship with its concomitant 5th-6th century BC date. Second, in the context of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the empires represented by the statue, not only is the exact correspondence of the strata of the statue with world empires disputed, but also the apocalyptic nature of the image and the interpretation of dreams as a legitimate way to establish historical facts is tenuous. Third, the meaning of a “kingdom that shall never be destroyed… and …“shall stand forever” (Dan 2:44) is ambiguous. These statements are problematic since they appear to be foretelling of a kingdom that, as of this writing, has no current physical manifestation and is therefore completely speculative.

In the final analysis, both Ramm and Barfield represent significant steps in the right direction. Neither, however, incorporates all of the necessary elements for a full-length critical treatment of OT prophecy and NT fulfillment.

Robert C. Newman: Jesus: The Testimony of Prophecy and History

Robert Newman has published three important works bearing on the issue at hand. The first is Jesus: The Testimony of Prophecy and History. The focus of this short book is exclusively messianic prophecy and the historical evidence for Jesus as the fulfillment of certain

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76 See the section entitled, Elements and Rational for Section1 of the Literature Review

OT messianic texts. The book treats the OT texts pertaining to “Messiah as a light to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6–7; 49:5–6) together with several other significant OT prophetic texts. These texts include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biblical Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>Micah 5:2</td>
<td>Born yet Pre-existent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel 7:13–14 and Zechariah 9:9</td>
<td>Humble yet Exalted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalm 22, Zechariah 12:10, and Isaiah 52:13–53:12</td>
<td>Suffering yet Reigning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 110 and Genesis 14:18–20</td>
<td>King yet Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 49:10</td>
<td>The Messiah was to come while Judah had its own rulers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haggai 2:3–9</td>
<td>The Messiah was to come while the 2nd Temple stood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel 9:24–27</td>
<td>The Messiah was to come after the 69th sabbath cycle(^{78})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A primary strength of this book is its focused treatment of messianic prophecy. Newman does not digress into areas unrelated to messianic prophecy while marshaling a handful of historical evidences for his conclusions. The individual treatments of the various passages include some exegetical and lexical work, but an extended treatment of these issues is needed if the conclusions are to be accepted by critical scholars.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., Kindle loc. 10.
Another strength of Newman’s work is his implicit recognition that mere assertion will not persuade the unconvinced; documentation bearing upon the issue must be readily available and cited. Newman’s book is brief, as noted earlier. Despite that, it contains an abundance of citations from several Jewish and other historical sources.

The primary weakness of Newman’s approach is its failure to provide adequate interaction with the assertions of critical scholarship on the various issues of both a textual and contextual nature. Ambiguities in the Hebrew text must be addressed in greater detail and the rationale for conclusions supported by a more robust engagement. Scholarly interaction is lacking between (1) how each of the cited biblical texts would likely have been interpreted by the first audience and (2) how the Jewish interpretation of these texts may have developed through the intertestamental, NT, and Christian era. It does not appear plausible to argue that every text currently held to be fully messianic by Christians was understood as such by the original readers. If claims of fulfillment are to find wide-spread acceptance, the work of skeptical scholars must not be omitted. Solid argumentation, to whatever extent possible, is crucial to making Newman’s case a plausible alternative to skepticism.

Robert C. Newman: “Fulfilled Prophecy as Miracle”

The second important contribution from Newman is a chapter in larger edited volume. In “Fulfilled Prophecy as Miracle” he makes the case for predictive prophecy as a species of miracle.79 The primary thrust of this chapter is the contention that if genuine predictive prophecy occurred in the form presented in the OT, it is miraculous in nature. As previously stated, many critical scholars reject this possibility a priori. The early part of Newman’s work seeks to address

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this prejudicial rejection by critiquing various techniques skeptics employ to explain the phenomenon of predictive prophecy by naturalistic means. On some occasions, Newman notes, texts are simply subjected to reinterpretation or the literature is declared *ex eventu* by postdating. On other occasions, the application of a reductionist hermeneutical methodology disallows any long-term perspective by the prophet. In this latter case, the immediate horizon is the only allowable context. If there is no identifiable fulfillment, skeptical scholars argue, the prophet was mistaken in his prediction, or perhaps a later prophet invented a fulfillment.

In an attempt to address these difficulties, Newman sets down five criteria to evaluate if a miraculous prophecy is present in a biblical text.\(^8^0\) These criteria are much like those other authors have suggested; they supply some of the needed foundation for the study of OT prophecy that moves from a naïve examination of the biblical text to informed interaction with critical scholarship.

This particular work by Newman addresses three types of OT prophecy: (1) those referring to Israel as a nation, (2) those addressing city-states such as Tyre and Sidon, and (3) those describing the coming Messiah. The portion of Newman’s work dedicated to messianic prophecy is painfully brief. It treats nothing beyond the concept of the Servant from Isaiah 40–56 and the seventy weeks from Daniel 9:24–27.\(^8^1\) First, Newman’s evidence for Jesus being the fulfillment of the Servant texts of Isaiah is essentially a restatement of his previous work. Specifically he notes the related facts that Jesus is the founder of a religion currently having 1.4 billion adherents, and that no other messianic claimant has ever established a religion among

\(^8^0\) Ibid., 215.

\(^8^1\) To avoid redundancy Daniel 9:24–27 will not be extensively treated, even though it remains one of the most popular (and frequently cited) texts with some interpreters who reference it as specifically identifying the time of Messiah’s appearance.
Gentile nations. Second, Newman observes the fact that the vast majority of the Jewish people historically and currently reject Jesus, whereas many Gentiles have embraced him as the Messiah. Of what other Jewish person could Isaiah have spoken? Newman’s answer to this important question is that no other person could fit the criteria.

The single most important contribution Newman brings to the discussion is the mention of criteria or techniques that skeptics often employ to disallow the existence of genuine predictive prophecy. Newman desires to begin interacting with these skeptical ideas. The present study will include, and in some instances embrace, these criticisms to engage the issue of predictive prophecy from a fresh perspective.

Robert C. Newman: Prophecies About the Coming Messiah

Newman’s third contribution is contained in Prophecies About the Coming Messiah. The focus in this short work is those OT prophecies he believes could not have been invented or staged by the NT church. These include the following: (1) the light-to-the-Gentiles prophecy of Isaiah 42 and 49, (2) the seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9, (3) the suffering-servant prophecy of Isaiah 53, and (4) the pierced-one prophecy of Psalm 22.

The most important addition to the biblical texts mentioned in his other works is the short treatment of the pierced one as described in Psalm 22. A straightforward reading of this Psalm gives the impression that it is depicting a suffering person who has pierced hands and feet and is crying out in anguish as an expression of his feelings of abandonment by God. Newman points out that two of the NT writers appropriate this text in reference to utterances made by the suffering Jesus during his crucifixion (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). Besides this obvious connection, the following statements approximate Newman’s reasons for viewing the Psalm as a depiction of the suffering of Jesus:
1. The sufferer depicted feels abandoned by God.

2. The sufferer trusts God completely.

3. The sufferer is despised and mocked by the people around him.

4. The hands and feet of the sufferer are pierced.

5. Lots are cast for the sufferer’s clothing.

6. The sufferer is weak, thirsty, and his bones are out of joint.

7. Though the sufferer expects or is experiencing death, God somehow rescues him.

8. The effects of these events will be recognized in future generations and to the ends of the earth.

9. The families of the nations will turn to the Lord.82

The point of the enumerations above is to demonstrate the improbability of a single human death containing all of the elements described in the Psalm. Whether the Psalm in its original context is actually describing a crucifixion is another matter; one this dissertation will address. One thing is certain about Psalm 22, however: the NT writers apply the image to the death of Jesus.

J. Barton Payne: Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy

The next important text for our consideration is Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy by J. Barton Payne. This book is possibly the most comprehensive work on biblical prophecy in existence. Like most works on biblical prophecy, it presupposes the biblical autographa as inspired by God and inerrant in content. Beyond these presuppositions, however, Payne takes a serious scholarly approach when addressing the topic of prophecy. Issues speaking directly to the

possibility of predictive prophecy and the functions of the Hebrew prophet are detailed, along with hermeneutical guidelines that undergird his study methodologically. The value of prophecy for the Jewish people, according to Payne, was its verification that alleged prophets were indeed messengers of Yahweh or, alternatively, were inspired oracles of assurance. Most important was the prophet’s role as a motivator calling Israel to holiness.83 While noting that the value of prophecy for the first audiences was important, Payne believes the significance of prophecy actually grows over time because the overall body of fulfillment grows. This growth is the means whereby the apologetic value of prophecy becomes a noticeable, viable tool for defense of the Christian faith in the modern and postmodern intellectual climate.

At this important juncture in his work, Payne introduces the opinions of critical scholars who dismiss the possibility of genuine predictive prophecy.84 The modern reader must function as an interpreter of the texts; he or she cannot witness historic fulfillments first-hand. As such, a naturalistic or antisupernaturalistic view of the Hebrew prophets has become fashionable. These views demand either ex eventu prophets or over-spiritualized interpretations. When describing the current state of the prophetic/apologetic question, Payne, intimates that higher critics have reduced the apologetic value of prophecy as “proof” for unbelievers to embarrassingly low level. He proposes to alleviate this embarrassment with his work.

To establish a framework for his approach to prophecy and to restore its apologetic value, Payne introduces several criteria for determining legitimate predictive elements and their corresponding fulfillment. These limiting criteria (and those similar criteria developed by other writers) constitute a corrective to the traditional approach often taken in works dealing with

84 Ibid., 15.
prophecy. However, the nature of the criteria offered by Payne differ from those used in the present study. He is treating with prophecy in multiple forms, rather than the messianic form only, and his approach does not require direct fulfillment. More importantly, acceptance of Payne’s method and conclusions, by critical scholars is not a required. Nevertheless, Payne’s criteria are worth considering for their applicability to the study of biblical prophecy and their interaction with the criteria used in the present study.

Payne’s first criterion is the proper limitation placed on the various oracles contained within the biblical corpus. He applies limitations to predictive figures, symbols, and types by closely analyzing the texts to ensure that they are predictive rather than textual misrepresentations, incorrect translations, or simply not intended as predictive in the first place. Extending this criterion, Payne argues that if the predictive element is identified from inference rather than by explicit statements, the analogy of faith principle is applied. When the analogy of faith principle applies, in a given passage, support for the presence of a predictive element must be confirmed from biblical cross references.

Similar criteria are applied to biblical figures. Both predictive and non-predictive figures confront the exegete in the study of prophecy. Eliminating the non-predictive figures from consideration is crucial to working accurately with the material. Much the same is true of the symbols and symbolic behavior portrayed in many biblical texts. Those with an actual bearing on the future must be distinguished from those that do not.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of predictive prophecy and one requiring detailed explanation is that of typology. Payne’s treatment of this controversial topic is thoughtful and

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worth referencing when the need arises. For example, certain persons (such as Zerubbabel) who were part of the Davidic dynasty are sometimes understood in a typological relationship to the Messiah.

No consensus exists on the issues pertaining to Payne’s treatment of typology and limitations on what should be considered as typological. Even so, his work is an excellent primer on prophecy. The two-step approach adopted by Payne first makes the most drastic reduction in what is an allowable type; he then describes the expansions that will be considered. This initial drastic reduction is achieved by limiting types to those elements that have both direct divine origin and redemptive character, with the additional requirement that these elements be demonstrated as such by the declarations of Christ or the apostles.86

Payne’s subsequent expansion of what constitutes a type then proceeds by noting the objection of Patrick Fairbairn. Fairbairn argues that interpreters do not demand that each prophecy contained in the biblical corpus be demonstrated or explicitly stated in order to be considered inspired. Such a requirement on types is too restrictive. Fairbairn (and Payne) therefore allows types that present themselves as matters of deduction, in addition to those explicitly stated.87 Further expansion is provided by understanding certain symbols that were conceptually redemptive to those first exposed to them, but also possess a prophetic, futuristic element or antitype. Without belaboring the point, the criteria for identifying prophecy in its

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various forms moves significantly forward with Payne’s work. As will be seen below, so does the list of criteria for determining fulfillment.

Determining fulfillment of particular prophecies is often difficult, especially when little or no evidence is available. Under such circumstances, the interpretive process may become a matter of presupposition rather than a consistently applied hermeneutical or historical method. Many of these difficulties are resolved by Payne in his rigorous approach to both the texts and their contexts, and by advocating a thorough knowledge of history. Payne argues that recognizing the appropriate limitation on texts, symbols, and types does not reduce prophetic fulfillment to mere history. Some degree of literal fulfillment is usually intended, whether through the use of analogous symbols and types, or by a straightforward point-by-point correspondence. Concisely stated, it appears that a given OT prediction is best understood as fulfilled (1) when other OT texts confirm the predictive element; (2) when fulfillment is confirmed canonically, whether literally or by analogy; and (3) if possible, by secular history.

The great strength of Payne’s work is his detailed and consistently applied methodology. He adequately treats the textual difficulties, his conclusions are well supported, and the criteria (22 of them) tightly control the process of exegesis. The primary weakness lies in his sparse interaction with critical scholarship.

_Herbert W. Bateman, Darrell L. Bock and Gordon H. Johnston:_ Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King

The last text this section discusses is _Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King._88 Bateman, Bock and Johnston examine messianic

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88 Bateman, Bock, and Johnston, _Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King._
prophecy from both a historical and canonical point of view. The term *canon*, however, is used in the limited sense of the OT canon and how the prophecies it contained would have been understood in light of the whole (OT). The authors also take pains to note the progressive nature of messianic prophecy within the OT. Their approach allows for meaning in the original context and also for a development as understood by later second-temple Judaism. Last, as is appropriate, they consider the prophecy from the NT christological perspective.

By admitting the possibility of a canonical reading of the OT, the authors presuppose some form of inspiration in which the messianic ideas contained in the prophecies become more visible and understandable. This emergent process is similar to the various pieces of a puzzle (their analogy) gradually revealing the whole picture.\(^8^9\)

According to the Bateman, Bock, and Johnston, the problem with many treatments of OT prophecy is that individual prophecies, especially the earlier ones, are interpreted as exclusive-explicit and direct prophecies concerning the Messiah. They argue that OT texts are capable of containing implicit, ambiguous messianic concepts that are not necessarily exclusively attributable to the ultimate Messiah. In other words, when the dynamic nature of the “*pattern and prophecy*”\(^9^0\) are properly valued, OT prophecies may indirectly refer to Messiah or prefigure Messiah or point directly to other persons. Concisely stated, the strategy employed by Bateman, Bock, and Johnston requires the use of a three-fold hermeneutic: first, contextual-canonical; second, messianic; and third, christological.

The strengths of this approach are manifold. The reader gains much insight into the wording and original historical context including its attending ambiguities. The additional

\(^8^9\) Ibid., 22.

\(^9^0\) Ibid., 26. (Italics in the original)
information supplied by later literature often illuminates those ambiguities, uncovering the latent eschatological potential of the prophecy. The historical research and attendant sources are well-cited by Bateman, Bock and Johnston. Further, the insights of critical scholarship are, at least, partially taken into account by the explication of a method that begins with the original historical context.

Only two weaknesses limit the value of this important work. First, the sparse interaction with specific arguments of critical scholars on particular texts limits the value of the book for apologetic purposes. Ignoring skeptical opinions reduces the credibly and, consequently, the viability of OT prophecy as a legitimate tool for the twenty-first century Christian. The second weakness is the presupposition of an inspired text and canonical readings. This weakness is far more difficult to remedy because empirical proofs of divine inspiration are as impossible to establish with certainty as the existence of God. The best that can be obtained is the logical necessity of a divine being and the probability that miracles (prophecy included) attest divine participation in the events described by the documents.

Section 2 Key Authors and Arguments that Alter or Eliminate the Traditional Approach to Predictive Prophecy

Elements in and Rationale for Section 2 of the Literature Review

The second section of this literature review features some key authors and arguments that in one way or another discount the significance of, or legitimacy of, predictive prophecy. This


discounting is often the result of conclusions reached by applying criteria associated with the historical-critical method to the biblical texts. The presuppositions of authors who wholly embrace the historical-critical methodology, as will be demonstrated below, differ significantly from those who take an uncritical or even moderately critical approach to the topic. Consequently, their conclusions also differ significantly.

John J. Collins: The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age

John Collins has commented that the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a crisis in the historiographical study of ancient Israel. Specifically, a progressive loss in confidence of the accuracy of the biblical narratives has occurred. This loss has taken concrete form in the writings of some scholars who deny the historicity of certain persons and events. In some extreme cases, biblical chronologies and large portions of the patriarchal period (the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the book of Genesis) have been deemed unhistorical.93 Collins notes that virtually all “mainline” scholars date the finalization of the Torah, prophets, and historical books no earlier than the Persian period”.94

The crisis in ancient Israelite historiography, according to Collins, is not based on philosophical predispositions; rather it arises from the limitations of the available evidence.95 This assertion becomes self-evident when one scrutinizes the general methodology developed for historical-critical investigations. Although the wording and explanations are not identical in every case, the three generally accepted criteria are: (1) the principle of autonomy of the

94 John J. Collins, The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 33.
95 Ibid., 34.
historian, (2) the principle of analogy, and (3) the principle of criticism.\textsuperscript{96} With employment of these strict criteria, the problematic aspect of ancient historiography, in general, and how prophetic oracles were historically, and should be presently, understood becomes apparent.

From within the framework of the historical-critical method, other criteria are applied specifically to prophetic texts; this process further diminishes the likelihood of evidential verification. This attenuating effect is achieved by utilizing any of the following devices: (1) reducing the prophecy to an ideal rather than concrete historical prediction, (2) asserting later redaction or interpolation, (3) claiming \textit{vaticinium ex eventu} prophecy (late dating), (4) reducing the scope to a strictly localized context, and (5) outright denying the possibility of historical fulfillment. Collins’ book establishes parameters such as those listed above and prepares the reader to follow the rationale reflected in the books examined in this section of the work.\textsuperscript{97}

\textit{Ernest A. Edghill and Herbert E. Ryle: An Inquiry into the Evidential Value of Prophecy}

Ernest A. Edghill and Herbert E. Ryle authored a book with a very provocative title, \textit{An Inquiry into the Evidential Value of Prophecy}. At first glance, the title suggests an approach to prophecy similar to that employed in the current study. This first suggestion is not supported by the content of their work, however. Edghill and Ryle approached the subject of the evidence of prophecy from an idealistic perspective, seeing the “fundamental conceptions of prophecy…in ‘preparing the way of the Lord’”.\textsuperscript{98} This preparation is treated under three thoughts central to the


\textsuperscript{97} Other works by John J. Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins consulted during this study include: Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, \textit{King and Messiah as the Son of God} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); John J. Collins, \textit{The Scepter and the Star} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

\textsuperscript{98} Ernest Arthur Edghill and Herbert E. Ryle, \textit{An Inquiry into the Evidential Value of Prophecy} (Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 2010), 43.
The authors follow each of these dominate themes as they relate to the growth of the fundamental concept.

Edghill and Ryle are very specific in that they intend to treat prophecy as a whole—as a religious and historical phenomenon, not as a collection of individual passages or even individual prophets. They avoid discussing key issues such as the geniuses of the oracle, authorship, dating, or the possibility of redaction. Their contention is that the prophetic phenomenon prepares the way of the Lord and thereby constitutes evidence of the truth of the Christian religion.

The evidence, Edghill and Ryle believe, surfaces through four streams of biblical thought. First, prophecy progressively prepared the world for the “teaching of Christ,” who brought perfected standards of ethics, morality and knowledge about the metaphysical attributes of God. Second, prophecy prepared the way for the “office of Christ and his Church.” Prophecy depicts Christ as prophet priest and king; king from David’s line with David’s character, and endued with the Spirit to fulfill the ideal image. Christ as prophet from the ideal image of the prophet as a teacher knowing God, revealing God to all of mankind; and priest as mediator, offering sacrifice and minister of grace.

The third stream of biblical thought, according to Edghill and Ryle, emphasize that prophecy prepared the way for the “the true apprehension of his person.” The Christ as conceived by the OT prophets progressively became more than merely human; he was described

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99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 35.
101 Ibid., 36.
102 Ibid., 39.
as having abundant gifts of grace, functioning as the perfect mediator, even becoming the son of God and Mighty God. All of these prophetic images coalesce leading to the incarnation.

Finally, prophecy prepared the way for the “historical life of Christ.”¹⁰³ This element is the most interesting aspect of the book. Edghill and Ryle discuss the life of Christ from the perspective of his titles: Son of man, Son of God, and Son of David. The title Son of man, they assert, has very early origins and is centered in the frailty of man as demonstrated in the Fall. This frailty later finds hopeful expression in Psalm 8. The designation of Ezekiel as son of man seems to indicate his dependence on God in light of his mortality and human weakness. Yet in Daniel, the phrase son of man, and its meaning, take a dramatic shift by becoming a messianic designation in the mind of the author and his subsequent readers. Edghill and Ryle imply that in Daniel, the dominion over creation lost in the Fall is regained by man—by a man who encapsulates all the ideals of Israel, superseding even the ideal, and becoming truly messianic. The authors of the Synoptic Gospels clearly, believed that Jesus applied the phrase to himself both as an identification with the frailty associated with the early use of the phrase and as a clear self-identification with the cosmic figure portrayed in the book of Daniel.

Edghill and Ryle discuss the title son of God as used in Israelite settings, differentiating it from how the phrase was employed by other nations. They contend that the phrase was used as a moral designation based on protective love and election. This designation involved the duties of filial love, but did not imply physical decent in any sense. It was a title of official sonship. Such is the case in Psalm 82:6–7, where no hint of essential deity is indicated; rather, a place of privilege is described. Contrasting with this clearly human designation for the phrase is the description of what may be angelic beings as sons of God in Genesis 6:2 (cf. Job 1:6). The use of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 41.
this phrase, according to Edghill and Ryle, designates beings of a higher metaphysical order, as it most clearly does in Daniel 3:25. Combining all of these ideas, one may argue that Judaism was never understood as a limited monotheism; it was, rather, a system that looked for the real union between God and man. This leads to the conclusion that the phrase son of God is, from the beginning, a preparation for a Son of God who encapsulates the theocratic, theanthropic, and metaphysical ideal of the phrase: one who is both God and man.

It their discussion about the title Son of David in relation to how OT prophecy prepared the way for Christ, Edghill and Ryle begin to distance themselves from what traditionally would be described as verifiable evidence. In their minds, historical events and details are not excluded in fulfillment criteria. The evidential significance of the historical life of Christ lies in his fulfillment of the messianic ideal, the spiritual ideal. They argue that the ideal supersedes the historical as evidence. A key example of what the authors mean is found in their discussion of the Davidic Covenant. The promise of a seed of David as the Messiah is affirmed; even the eternal significance of the promise is acknowledged. In a dubious exegetical move, however, Edghill and Ryle abandon literal Davidic decent in light of Jeremiah 22:30 and Isaiah 11:1. They ask if it is not possible to assert a religious conception? The authors offer several rationales for this move, including the denial that Isaiah 7:14, regarding a future birth in that clan, is directed to the house of David. They also assert that the prophecy of Micah regarding the birthplace of the Messiah may indicate a reincarnation of David himself. Edghill and Ryle suggest that if the prophecy concerned the birth of a king, Jerusalem would be the setting.

The primary argument against a literal descendant of David is the correspondence between הָעִידָה (hewn down) in relation to the Assyrians in Isaiah 10:33 and הָעִידָה (stump) in Isaiah 11:1. Edghill and Ryle contend that the connotation of being hewn down is present in both
verses. The hewn down tree, in combination with the mention of Jesse instead of David, indicates that Isaiah expected neither a literal descendant of David nor a revival of the monarchy. Isaiah, they argue, expected only a second David from some undesignated place: a second David with the character of the first. The name David, they contend, connotes certain ideas and theocratic reflections, but cannot be pressed to demand literal physical decent. The Messiah will have the character of David, perhaps even being a second David. However, the Messiah’s relationship to David must not be taken in a strict literal sense. The emphasis of the prophets, Edghill and Ryle contend, is on the Davidic character of the Messiah, not lineal decent.

Taking these messianic ideals and transferring them to the NT context, Edghill and Ryle proceed to strip virtually all hope from the historian in of search verifiable evidence regarding the evangelists’ claim that Jesus was a descendant of David. Their examination of the question Jesus posed to the Pharisees in Mark 12:35 is interpreted as a denial that Jesus could be both son of David and David’s Lord. These authors claim that Jesus simply wanted to convey the idea that he was the spiritual son of David: “he is son of David only insofar as he is son in the Spirit.”104 If he was genetically son of David, Jesus valued it only as an outward pledge of his spiritual kingship.

In the final analysis Edghill and Ryle believe that the true evidence of prophecy is not found in literal fulfillment of predictions; rather it lies in the “spiritual correspondence of the fact with the essential ideas of the prophecy which it fulfills.”105 Thus what began as an evidential

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104 Ibid., 423. Later in their book, the authors admit that the early Christians believed in the physical decent of Jesus from the stock of David (579).

105 Ibid., 581. These authors also assert that if Jesus’ Davidic lineage was only through Joseph, then he could not actually be a son of David. This observation seems plausible.

Another author who reduces the historical significance of the NT fulfillments to merely spiritual status is A. Kuenen. He grounds the OT predictive elements of prophecy solidly in their original contexts and then completely dismisses any thought of the NT interpretation as exegetical ground. He describes the method of the NT writers when utilizing the OT in prediction and fulfillment claims as sometimes contradictory, and in opposition. Kuenen
inquiry by Edghill and Ryle ends as little more than an allegorized philosophizing of the biblical data on the *son of David* concept. Their book includes lucid evaluation of phrases like *son of man* and *son of God* and how those concepts progressed into an understanding of the person of Jesus. Yet, with something actually containing the potential to place real evidence in front of the skeptic, Edghill and Ryle offer nothing. Their retreat to an ideal *son of David* cannot be classified as evidence; it can in no wise withstand the scrutiny of a verification principle. It is even possible that such a notion is exegetically falsifiable.

*Gurdon C. Oxtoby: Prediction and Fulfillment in the Bible*

Another work that takes a mildly critical view of predictive prophecy is entitled *Prediction and Fulfillment in the Bible*. Oxtoby’s primary goal appears to be the explanation of the concept of fulfillment in ways that clarify how the NT writers appropriated OT texts. He does not completely idealize the concept of fulfillment, but he diminishes the expectation that specific OT prophets could foresee NT historical realizations of their oracles. His argument proceeds by treating the semantic range of the expression *fulfillment*. The resulting terms are familiar: complete, consummate, finish, realization, and actuality. His purpose, however, is to move the reader to think of fulfillment as “correspondence.” This correspondence may be as slight as phraseology and illustrative correspondence, or as prominent as that of genuine anticipation of what the NT writer is presenting. Jesus as a historical person corresponds to the ideal of the *Son of Man*, *Son of God*, and *Messiah*. These assertions are valid, as far as they go.

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107 Ibid., 67.
Conversely, Oxtoby appears to be ambivalent about the assertions of biblical prophecy when specifics are investigated. He asserts that several occasions can be identified when the OT prophets predicted events that did not, and “in the very nature of the case, never can come to pass.”

Throughout the book, however, Oxtoby affirms fulfillment of other oracles; particularly those historically proximate to the prophet. These distinctions uncover the first methodological difficulty in Oxtoby’s work. How can someone trust a prophet whose predictions fail? Oxtoby rightly corrects those who believe the magical or superstitious forms of divination often associated with pagan prophets are somehow appropriate to Christian understanding. In so doing, however, he blunts any thought of supernatural aid at work in the mind of the prophet. This is why he is able to reject the entire concept of specific long-range prediction by the biblical prophets. In fact, long-range prediction is the target of Oxtoby’s most disparaging comments; he describes the concept of long-range predictions as historically presupposing, predestining, and fatalistic.

Ironically, Oxtoby affirms the methods of historical critical studies and then, in his summary, appropriates the story of the transfiguration of Jesus without any demonstration of its historicity. To his credit, Oxtoby notes the conditional nature of some predictions, and accepts some short-range predictive prophecies. He then turns and rejects most, if not all, long-range predictions.

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108 Ibid., 79.

109 The best responses to date on the issue of what are perceived to be failed prophecies are, Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 53, no. 3 (2010): 561–577. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “Does God ‘Change His Mind’?,” Bibliotheca Sacra 152, no. 4 (1995): 387–399. If prophecy as biblically construed actually fails, with no mitigating conditionality, all but the most learned historians struggle to separate what is true from what is false. This introduces a plethora of problematic elements into the historic understanding of the biblical text in relation to the intended and extended audience and the perspicuity of the documents.

110 Oxtoby, Prediction and Fulfillment in the Bible, 77.
predictions. He speaks of the fulfillment of prophecy in terms of conceptual cooperation and verification, yet rejects the idea that the biblical prophets possessed “extraordinary powers of second sight.” 111 He accepts the resurrection of Jesus, yet rejects the notion that the career of Jesus was predicted. When considered in light of the whole biblical corpus, the problem lurking beneath Oxtoby’s method is inconsistency. The Bible’s prophetic corpus does not betray any notion that it is limited to oracles directed to past events. If current scholarship is at all correct, future events also have been predicted. At least part of the reason for anticipating their fulfillment is the concrete actuality of past predictions, not vagaries about conceptual realization.

How are inquirers to react if some prophecies fail and others are realized? What is to be believed and what is to be rejected? Adequate, non-speculative answers to these questions require a historical-evidential approach rather than the inconsistent method of Oxtoby.

*Dewey Beegle: Prophecy and Prediction*

*Prophecy and Prediction* by Dewey Beegle marks an approximate half-way point between the classical view of predictive OT prophecy and the outright rejection of its actuality. Beegle affirms the existence of predictive prophecy and even certain fulfillments. One of the problems with OT prophecies, according to Beegle, is the tendency to accept the hermeneutical methods of the NT apostles when they appropriate OT texts and apply them. Beegle does not accept this as a valid method for interpretation of the texts today; each generation encapsulated in the biblical documents must be allowed to speak for itself.

The problem identified by Beegle stems from a continuing desire to extend a legitimate short-term promise made in the OT context into a long-term messianic prediction. His solution is to let the prophet speak to his immediate context. Any subsequent appropriation must fit that

111 Ibid.
context without forcing crossovers that are not explicit. Beegle’s primary example of this principle is the text of Isaiah 7:14. The single element expressed in both Matthew 1:21–23 and Isaiah is the term *Immanuel*. The use of the term in Isaiah, according to Beegle, means something like this: Ahaz’s son who is among them is a sign that God is with Judah. In contrast, Matthew’s use of the term *Immanuel* means God is actually present in body with us. Other aspects of Matthew’s appropriation of the prophecy, such as the term *virgin* and the naming of the baby (in the former case by his mother and in the latter by Joseph) are, according to Beagle, forced on the Isaiah text. Beegle’s point is not that Matthew or Isaiah are mistaken; rather, he argues, that each writer is addressing completely different contexts. Efforts to harmonize the two accounts are not beneficial to honest inquiry.\textsuperscript{112}

In another set of examples, Beegle takes issue with the evangelical stance on biblical inerrancy by describing what he believes are historical predictions that never occurred (e.g. Ezek 26:7–13; Zech 6:12–13; Mic 3:12). His arguments are not wholly convincing when he describes specifically why he thinks these prophecies failed.\textsuperscript{113} Even so his major point is to allege that the rigid commitment of conservative biblical scholars to a brand of “supernaturalism” does not make room for human culture and errors. Beegle denounces this type of conservatism for treating prophecy as another piece in a jigsaw puzzle that must by some means be fitted together.

Using the prophecies concerning Zerubbabel as exemplars, Beegle demonstrates his version of the evangelical “prophetic criticism” method. He argues that only a scattered few pieces of the Zerubbabel puzzle fit into the Persian period; others are deferred to the time of


\textsuperscript{113} Beegle does not give any attention to the interpretive principle set out in Jeremiah 18:7–10. This text contains a promise that *Yahweh* will relent of the either prophesied disaster or prosperity if the nation fails to listen and act. This principle must be considered before declaring a specific prophecy as failed.
Jesus, the millennial kingdom, or even the final judgment. This method of interpretation as critiqued by Beegle, illustrates a supernaturalism bordering on the magical. It represents a system presupposed to be perfect.\footnote{Beegle, \textit{Prophecy and Prediction}, 61–62.} The irony in Beegle’s argument is that he approves of the same type of dissecting procedure when applied as literary-source criticism. These methods often draw the ire of evangelicals and the accolades of anti-supernaturalists. Beegle does not conclude that all liberal or historical-critical conclusions are correct. Rather he chastises evangelical Christians for rejecting the work of thousands of scholars working over a 150-year period. He believes the conclusions of these scholars should be given due consideration. Beegle is correct on this point. As demonstrated below, the engagement of the evangelical and scholarly worlds with the various critical methodologies has increased significantly.

\textit{Joseph Fitzmyer: The One Who Is to Come}

Joseph Fitzmyer’s insightful work, \textit{The One Who Is to Come}, is an excellent treatment of the messianic concept; it contains key thoughts and components for those handling messianic prophecy. Its methodological proximity to the present study, in cooperation with a balanced critical procedure, marks a major step forward in messianic studies. Fitzmyer examines OT texts that Christians have traditionally believed to express messianic content. His approach to these texts is to ground them in both their literary and historical contexts, in order to understand the meaning in the same way as the first recipients of those texts.

The problem with Christian messianic titles such as \textit{Son of Man}, \textit{Son of God}, and \textit{Servant of the Lord},\footnote{Joseph A. Fitzmyer, \textit{The One Who Is to Come} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), viii.} according to Fitzmyer, is not that Christians use them, since NT writers have predicated these titles of Jesus. Rather, the problem is “whether these titles were used in a
messianic sense in pre-Christian Judaism in the Old Testament, or other pre-Christian Jewish writings.”

Employing this methodology requires that the texts themselves be examined in canonical order. The result is that some display messianic overtones from the period of their original composition while others gradually acquire messianic implications through a process of supplementary oracles added to the Hebrew prophetic writings. Still other texts acquire messianic import through the interpretation afforded them by Jewish commentators over long periods of history.

The progressive development of messianic prophecy works in genetic and teleological connection with the course of the history of the OT kingdom of God. The genetic connection is due to the influence of the historical relations just mentioned. The teleological connection surfaces because history, as much as prophecy, was interpreted as preparing and educating Israel for its destiny and for the reception of the messianic blessing.

The rare feature of a chapter devoted to the analysis of the allegedly messianic OT texts as they are presented in the Septuagint also distinguishes Fitzmyer’s work. This important and early translation of the Hebrew Tanakh into Greek is not a monolithic work composed during one brief period sometime during the third century BC. It is, rather, a composite work reflecting in part the thoughts and influences of early Christian scribes. As a result, it may reflect some Christian interpretations of OT texts. In short, the Septuagint is to some degree a commentary on the Tanakh; as such, it provides valuable insight into the interpretation of OT prophecy.

116 Ibid.

117 Several of the biblical texts addressed by Fitzmyer are included in the current study, as are many of the extra-canonical writings from the second temple period and later rabbinic writings.
The importance of Fitzmyer’s work for the present study cannot be overemphasized. Methodologically he has approached the OT messianic texts with the same initial goal as that informing the current study. He seeks to understand how the texts were originally understood. A second element in congruence with the current study is seen in his attempt to follow how the meaning of texts evolved. Fitzmyer is by far the most critically accepted source in this Literature Review. He interacts with other critical works effectively, and often comes to conclusions that are at variance with traditional Christian interpretation.118

The weakness of Fitzmyer’s approach, which the present study hopes to buttress, is that he fails to sufficiently bring the various lines of argumentation together, assimilate the evidence, and reduce the evidence to factual statements. These additional steps when completed effectively should find acceptance with a broad spectrum of scholars with relevant expertise. Stated differently, if the conclusions offered by Fitzmyer were melded with the more traditional conclusions, and the contradictions discarded, what facts would remain?119

Section 3 The Possibility of Miracles

Elements in and Rationale for Section 3 of the Literature Review

Until this point in the current work, no attempt has been made to demonstrate the possibility of miracles. Further, no attempt has been made to differentiate between spectacular

118 For example, Fitzmyer’s treatment of Psalm 2 does not give adequate treatment or place to the term begotten (יִ֫לָד) and appears to rely on an undemonstrated adoption motif that has questionable application in Jewish history and little if any verbal correspondence to the psalm itself. In addition, despite the intertestamental evidence, he gives no place for a messianic interpretation of the psalm, stating his agreement with other scholars who hold, “that Psalm 2 is not ‘messianic’ in any sense” Fitzmyer, The One Who Is to Come, 20.

acts of healing or the less spectacular, but just as miraculous, act of predictive prophecy. Both expressions of the miraculous, if they are critically evidenced, are undeniably beyond the capabilities of unaided human agents. The position taken thus far in the work, is that the *a priori* rejection of miracles is unwarranted. To reject the possibility of miracles without investigating the relevant data requires omniscience. Omniscience itself is supernatural and thus a miracle if attained by a human being. That fact alone renders the entire concept of *a priori* rejection incoherent. However, this logical conclusion alone may not satisfy the skeptic. Therefore, this section of the current work seeks to disclose additional rationale for not rejecting miracles *a priori*.

*Hume’s Arguments against Miracles*

David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* is the *locus classsicus* for the conviction that miracles do not occur and cannot be adequately verified historically. This conviction emerged during the Enlightenment and is still embraced by many among skeptical and critical historians. In order to address this Hume based conviction as relevant to the current work, several quotations from Hume are required. In doing so, it is important to note that much has changed since 1748 when Hume penned this particular treatise. Hume’s conclusions were based on experience and information gleaned from that age. His arguments were flawed then, even as they are now. However, exposing these flaws and understanding why they are present is currently facilitated by globalization and the digital era. The scope of knowledge, experience, and verifiable data available to individuals far exceeds anything Hume could have imagined.

Hume’s basic argument consists of several key points addressed as they occur in Section 10 “Miracles” of his treatise. First, because no current eyewitness is available to verify the miracle accounts in the NT, Hume levels the assertion that the “truth of the Christian religion is
less than the evidence for the truth of our senses.”¹²⁰ All Christians subsequent to those eyewitnesses of Jesus’ works are thus handicapped by their inability to adjudicate the miracles claimed in the NT. The “authority, of either scripture [sic] or tradition”, Hume avows, is founded “merely in the testimony of the apostles.”¹²¹

The flaw in this portion of Hume’s logic consists of a failure to grasp adequately the entire system of Christian belief, resulting in seven distinct errors. First, Hume commits his first error by thinking that Christians anchor their belief system exclusively on the testimony of the apostles. The apostolic testimony comprises but one link in a chain of evidence. Moving retrogressively, that chain of evidence, at the least, includes personal experience and observation as a first premise. Often contemporary personal experience and observation carry the weight of eyewitness testimony to marvelous, or even miraculous events. Second, individuals regularly report innate experiences with something numinous that they characterize as the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit. Hume mentions that his experience is absent the internal work of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, however, his lack of experience does not disallow the possibility for the remainder of mankind.¹²² Third, both currently and historically beginning with the era of the apostles, Christians have reported multitudes of healings or other acts that they believe are the direct intervention of the supernatural into the normal course of cause and effect. Fourth, no scholarly rationale permits the discarding of the apostolic witness as captured in the NT documents a priori. Fifth, some independent non-canonical Jewish writers prior to, and


¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Hume may fall into the all-or-nothing fallacy or the suppressing-evidence fallacy on this point. Either everyone confirms the same experience or it must be disallowed.
subsequent to, the NT era verify the expectation that a miracle-working messianic figure would arise: a figure with characteristics remarkably like those recorded of Jesus. Sixth, the OT witness of the prophets and nation of Israel must be considered. These records give reason to believe that what the NT records was specifically and miraculously predicted. Seventh, the Christian religion is able to explain origins coherently; why *something* rather than *nothing* exists. In response to Hume, the composite evidence for the Christian religion emerges from personal and corporate experience, history, independent documentation, and philosophical rationale, not “merely” the apostolic testimony.

Hume’s well-known statement disregarding any, and all, testimony as sufficient to establish a miracle claim (unless the falsification would be more miraculous) is also problematic. The basis for Hume’s unwillingness to accept human testimony for miracle claims is fourfold. First, he does not believe that any miracle has the requisite number of witnesses who possess the following virtues: good-sense, education, learning, undeluded perspective, integrity, credit and reputation, and potential for loss. In addition, the event in question must have been performed in public and “in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable”. Second, Hume argues that the “most usual is always most probable; and that where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations.” Third, Hume holds the presumption against miracles reported by citizens of undeveloped third-world nations. Fourth,

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124 Ibid., 122.

125 Ibid., 122–123.

126 Ibid., 125.
he objects to the evidential use of miracles to establish the truth of religions whose ideologies are in conflict. In short, Hume contends that human testimony regarding miracles is untrustworthy and always attended by mistake, delusion, or fraud. Therefore, Hume’s argument is epistemological. One simply cannot know if a miracle happened.

Undeniably, Hume’s analysis is partially correct. No serious scholar doubts that miracle testimony can be tainted. Nevertheless, Hume does not adequately address several issues, including the two addressed below which leave open the possibility for genuine miraculous activity. First, it must be acknowledged that the probability an event has occurred must be weighed against the probability that the event did not occur, given the extant testimony. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig argue this point cogently. Using the purported resurrection of Jesus as a case in point, Moreland and Craig reason that is it beyond incredulity to disbelieve that the evidence in our possession would be the same if the resurrection did not occur. An event described as a miracle may be attended with multiple independent witnesses, including postmortem appearances, and physical evidence, such as the empty tomb. In such cases, what is the probability that the event in question did not happen? The point of the illustration is to demonstrate that both the positive testimony for the event and the probability of the event not happening need to be considered in light of the available evidence. Soberly considered little probability exists that all of the witnesses to the resurrection suffer from delusion or integrity problems, given the overall scope of the evidence. The same types of evidence can be gathered from other miracle claims. Some of these are captured for scrutiny in Craig Keener’s two-

127 Ibid., 127–128.

128 Moreland and Craig, Philosophical Foundations for A Christian Worldview, 570.
volume work on miracles. The probability that the bulk of the miracle accounts Keener has investigated and reported are overladen with mistakes, delusion, or fraud is minute to such a degree as to make it incredible. Furthermore, reports of miracles are not limited to underdeveloped third-world countries.

Second, the a priori rejection of miracles based on naturalistic assumptions is neither a scientifically grounded nor a philosophically sound approach to history. Historicity is established by applying a set of rules or usually accepted criteria to historical claims. An appeal to the laws of nature, or the argument that necessity and causation uniformly arise from operations of nature, is also misguided. The scientific method and its conclusions change and evolve as knowledge increases. In this context, Habermas acknowledges the inability of science to “postulate absolutes.” None of the conclusions of science are inviolable. As such, an appeal to inviolable laws of nature, serve only as empty rhetoric. The so-called “laws of nature” describe what happens in regular and predictable ways. However, the existence of the regular and the predictable can never rule out the irregular or unpredictable event. Richard Swinburne establishes that a non-repeatable counter occurrence to a law of nature is logically compatible with the existence of the law. When the conceptually impossible happens (something irregular

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130 The criteria for establishing historicity are as follows: (1) eyewitness sources; (2) the superiority of early sources over latter sources; (3) multiple attestation by independent sources; (4) multiple attestation by different forms or genres; (5) discontinuity of the source with the prevailing culture; (6) possible embarrassment resulting from the contents of the source; (7) surprise elements contained in the source; (8) attestation by enemies or former enemies of the source; (9) coherence of the terminology and style with the source; and (10) the presence of an Aramaic substrata in NT sources.


or unpredictable), it highlights the difference between a law (something regular and predicable), and something universally true (inviolable). As such, methodological naturalism or historical naturalism consisting of the unwarranted exclusion of supranatural or supernatural explanations fails as a scientific methodologically.

Philosophically the basis for historical naturalism is usually linked to the principle of analogy. This principle stated in simplest terms maintains that, “on the analogy of the events known to us we seek by conjecture and sympathetic understanding to explain and reconstruct the past.” As utilized by Ernst Troeltsch, the principle of analogy is flawed and often misapplied. Moreland and Craig maintain that ancient myths, legends, illusions, and the like are dismissed as unhistorical, not because they are unusual, but because they have no objective referent: no historical reality. They are analogous to modern myths and dismissed casually. This clearly demonstrates the flaw in the principle of analogy as applied to historical investigation. It is not the absence of an analogy that demonstrates something unhistorical, but the positive presence of the analogy containing imaginary thought forms. Reality consisting of the unpredictable, irregular, or even conceptually impossible events may not have a direct analogy, yet may still be a real historical event.

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133 Ibid., 80.

134 Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. “Historiography.”


Hume’s Argument and Predictive Prophecy

How do the arguments presented above apply to predictive prophecy and fulfillment? Hume made no distinction between other types of miracles and prophecy; he asserts, “What we have said of miracles may be applied, without any variation, to prophecies”. This statement is particularly incorrect in the case of prophecy. The species of miracle in which accurate predictions of future events are made—predictions meeting the critical criteria for fulfillment—are of a different nature than isolated events springing from supernatural or suprahuman sources.

Both of Hume’s major arguments fail when applied to prophecy, for four key reasons. First, the miracle of prophecy and its later fulfillment is sometimes verifiable historically. Predictive prophecy and fulfillment may manifest in two distinct phases. Critical criteria can be applied to confirm or disconfirm both phases. This evaluative process might entail an event universally acknowledged to have occurred, an event attested by several witnesses, or an event supported by other types of evidence.

Second, prophecy and its fulfillment are not necessarily bound to second-hand testimony. Eyewitnesses might be present or the prophecy recorded at one time and place, while the fulfillment is recorded at an entirely different time and place. Each aspect of the event might be verified by eyewitness testimony. Third, it is even possible that first-hand observation of prophecy and fulfillment occur today. Nothing limits genuine prophetic activity with a corresponding fulfillment to the historical past. Fourth, prophecy and its corresponding

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fulfillment do not require a violation of a law of nature. No appeal to so-called laws of nature impact the process of determining whether a prophecy is authentic.

Peter Harrison has argued persuasively from a variety of sources that Hume’s arguments were not accepted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when they were applied to prophecy. Harrison states, “‘Miracles alone… are ‘not sufficient confirmation of a true prophet.’ or, it was widely admitted, could miracles convince an atheist. Together, however, miracles and accomplished prophecies could give a moral certainty of the truth of Christianity to the contemporary believer.’”139 This is why historical investigation of credible evidence is so crucial to establish in the case of prophecy. Employing the proper hermeneutical and historiographic methodology, verification of prophetic prediction and fulfillment is possible.

**Conclusion**

This review has sought to delineate and comment on a select group of published works from among the masses treating OT prophecy and alleged NT fulfillments. The works selected, with the exception of Hume, contain both a messianic component and a definite apologetic appeal. The evaluation of their content has highlighted significant lacunas in current OT and NT messianic scholarship that at some level is represented in each of the works reviewed. Each suffer from one or more shortcomings: (1) approaching the topic uncritically, (2) presupposing some form of divine inspiration, (3) offering sparse historical evidence, (4) providing little

interaction with textual difficulties or historical context (i.e., both OT and NT contexts), and (5) offering little interaction with the objections of critical scholarship. These shortcomings often result in the rejection of the conclusions offered.

The most difficult presupposition to remedy exposed by this review is the concept of divine inspiration. If one adopts a skeptically extreme position, abandoning divine inspiration illegitimates any attempt to read either the OT or the NT as unified works. Readings that allow the various biblical books to illuminate or to intertextually inform one on the other must be reconsidered developmentally and diachronically. This approach may lead to discarding canonical readings in favor of viewing the texts as isolated oracles. Conversely, critical scholarship also posits a final redactive process after the Babylonian exile for the OT and the well-documented history of the establishment of the NT as a developing unified body of thought. In light of these insights, it is possible to argue for a canonical reading of both: the OT in light of the historical-cultural intent of the final OT redactor, and the NT in light of the historical-cultural understanding of the first-century authors. No treatment of these issues will be problem free. Even so, the aim of this dissertation is to fill the lacuna exposed with facts that are well-attested and accepted by the majority of scholars.140

Concordant with the arguments offered above, one further conclusion is indicated by the literature. The position remains that no a priori rejection of miracles is warranted for the historian. Epistemological certainty is never possible with historical investigations. This does not however, exempt the responsible historian from a methodological and philosophical obligation to

140 In the Statement of the Problem above, “This investigation envisions the existence of three possible outcomes for each prophecy examined: (1) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient historical evidence establishes the claim as probable, (2) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable, and (3) sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.”
approach the task with an open mind and to draw conclusions from all relevant data. The
obligation to treat data fairly holds true whether the event or phenomena in question is analogous
to current data, or whether it is consistent with one’s own experience.
PART II EXEGESIS ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

Introduction to Part II

Before beginning the work with the various texts, it is proper to remind ourselves that demonstrating the probability of a historical event is very difficult. Origen remarked, “that the endeavour [sic] to show, with regard to almost any history, however true, that it actually occurred, and to produce an intelligent conception regarding it, is one of the most difficult undertakings that can be attempted, and is in some instances an impossibility.” Without minimizing the daunting task this dissertation has undertaken, it is possible to show the probability of many historical events. Although exhaustive knowledge of them is beyond human capacity, adequate or even substantial knowledge is possible.

It is no less difficult to establish facts about authorial intent when interpreting ancient literature. It is possible to show the likelihood that the gist of interpretations is correct, although exhaustive knowledge of the author’s intent is unattainable. In sum, adequate explanations are possible.

With these issues in view, the present study approaches the subject texts from a historical-evidential orientation. The method of argumentation during the exposition, the “plausible historical-evidential conclusions,” and “facts” presented at the end of each text investigated are not intended to be understood as minimal facts. They represent the present author’s style and personal conclusions. Other scholars may or may not agree. Only those items specifically labeled minimal facts meet the criteria and will be treated in Chapter 8.

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141 Origen, “Origen Against Celsus.” in Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second, Cont. Celsus 1.42.
Chapter 3

The First Group of Biblical Texts

*Introduction to the First Group of Biblical Texts*

The first group of texts investigated are sometimes referenced to substantiate the claim that the *terminus ad quem* for the coming of the Messiah must be before Israel loses its status as self-governing and before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. The OT texts chosen for evaluation cover virtually the entire era for the writing of the OT (Gen 49:10; Ps 118:26; Hag 2:7, 9; Mal 3:1). If plausible conclusions or minimal facts can be ascertained from either the literary or the historical contexts of the OT prophecies and the NT witnesses, these texts are the place to begin the research.

*Genesis 49:10*

*Literary and Textual Analysis*

*Two Key Questions for Understanding this Study of Genesis 49:10:*

*what do the Terms Scepter (םֵּב) and Shilo (שִּׁלְו) Mean?*

Genesis 49:10 contains problematic elements for exegetes. This part of the poem directed to Jacob’s fourth son, is uncertain with reference to both its wording and its meaning. These ambiguities make tenuous any broad statements about historical facts or certainty about interpretation. The primary difficulty, for most exegetes, lies in the term נֵלַע (šîlô) or נֵלַי (šîlô). The meaning and spelling of this term, according the *Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT), remains a disputed question. The latter spelling is translated predominantly with one of three senses: (1) “until the one comes to whom it (the sceptre) belongs, (2) “the one to whom it (authority) belongs”, and (3) “until the Messiah comes to whom the kingdom
belongs.” In addition, Rydelnik includes the long-standing views that Shiloh (if the former spelling is correct) is either a place name or a personal name of the Messiah. Neither of Rydelnik’s options has any conclusive support, however; Shiloh as the personal name of the Messiah has limited support from later Jewish literature. This later support notwithstanding, neither the *analogia Scriptura* nor lexical evidence dispels the difficulties with this translation. Similarly, Briggs flatly states that this view was not introduced into the Christian church until the sixteenth century.

If *Shiloh* is translated as a place name, the text would read, “until he comes to Shiloh” with a focus on the Judah’s role in the conquest of Canaan. Rydelnik rejects this possibility based on the MT’s (Masoretic Text) consistently different spelling for the place Shiloh (שִׁילוֹ) in relation to the word appearing in Genesis 49:10 (שִׁילה). However, in light of Joshua 18:1, regardless of spelling irregularities and if the text is rightly translated as a place name, any suggestion that it does not relate to the conquest of Canaan can be dismissed. These observations make any alleged connection to the Messiah for both the personal name and place name translations indefensible.

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All three of the remaining possible translations might be interpreted as predictive of the Messiah, David, or the Davidic dynasty. The most frequently chosen of the possibilities is something similar to “he whose it is”, or “that which belongs to him”.\(^\text{147}\) As will be demonstrated below, wording similar to these examples is indicated as the most likely translation.\(^\text{148}\)

The answer to the other crucial interpretive question lies in solving two problems. First, what is meant by the “scepter” ( Heb) and the “ruler’s staff” ( finga)? Second, when were these emblems de facto removed from a representative of the tribe of Judah? The importance of this second question arises because some Christian interpretations of Genesis 49:10 contend it demands a continuous succession of kings from the tribe of Judah, or at least self-governance by a Judahite, until the Messiah comes.\(^\text{149}\)

The scepter is an emblem of royal authority. In Genesis 49:10 scepter and the ruler’s staff are in synonymous parallelism. Together they denote the vesting of rulership, in the tribe of Judah, over the other tribes. This assertion is not controversial; however, the tribe of Judah is not currently in a leadership role in Israel and has not been for more than 2000 years. These preliminary observations lead to one of three conclusions: (1) the text does not demand a

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continuous succession of Judahite rulers, (2) the prediction has been realized, or (3) both one and two are true.

When examined diachronically, the recorded history of Israelite leadership quickly exposes the inconsistency of maintaining that Genesis 49:10 prophesies an unbroken line of Davidic kings until the advent of the Messiah, or at least that the internal affairs of the Jews be governed by a Judahite leader until the Messiah comes.\(^{150}\) This approach has several historical problems to overcome. First, neither Moses nor Joshua was Judahite. Second, the office of the king of Israel was initially occupied and divinely ordained to Saul from the tribe of Benjamin (1Sam 9:16). Third, a considerable amount of historical contortionism is required if one hopes to demonstrate an unbroken line of Israelite leaders (official or unofficial) from the tribe of Judah (even when allowances for beginning with David are granted) until the birth of Jesus.

Subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, it is doubtful that the succession of \textit{bona fide} Jewish monarchs from the tribe of Judah can be mustered. For the vast majority of Israel’s post-exilic history, it existed as vassal state answerable to a non-Israelite king. When the nation was sovereign for short epochs, such as during the Hasmonean period (ca.144–63), Judean ancestry of its leaders is possible, but uncertain.\(^{151}\) Newman proposes to address this problem by making the reference to Judah in Genesis 49:10 a geographical designation. If correct, this interpretation would place the location of Israelite kings in the land of Judah, with the last king being Herod Agrippa I.\(^{152}\) Newman’s approach solves the succession problem by simply


\(^{152}\) Newman, \textit{Jesus: The Testimony of Prophecy and History}, Kindle loc. 176.
reframing the question to one of geographical origins rather than of specific tribal ancestry. This approach, however, ignores the personal language and character traits the author of The Testament of Jacob applies. It also potentially allows for a Reubenite born in Judea to become king. Moreover, Newman’s topographical maneuver cannot satisfactorily explain how the scepter did not depart during the exile and those eras when the kingdom of Judah was a vassal state.

The reasonable way to understand the prophecy, whether originally penned in the patriarchal period or during the early monarchy, requires using the same general approach reflected centuries later in the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls:

The sceptre [shall not] depart from the tribe of Judah … [Gen. 49:10]. Whenever Israel rules, there shall [not] fail to be a descendant of David upon the throne. For the ruler’s staff is the covenant of kingship, [and the clans] of Israel are the divisions, until the Messiah of Righteousness comes, the Branch of David. For to him and his seed is granted the Covenant of kingship over his people for everlasting generations…. 153

Adela Collins and Harold Attridge concur with this understanding concluding. That “it is likely that the figure declared to be ‘son of God’ and ‘son of the Most High’ in a controversial Aramaic fragment from Qumran is also the Davidic messiah.” The fragment they are referencing, (4Q174 Frags. 1 i, 21, 2) reads as follows:

The Lord declares to you that he will build you a House (2 Sam 7:11c). I will raise up your seed after you (2 Sam 7:12). I will establish the throne of his kingdom [for ever] (2 Sam 7:13). I will be] his father and he shall be my son (2 Sam 7:14). He is the Branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law [to rule] in Zion [at the end] of time. 154


The theme of Genesis 49:10, then, is not a promise of an unbroken chain of leaders from, or situated in, Judah. It is not even a promise that can be explained by sporadic Judean kings. The only reasonable way to understand the text is to except that it is primarily a declaration that the divinely appointed ruler of Israel is from the tribe of Judah. Secondarily, if later texts are allowed an interpreting voice, the universal eschatological rule of Israel will be vested in a king from the tribe of Judah. This interpretation aligns well with the overall development of the messianic concept in the OT; it also aligns well with the insights of historical criticism while avoiding anachronism.

*Genesis 49:1b and 49:10 Redacted Insertions?*

Historical critical scholars assert that Genesis 49:1–27 is a poem and is not a part of the original Patriarchal narrative that constitutes the body of Genesis. They argue it is *vaticinia ex eventu*; the poem has been inserted into the narrative of the Priestly (P) or the Yahwist (J) source by a later redactor, leaving the reader with the impression of a prophetic utterance by Jacob. Hermann Gunkel agrees with this position, describing the poem as very old and

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155 John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis. International Critical Commentary* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1910), 509. For the purpose of this dissertation, the Yahwist source (J) is dated 10th century BC; the Elohist (E) 9th century BC; the Deuteronomist (D) 7th century BC; the Priestly source (P) 6th century BC.


Amihai Mazar takes issue with the total invention of the patriarchal narratives. He contends that the cultural environment of the Middle Bronze Age II “provides the most suitable background for the patriarchal sagas in the Book of Genesis.” Further, the prosperous urban culture, pastoral clans, and the four-hundred years chronology for the time in Egypt, all point to the seventeenth century BCE as the time of Jacob. Other informative points of interest include, (1) Joseph’s place in Egypt could fit the Hyksos period, (2) most cities mentioned were occupied (e.g., Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, and Hebron), (3) Abraham’s journey from Ur to Haran and on to Canaan are explained by the general movements of people during the era, and (4) Personal names used in Genesis are of “West Semitic form known from the first half of the second millennium BCE.” These apparent parallels with the Middle Bronze Age II do not dismiss the probability that later redactors (perhaps during the time of the Judges or monarchy) modified the stories, whether in written or oral form, but this does imply the probability that there is some historicity to the underlying stories.
originally part of the J corpus.\(^{157}\) The basis for his claim lies partly with the identifiable parallels in the characteristics of the tribal sayings in Genesis 49:10 with those of Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5:14–18.\(^{158}\) Claus Westermann contends that these tribal sayings originate during era of the Judges, with the exception of those concerning Judah, which must come sometime after the establishment of the monarchy. The specific attributions concerning the tribes of Israel in The Testament of Jacob are reflective of internally known and discussed characteristics of the tribes arising from tribal meetings and battles on various occasions after entering Canaan; these extend to the period of the judges.\(^{159}\)

Important for this discussion is Westermann’s contention that a second redactor inserting verse 1b into Genesis 49 is purposely imposing prophetic eschatological meaning on verses 8–10. This later redactor understood verses 8–10 as designating a ruler of the last days.\(^{160}\) This is indicated by the phrase, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come” (ESV)\(^ {161}\). Barfield tacitly affirms this position by indicating that the phrase “in the last days” (KJV) (באחרית הימים) “generally speaks of a time when the Jewish kingdom

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\(^{158}\) Deuteronomy 33 also contains a list of blessings directed to the tribal groups. Similar to Genesis 49:1–27, this list includes images drawn from nature (particularly animal life) set in prophetic prose. The parallels Judges 5:14–18 are not as pronounced.


\(^{160}\) Ibid., 223.

\(^{161}\) Westermann cites Hermann Gunkel in this regard, noting that several other biblical texts use the same type of eschatological language. Even the most conservative view of the phrase “in the days to come” indicates a very long-term perspective. However, when other texts are allowed to inform the reader, the messianic eschatological understanding appears the most reasonable.
would be judged by God and replaced with a new kingdom and covenant.\textsuperscript{162} If this interpretation is accurate, according to Barfield, scholars customarily locate the period of judgment and replacement in the decades prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Johnston, however, is more cautious, noting that the phrase, “in the days to come,” is a technical expression of the eschatological future in the prophets. Although it does not necessarily point toward an eschatological event in the Pentateuch (e.g., Deut 4:30 and 31:29).\textsuperscript{163} Conceptually then, given the passage’s prophetic nature, it is possible that this pericope intends to project a judgment and replacement motif present in the mind of the redactor of 1b or his peers. The only constant that may be asserted is the focus on Judah and a probable extension to the Davidic monarchy.

Numbers 24:14 and following is particularly informative in relation to Genesis 49:1–27. It originates from approximately the same period, or earlier and unarguably contains import that later Jewish interpreters considered as pointing to the ideal Davidic scion.\textsuperscript{164} The initial concept probably was a \textit{vaticinia ex eventu} affirmation of the subjugation of Moab and Edom by David.\textsuperscript{165} If so, a further intertextual relationship emerges in prophecy of a particular ideal Davidic scion (2 Sam 7:12–16). Relating these affirmations to Genesis 49:1–27 as the work of monarchial or later redactors leaves open the possibility that Numbers 24:17 is the earliest

\textsuperscript{162} Barfield, \textit{The Prophet Motive}, 126–127. The difference of wording lies in the English translation, not the Hebrew text. Other occurrences of similar phrases in the OT prophets support this interpretive approach (e.g. Num 24:14; Isa 2:2; Jer 48:47; 49:39; and Mic 4:1).


\textsuperscript{165} Fitzmyer, \textit{The One Who Is to Come}, 99.
biblical mention of rulership coming from Jacob. The bulk of the Balaam oracles are attributed to J and E. However, if these oracles derive their basis from historical events, as Martin Noth contends, they are necessarily from an earlier tradition; they easily could pre-date the introduction of The Testament of Jacob into the patriarchal narrative.  

This possibility makes it more likely that Genesis 49:10 was originally pointing toward more than Judah’s role in the conquest of Canaan, or a vaticinia ex eventu affirmation of the Davidic monarchy. Genesis 49:1–27 may have formed a type of messianic commentary on the Balaam oracle. With this additional evidence, it is probable (given redaction) that the text of Genesis 49:10 was (1) intended to affirm the role of Judah and the perpetuity and “inviolability” of Davidic monarchy, and (2) perhaps even point toward the nascent ideal of a scion of David as implied in Numbers 24:17.

Conversely, if Genesis 49:10 is read in its traditional patriarchal context, not as a later redaction, the meaning probably was not overtly messianic. The messianic interpretation, according to Fitzmyer, came about through a process. He contends that Genesis 49:10 is meant to emphasize the “ascendancy of the tribe of Judah among the twelve tribes.” While acknowledging the problematic aspects of the last half of the verse with it reference to Shiloh, Fitzmyer understands the verse to be an oracle pointing to the tribute that will eventually be paid to Judah through David and his descendants. This honor will continue until the dissolution of the

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166 The critical scholar Martin Noth believes that the area east of the northern end of the Dead Sea is the region from which this story originates. Balak was probably a “petty” king and underlies the character of Balaam who was a real historical figure. The story, as a whole, is also thought to have a historical basis, from which it was handed down from one generation to the next. Martin Noth, Numbers: A Commentary, trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 172.


monarchy that ended with the reign of Zedekiah. In his view, to interpret the text otherwise is anachronistic. Similarly, Johnston notes the openness of the text, adding this text “initially conceived the role the tribe of Judah would play in the conquest and settlement of Canaan to fulfill God’s ancient promise.” 169 Even so, a latent and progressive messianic potential exists in the text.

Briggs also evaluates the text as a progressive promise after treating the textual issue surrounding the term Shiloh. Briggs makes the cogent point when arguing, that claiming this term as the name of the Messiah disturbs the flow of the progressive unveiling of the messianic promise. Viewed as the next step in the revelation given to Abraham regarding the promise of a seed, the natural way to understand the promises made to Jacob’s son Judah is that of headship during the conquest of Canaan. 170 As was the case with Fitzmyer and Johnston, however, Briggs does not end his exegesis with the conquest of Canaan. This prophecy, he argues, transcends the era of Joshua and Caleb or even David and Solomon, and points toward a final realization “at the end of the world”. 171

These assertions by Fitzmyer, Johnston, and Briggs are logical deductions. More importantly they allow “in the days to come” (1b) to bear the same prophetic and eschatological meaning (of a permanent ideal Davidic monarch), whether it was inserted by a redactor or not. None of these scholars omits David or the Davidic monarchy as part of the progressively

169 Johnston, “Messianic Trajectories in Genesis and Numbers,” in Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King, 41.

170 Briggs, Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfillment of the Redemption Through the Messiah, 97, Ftnt III.

171 Ibid., 98.
included meaning. Temporally they simply regress one step further back in time to the initial conquest of Canaan, rather than beginning with David and the monarchy.

If *The Testament of Jacob* is a product of later redactions, as Westermann claims, it presupposed, at a minimum, the monarchy and probably contained connotations of Jewish prophetic eschatology (in the sense of a permanent ideal Davidic monarch) from its first insertion into the narrative.\(^{172}\) However, given the lack of any historical data that clearly establishes the date of writing or any redactive process to which the text has been subjected, an examination of how the text was interpreted in exilic and post-exilic Judaism is warranted.

*The Interpretation of Genesis 49:10 in Exilic and Post-exilic Judaism*

*Old Testament Evidence*

Regardless of whether *The Testament of Jacob* or the Balaam oracles are earlier, sometime before the chronicler recorded his books (1Chr 5:2), the text of Genesis 49:10 was understood as delineating a Davidic leader from Judah. Subsequently it received additional messianic interpretation. This assertion is supported by two key conclusions: one from the OT, discussed in this section, and the second conclusion from intertestamental literature, discussed in the following section.

The exilic oracle of Ezekiel 21 (with focus on 21:27) manipulates what seems to be an accepted common messianic understanding of the promise made in Genesis 49:10. Ezekiel’s “sinister reinterpretation”\(^{173}\) intends to bring attention to the humiliation of Judah and Zedekiah. The removal of the royal symbols from Zedekiah—including the turban, crown, and implicitly

\(^{172}\) The Genesis Rabbah on 49:1–26 (XCVII:II. 7) specifically ties the phrase “in the days to come” (1b) to eschatological Gog and the end of days; (XCVIII:VIII. 1) connects the term Shiloh to the Messiah

the scepter—indicate his impending judgment. The implication is that Nebuchadnezzar temporarily possesses the ruler’s scepter. The phrase “until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him” (Ezek 21:27b) is effectively a reversal of the traditional understanding by replacing the meaning of מִשְׁפַּט (mišpāt) understood as right or claim, with connotations of judgment on Israel. Ezekiel’s appropriation of the expression “until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs” directly correlates with several translations of the term רִשות in Genesis 49:10. This correlation indicates not only the correctness of the conclusions made above, but also implies that Ezekiel may be thinking beyond localized terms toward the ideal eschatological Davidic king. Walther Zimmerli provides several of the translations of the term רִשות proposed by critical scholars that support an understanding in general agreement with this observation:

‘for whom it is fitting’ (Smend), ‘who has a claim (to it)’ (Kraetzschmar, Ziegler, Ezechiel), ‘who has a right to it’ (Fohrer), ‘who is right’ (Herrmann), ‘to whom the right belongs’ (Cooke), ‘die er recht op heeft’ (van den Born), ‘die het recht heeft’ (Aalders), ‘cui est jus (debitum)’ (Knabenbauer). As indicated above these translations can be construed as denoting either the Messiah or simply a Davidic king. The phrase appearing in Ezekiel 21:27b however, actually marks the end of formal Judahite rule in Israel. For the first time since the establishment of the monarchy, there is a clear break with the Davidic line. A promise accompanies this break by appropriating Genesis 49:10 in reference to a specific future individual, “until the one comes whose judgment it is”

174 Ibid., 167–168.

It seems that Ezekiel was thinking in terms of a single eschatological judge to whom the scepter will be given. Sigmund Mowinckel affirms that Ezekiel probably “alludes to the expected righteous scion of David.” Perhaps, adds Mowinckel, the prophet is thinking about the texts mentioned and several royal psalms that contribute to the overall idea of the Messiah.

**Intertestamental Evidence**

The locus of the second line of argumentation supporting the gradual accruing of a messianic interpretation for Genesis 49:10 emerges in the *Testament of Judah* (second-century BC). The *Testament of Judah* reasserts the idea that the posterity of Judah is the tribe from which the rulers of Israel will come (22:3 and perhaps 1:6). Similarly, the Dead Sea Scrolls also address the issue of Genesis 49:10. 4Q252, a commentary on Genesis, explicitly interprets Genesis 49:10 as a messianic prediction of the Messiah who is the branch of David (4Q252 Col. v). The *Targum Onkelos* is another example of Jewish interpretation stemming from about the first century AD; it also explicitly interprets Genesis 49:10 in messianic terms. Tom Huckle translates the *Targum Onkelos* as follows: “The transmission of dominion shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children’s children, forever, until the Messiah comes. to [sic] whom the kingdom belongs, and whom nations shall obey.”

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176 The author’s translation.


Pseudo Jonathan reads much the same way, as do some fragmentary Targum and several midrashic texts.¹⁸⁰

New Testament Evidence

This study has not discovered any NT evidence that demands Genesis 49:10 be interpreted as a *terminus ad quem* either for Israelite sovereignty or for the advent of the Messiah.¹⁸¹

Summary

In summary, it has been demonstrated that some Jewish interpreters from as early as the monarchial period may have believed that Genesis 49:10 pointed beyond the immediate context and toward the ideal Davidic king. Although indemonstrable, the possibility that The Testament of Jacob has a historical basis cannot be wholly dismissed. If it did have such a basis, that work was probably intended to designate Judah as the tribe from which the leaders of the

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¹⁸⁰ In addition to those listed above the Midrash Rabbah that Huckle identifies as having import for understanding Jewish interpretation of Genesis 49:10 are as follows: (1) Genesis XCVII; (2) Proverbs, Chapter 19, 21; (3) Genesis XCIX; (4) Lamentations I, 16, and 51; (5) Genesis XC VIII, 8–9. Ibid. The Eagle vision of 4 Ezra, also is a probably reference to the Davidic Messiah by the lion image associated the tribe of Judah and Genesis 49:10. Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Frerichs Ernest, eds., *Judaism and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁸¹ Although indemonstrable, Nils Alstrup Dahl argues that Paul, as someone steeped in the Jewish understanding of the OT, had concluded that Jesus was the τὸ σπέρμα ὧν ἐπήγγελται (Gal 3:19b, NA27). Dahl ties the Abrahamic covenant and Abraham’s seed in Genesis 12:7 to (Jesus) and connects Genesis 49:10 to 2 Samuel 7:12. The claim is that Paul is using a form of rabbinic exegesis that involves inference by analogy, whereby the promise related to “your offspring” made to Abraham (Gen 12:7) and to David (2 Sam 7:12) are fulfilled by one and the same person—Jesus. Dahl further argues that Paul employs a free exegesis of Genesis 49:10 with its reference to שילה as designating an individual according to birthright. This individual is the offspring “to whom the promise had been made” (Gal 3:19b). Three promises (Gen 12:7; 49:10; 2 Sam 7:12) are fulfilled in one offspring—Jesus. Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 130–131. Cf. Christopher G. Whitsett, “Son of God, Seed of David: Paul’s Messianic Exegesis in Romans 1:3–4,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 4 (2000): 667, accessed September 7, 2016, http://www.sbl-site.org/ (Publisher’s URL); http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000062737&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
conquest of Canaan and the kings of Israel would arise. This tradition was further developed during the early monarchy, with the resulting fully messianic interpretation coming gradually.

If Numbers 24:17 has a historical basis, as asserted in the current work, it could not have been far from the mind of the monarchial author/redactor of Genesis 49:10. The messianic interpretation becomes increasingly obvious in Ezekiel, continuing through to the intertestamental period. More interpretations are added in the Qumran literature and later rabbinic writings.

The preceding conclusion leaves unaddressed the question of when Genesis 49:10 was first interpreted as a reference to the Messiah. In contrast, the question of how the text has been understood is clear. For as long as relevant records exist, they interpret Genesis 49:10 as containing the dictum that the Messiah and other divinely installed kings of Israel will be from the tribe of Judah. No terminus ad quem can be established from Genesis 49:10. Israel's status as self-governing may come and go, but when a king is seated, he rightfully should be from the tribe of Judah. These assertions align well with the criteria for justifying historical descriptions established in Chapter 1.182

**Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Related to Genesis 49:10**

1. Presupposing a monarchial insertion into the Patriarchal narrative, Genesis 49:10 is intended to denote the perpetual ascendancy of the tribe of Judah as the bearer of the ruler’s scepter.

2. Presupposing a monarchial insertion into the Patriarchal narrative, the intent of the author/redactor affirms permanent rule for Judah.

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3. Presupposing a monarchial, and later (Genesis 49:1b) insertion into the Patriarchal narrative, the passage reflects the prophetic eschatological expectation of a Davidic king and permanent rule over the kingdom.

4. Presupposing that Genesis 49:10 is part of the original narrative, it is intended to denote the ascendancy and rulership of the tribe of Judah and permanent rule over the kingdom.

5. Presupposing that Genesis 49:10 is part of the original narrative, it was imbued with increasingly specific eschatological messianic import subsequent to the original writing.

**Historical-Evidential Facts Related to Genesis 49:10**

1. No terminus ad quem for the advent of the Messiah can be established from Genesis 49:10.

**Psalm 118**

*Literary and Textual Analysis*

The NT writers regularly explain parts of the ministry and life of Jesus by referencing Psalm 118. Leslie Allen communicates this observation in a slightly different but informative way. Psalm 118 is used by the NT writers to “exegete the work of Jesus in theological terms, in connection with both the royal manifestation of the triumphal entry and the great twin themes of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation.”

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183 These facts and those presented throughout the remainder of the paper should not be confused with the minimal facts (defined in Chapter 1) presented in Chapter 8.

Psalm 118, as the four evangelists did, the Psalm reflects: (1) their understanding of Jesus’ relationship to Israel; (2) Israel’s institutions, such as the temple; and (3) the eschatological themes of salvation, healing, and righteousness. All four evangelists use either verse 25 or 26, or both, in their Triumphant Entry narrative (Matt 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38; John 12:13).

Allen contends that Psalm 118 is a thanksgiving song offered in a “festival procession that is on its way to the ‘portal of Yahweh’”\(^1\). In this procession context, Jesus enters Jerusalem in a manner consistent with intentionally acting out the messianic promise associated with Zechariah 9:9. It is probable that Jesus deliberately acts out the prophecy by riding on the foal of a donkey; it is also probable that the writers of the synoptic texts organized their material to highlight messianic functions accomplished by Jesus. Darrell Bock describes one aspect of this organizational emphasis, in light of Psalm 118, by noting its placement between two other symbolic events. Just prior to the Triumphant Entry is the healing of Bartimaeus, and immediately subsequent the cleansing of the temple. These events, according to Bock, are best understood as both prophetic fulfillments and eschatological messianic signs; signs possibly invoking thoughts of Shemoneh Esreh (specifically benediction 14) among the recipients.\(^2\)

There is little doubt that prophecy related to the riding of a donkey and cleansing of the temple are specifically staged as fulfillments of prophecy, but those fulfillments are not at issue. The issue is whether Psalm 118 indicates that Messiah must enter the second or rebuilt temple. If this is the case, it is reasonable to conclude that this must have preceded the destruction of said temple in AD 70. It is, after all, impossible to enter a non-existent temple.

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2. Darrell L. Bock, “The Identity of Jesus as the Christ in His Ministry,” in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012), 451.
Prior to the first century and the events transmitted in the NT accounts, the overall significance of Psalm 118 was certainly understood in relation to a specific individual,\(^\text{187}\) possibly a king,\(^\text{188}\) leading the participants in the ascent to the temple. John J. Collins affirms the kingly identity of the individual based on the “nations” of verse 10 being set in opposition to the celebrant.\(^\text{189}\) Psalm 118 is part of the “gate liturgies” that include Psalms 15 and 18, both ostensibly authored by David the king. If the individual is a king, he is symbolically leading the nation as a whole. The liturgy is clearly a communal event, and part of it may have been sung antiphonally or perhaps even with multiple individual parts. The Babylonian Talmud confirms this probability:

> He said, ‘[I learned this] from what I saw the great rabbis do. When reciting in public [the Hallel on a festival or the new moon], one [group] recited, ‘Blessed is he that comes,’ and another [group] answered, ‘In the name of the Lord’ [Ps. 118:26].\(^\text{190}\)

In the Psalmist’s historical context, the notion is plausible that the stone the builders rejected may be national Israel, or more likely, the king as representative of Israel (see below with in this section).\(^\text{191}\) However, a third and more contextually suitable option exists. Gregory R. Lanier has argued convincingly that the stone is best understood in relationship to the stone metaphor as it is consistently applied in the OT. Lanier’s research indicates that the stone

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\(^{188}\) Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 164. Allen cites Dahood as holding the positon that a king is in view.


\(^{191}\) Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reyburn, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms* (New York, NY: United Bible Society, 1991), 993. Bratcher and Reyburn think the reference to the rejected stone is a proverbial saying applied to the nearly defeated king or to the insignificance of Israel when compared to world empires. In either case, the image is of rejection, defeat, and near death with a sudden reversal of fortune because of *Yahweh*’s intervention.
metaphor contains a “two-fold significance: for some it is a stone of strength or upbuilding; for others, it is a stone of stumbling.”

The metaphor, according to Lanier, first appears in Deuteronomy 32:4, 37 in relation to Yahweh as the true God against false gods. Isaiah 8:14 presents in one verse a prime example of the two-fold aspect of the stone metaphor. If Israel will fear Yahweh, he will be a sanctuary; if not, he will become a stone of stumbling: a trap and snare.

Isaiah 28:16–17 is even more striking in that it employs construction language related to true and plumb structures, in combination with the stone metaphor closely related to Psalm 118. Once again, Yahweh is the one laying the stone (a corner stone), pictured in contrast to a covenant made with Egypt. The implication in this passage is that those who express trust in him by obedience are secure while those trusting in Egypt will be destroyed. Further, Lanier notes two key pieces of evidence that personify the stone in Isaiah 28:16. First, the Aramaic Targum replaces the crucial word stone with king; and second, most codices of the LXX include the dative pronoun in him (αὐτῷ) in reference to the stone.

The trajectory of the stone metaphor in exilic and post-exilic literature shifts from an emphasis on Israel’s unbelief to its eschatological deliverance, to a messianic kingly image.


193 Ibid., 747. Cf. Isaiah 31:9; 51:1

194 Other significant uses of the stone metaphor that Lanier includes are, Zechariah 3:9, where the stone bears an inscription relating to forgiveness of Israel’ sin and very quickly reappears in 4:7 as the headstone for the rebuilding of the future temple and again in 12:3 as a heavy stone against which the nations of the earth will gather. Daniel 2:34 portrays a stone cut out by no human hand that destroys the nations.

In the Qumran literature, Isaiah 28:16 is referenced in relation to the Qumran community and as the stone. The “tested rampart, the precious cornerstone whose foundations do not shake or tremble from] their [p]lace”, with the apparent implication that the foundation stone does not shake or tremble, but is a “most holy dwelling.” García Martínez and Tigchelaar, The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition (Translations), 89.
Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham confirm that the cornerstone image from Isaiah 28:16 and the “tent peg” image from Isaiah 22:20–23 have strong royal associations and are translated as “king and messiah” respectively in the Aramaic Targum. Lanier concludes his essay by identifying the stone as originally meaning *Yahweh*, but later identified a messianic kingly figure. This kingly figure fulfills one of two functions: either building up the faithful or crushing unbelievers. Both functions apply to Jew and Gentile alike.

The cogent point to be grasp from Lanier’s work is that the conceptually interconnected images of *Yahweh*, his Davidic king, and the Messiah in relation to the stone metaphor are no late accretion or invention of the NT writers. The stone has a history as long as the canon itself, and is consistently presented as both a source of refuge for the faithful, and a source of destruction for the unbelieving—all of which depends on the faithfulness of *Yahweh*.

Interpreting the stone in Psalm 118 as the nation of Israel while isolating this occurrence of the metaphor from other OT uses, inflicts little damage to the current study. From the nation comes the Davidic king, and from the Davidic line comes the Messiah. The stone metaphor in this case could only be applied to the faithful of Israel and would still require the faithfulness of *Yahweh*. Another similar approach, that nets little damage to the current argument, is that located in the Aramaic Psalter. This text prefers to understand the stone that the builders reject as the

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“lad” David. If this conception is accurate, the most that could be said of the original meaning in relation to the alleged NT fulfillment is that it contains some typological significance.

The stone metaphor notwithstanding, the objective of this portion of the study is to determine if the implied, but unnamed, celebrant is the Messiah and, if so, whether he must enter the second temple. The conclusions drawn from Lanier’s work assure that the messianic implication was early. Given an exilic or post-exilic date for Psalm 118, the messianic implication may have been part of the original conception. Allen confirms at the least a gradual messianic recognition of this psalm. He believes it is placed at the beginning of Book V in the Psalter because of its gradual imbue with messianic import. This arrangement occurred in the pre-Christian era perhaps as early as Ezra, but certainly no later than the translation of the LXX.

Scholars such as Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger argue that the psalm contains eschatological (not necessarily messianic) motifs from its origin. These commentators observe that the motif of rescue by Yahweh is a major theme of the psalm, with direct quotations from Exodus 15 and textual ties to Isaiah 12. They note “striking commonalities” with the thanksgiving song in Isaiah 12:1–6 that closes the composition in Isaiah 1–12. These commonalities are especially visible in Psalm 118:14/Isaiah 12:2 and Psalm 118:21/Isaiah 12:1–2. These commonalities, then, further relate to the theme of rescue from Exodus 15:2 and with connection to Isaiah 12:2b. The importance of this observation is heightened when the

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200 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, 235. These authors highlight several other links to Isaiah.
processional images and worship encapsulated in this psalm are understood as spanning the period from the exodus from Egypt to the eschatological restoration or second exodus. Hossfeld and Zenger argue that the procession toward the temple:

…is imagined in such a way that this event is tied into the history of YHWH with his people Israel—and indeed with the whole world of the nations—and placed within a time horizon extending from Israel’s beginnings to the completion of its history. This powerful spatial and temporal horizon in the psalm is constituted primarily by intertextual links to the book of Exodus (the past) and the book of Isaiah (the future).201

There is little doubt that Psalm 118 contains a combination of poetry and liturgy set in a cultic celebration with the temple as its center. This does not mean, however, that the historicity of any specific event or king can be established. Conceptually the central message of Psalm 118 is eschatological deliverance. The petitioner depicted in the Psalm may be the reigning king, but just as easily could be an individual expressing thanksgiving for some type of deliverance.

Critical scholars suggest that the text of the Psalm is the result of a post-exilic author/redactor. J. Day confirms this probability, observing that the present form of the psalm refers to the “‘house of Aaron’ which makes best sense as a reference to the post-exilic priests, who were known as ‘the sons of Aaron’ (in the pre-exilic era the priests were the Levites).”202 If this dating is accurate, for the present form of the psalm, there was no temporal king on the throne and the second temple (house of Yahweh) is the setting. The historical period proposed for the composition of the psalm is during the construction and dedication of the rebuilt temple (520–515 BC). Dating the composition of the psalm to this period, or even to time of the

201 Ibid., 234. Hossfeld and Zenger also note the striking parallels between Psalm 116 and 118: “(a) Crisis as ‘distress/constriction’: 116:3; 118:5; (b) Power of the name of YHWH: 116:4, 13, 17; 118:10–12, 26; (c)YHWH’s intervention as ‘rescue/salvation’: 116:6, 13; 118:14, 15, 21, 25; (d) ‘Thanking’(ritual thanksgiving): 116:17; 118:1, 19, 21, 28, 29; (e) Mortal threat/rescue from death/return to life: 116:3–4, 7–9, 15; 118:17–18; (f) Cry for help: ‘O YHWH!’: 116:4, 16; 118:25’” (244). If the Jewish people generally recognized these motifs it is clear why the disciples, writing after the fact, quoted Psalm 118 in reference to the Triumphal Entry.

Maccabees, renders any other possibility moot. The psalmist is depicting a procession, with strong eschatological overtones, led by an individual (possibly a king) who enters the temple and participates in the salvation and blessing of Israel by Yahweh. Only two plausible alternatives from the second temple setting exist. First, one might appeal to the poetic genres of Psalms, thereby relegating the “house of the LORD” setting to the status of a lyrical prop, rather than the location of a real event. This possibility seems unlikely. Second, one might posit the original form of the psalm as pre-exilic and David or another davidid are in view. This makes any direct correlation of the Psalm with the Messiah highly unlikely and direct fulfillment by Jesus impossible.

**Intertestamental and Extra-Biblical Literature**

References to Psalm 118 in the intertestamental literature are limited in the extreme. Fragmentary mention of Psalm 118:20 and 27 is found in Q173a 1, 3, from which nothing of value can be gleaned. The OT pseudepigraphical text of the Psalms of Solomon (23:4) mentions Psalm 118:22 in the context of a nonsensical account about the building of Solomon’s temple. This text also renders nothing of value for the current study.

Other evidence from post-biblical Judaism sporadically surfaces in Talmudic texts such as y. Meg 2:1, I.2.H, I, and J. In these verses Psalm 116, and 118:27, 28 are interpreted as speaking of the Messiah, Gog and Magog, and the age to come, respectively. These texts

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203 Herman Gunkel affirms several verses of Psalm 118 as part of the smaller genres of “blessings”. Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of Religious Lyric of Israel*, 222 ff.

confirm that at least some Jewish rabbi’s considered the psalm to contain eschatological and messianic elements.

[I] “I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications’ (Ps. 116)—this refers to the days of the Messiah.

[J] “Bind the festal procession with branches” [Ps. 118:27], [refers to the future events of] the age of Gog and Magog. [The word “Bind” is an allusion to the time following the festival. Bind over or hold over the festival to celebrate it in the future.]

[K] “Thou art my God and I will give thanks” [Ps. 118:28], [the use of the future tense refers to] the future age [after the messianic conflict and triumph].”

These texts provide little support for any conclusive historical understanding of Psalm 118, but neither do they demonstrate any reliable counter-evidence for an alternative interpretation.

New Testament Evidence

As noted earlier, all four evangelists’ narrate their version of the Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1–17; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–48; John 12:12–15). John calls Jesus the “King of Israel”, Matthew identifies Jesus as “the son of David,” and Luke uses the phrase “the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” Mark provides two key statements: the attribution that Jesus has come in the name of the Lord and that he is the representative of the kingdom of David (Mark 11:9–10). The phrase, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Mark 11:10), according to R. T. France, is the conceptual focus of all four of the Triumphal Entry accounts.206 France also notes that all of the evangelists except Luke record the cry “Hosanna.”207 During this event, the


207 Ibid.
people of Jerusalem are depicted as openly attributing messianic status to Jesus: more importantly, Jesus in no way discourages the acclimation of the crowd during the procession. Mowinckel admits as “fact” that Psalm 118:25ff was interpreted messianically by this time, and that prayers in the psalms related to the restoration of Israel may generally be assumed to have included prayer for the coming of the Messiah. These same NT texts give reason to believe the procession included the traditional lining of the way with green branches, meant to give special royal significance to the procession.

Three streams of thought by critical scholars also affirm the historicity of the basic story line of the Triumphal Entry and cleansing of the Temple. The first is provided by Bart Ehrman. Ehrman, dealing with this specific issue, believes that either immediately after his entry into Jerusalem or the next day, Jesus entered the city and engaged in the symbolic action of cleansing the temple. He calls this event a “mild ruckus.” Ehrman is skeptical of the overall historicity of the gospel narratives with respect to Jesus’ entry into the city and the fanfare that would have required his immediate arrest. However, he does admit a historical basis for the events, predicated on multiple attestation (Mark and John). In fact, Ehrman concedes that Jesus probably did come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration and may have entered the city on a donkey. He describes the incident in the temple as “exaggerated,” but acknowledges that the event’s


history is “almost certain.” Presenting a second stream of thought, E. P. Sanders allows for the historicity of Jesus entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (although, like Ehrman, he is not able to explain why Jesus was not immediately arrested) and his symbolic action of cleansing the temple. Finally, more than two-thirds of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar answered affirmatively to both of the following questions:

1. Did Jesus perform some anti-temple act?
2. Did Jesus speak against the temple?

The likelihood that Jesus intentionally did these things is functionally beyond dispute. Jesus acted against the existing temple and then, in the Parable of the Tenants (Matt 21:33–43pp), interprets the stone as the vineyard owner’s son. N.T. Wright observes that the Aramaic word for stone as it appears in Daniel 2 is eben and is perhaps a pun on the normal Hebrew word ben (e.g., 2 Samuel 7). Wright contends that Jesus intentionally links the stone metaphor to the new eschatological temple (the people of Yahweh). He admits that he is not aware of any specific attribution of Psalm 118:22–23 to the new eschatological temple/people of Yahweh. Even so, “Jesus’ own varied use of scriptural rock/stone imagery in relation to the building of the new Temple, interpreted apparently as the new community of the people of YHWH, makes it quite likely that this was his intention here as well.” These findings confirm much of the previously reported OT research and result in the following conclusions: (1) Jesus did enter the second temple, (2) no other temple or messianic candidate fitting the processional

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212 Ibid., 212.


214 Funk and Hoover, The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus, 97–98.

image of Psalm 118 exists, (3) Jesus considered himself to be the stone and directly related to the vineyard owner (*Yahweh*).

**Summary**

In summary, it is virtually certain that Jesus intentionally acted out the fulfillments associated with Zechariah 9:9 and the processional entry into the temple and its symbolic cleansing. It is also likely that he intentionally invoked messianic images of the *son of David* and the eschatological restoration of Zion present in Psalm 118. Wright captures this thought with clarity when he writes, “Someone doing what Jesus did was indicating that Israel’s history had reached the point of decisive destruction and rebuilding, and that his own actions were embodying that moment.”216 The temple is the central feature appearing in this decisive moment; neither the OT context nor the NT utilization of Psalm 118 allows for the dismissal of the temple structure as inconsequential. Yet, certainty about the specific temple is allusive.

The evidence indicates a possibility that Israel’s eschatological King/Messiah is depicted as entering a Jewish temple in a festal procession in Psalm 118, with the consequence that a fundamental reformation of the structure takes place. The rejected stone (the faithfulness of *Yahweh*) is reset (same stone personified) as the Messiah/cornerstone where the faithful of *Yahweh* always have found refuge. This conclusion is supported by multiple OT texts referencing the stone metaphor (above), extra-biblical literature (above), and also attested by the NT in the narratives (e.g., the Triumphal Entry: Matt 21:1–11 pp.; the cleansing of the Temple: Matt 21:12–17; the Parable of the Tenants: Matt 21:33–43 pp.). The temple these actions were directed toward was most likely the same temple that existed, or was under construction during,

216 Ibid., 492.
the composition of Psalm 118. No other has existed since its destruction in AD 70. Nevertheless, it is uncertain as to whether the Psalmist envisioned the temple built by Solomon, the rebuilt second Temple, or a fundamentally altered eschatological counterpart of some form. In addition, there is no historical-evidential way to demonstrate that the celebrant of the psalm or the stone metaphor, as it appears in verse 22, directly and exclusively identifies with the Messiah. Anyone attempting to make such a claim bears the burden of proof and that proof is wanting.

*Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Drawn from the Study of Psalm 118*

1. The temple existing during the composition of Psalm 118 was probably the rebuilt temple.
2. It is probable that Psalm 118 originally included eschatological elements.
3. Jesus intentionally invoked the processional images related to Psalm 118.
4. The temple (*house of Yahweh*) in Psalm 118 is the central cultic feature.
5. An extant temple is not necessary to the central meaning of Psalm 118; the temple may be incidental to the cultic setting.

*Historical-Evidential Facts Drawn from the Study of Psalm 118*

1. No *terminus ad quem* for the advent of the Messiah can be established from Psalm 118.
2. The rebuilt temple is the one Jesus entered, then spoke and acted against.
3. No other temple (*house of Yahweh*) exists.
4. The Triumphal Entry and Jesus’ entry into the temple have multiple NT attestation.
Haggai 2:1–9

 Literary and Textual Analysis

Old Testament Evidence

The text of Haggai 2:1–9 has a long interpretive history within Christian thought. If this text is isolated from its Jewish contextual origins, the reader might believe, its connotations have always interpreted messianically. Conversely, Jewish and many non-Jewish modern interpreters understand the key word חמדת (hemdat) in verse 7 as a metonym referring impersonally to the wealth of the nations that the Lord will cause to flow into the rebuilt temple. These interpreters also argue that כבוד (kābōwd) is the resplendence of the temple from the acquisition of this material wealth. This resplendence will make the glory of the latter temple greater than that of Solomon’s.

The core exegetical issues in the subject text center on how to understand three terms laden with ambiguity. First, the reference to “this house” (אָ֣תֶר הָבֵית הָזֶּה) appears three times in the first nine verses of chapter 2. Second, the interpreter must determine what is intended by the term “treasures” or “desired one” (חמדה)? Third, the interpreter must also determine what “glory” (כבד) means in each of its three near occurrences.

Treating the term “this house” (v. 3) begins with the observation that the splendor of the first temple in terms of tangible wealth far exceeded the initial splendor of the second temple. This much seems certain. The second temple’s decor was not initially impressive, even though its latter state will be greater than its beginnings. This straightforward reading of the text seems difficult to escape. It is not problem-free, however. The former glory of “this house” is obviously a reference to Solomon’s temple. This means no less than two structures are in view. Another problem with simply assuming that the latter glory of “this house” means the second temple lies
in the apocalyptic tone and vocabulary used in the passage. The eschatological nature of the prophecy is evident; Meyers and Meyers affirm that it envisions a time when Jerusalem is more than the capital of Yehud (as it then was). They infer that the scope of the prophecy entails a time when Jerusalem is the capital of the nations and riches flow into it.\(^\text{217}\)

Ray Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen attempt to provide clarity on the meaning of “this house” by contending that verse 9 refers to only one temple: “The Hebrew reads literally, ‘Great will be the glory of this house the latter.’”\(^\text{218}\) Their analysis places the modifying adjective latter as attached to glory rather than house, based on the Hebrew world order. This makes the proper reading “the latter glory of this house”. Taylor and Clendenen argue that this understanding is confirmed by verse 3, which speaks of “this house in its former glory.”\(^\text{219}\) It seems the rebuilt temple and the former temple are held to be distinct in glory, but not distinct as the cultic center of Israel and the house of Yahweh, even though they are two different structures. If this same approach is applied to the former and latter glory, “this house” may be yet another structure (worship center) with greater glory.

The textual-historical ground for understanding treasures (תָּמִים) in a personal messianic sense is largely based on the perception that Jerome properly translated the reading of the Masoretic Text as “et veniet Desideratus cunctis gentibus.” The same thought is reflected in the Authorized Version “and the desire of all nations shall come” (Hag 2:7a). This interpretation sees correspondence between 2:21b–23 and 2:6–7. This understanding is doubtful for at least two


\(^{219}\) Ibid.
reasons. The basis for Haggai’s exhortation is to motivate the constructors of the new temple. Their sparse resources and the meager appointments available for the rebuilt temple tempted them to compare negatively the state of the new temple to the splendor of the first. The disparity between the two temples, as Haggai speaks, is visually obvious to his listeners. Second, the term חמידה is used sixteen times in the OT and is translated in four distinct ways:

1. As *treasure* or *wealth* in a material sense on seven occasions (2 Chr 32:27; 36:10; Jer 25:34; Ezek 26:12; Dan 11:8; Hos 13:15; Hag 3:7).
2. As *desire* as a personal statement of feelings on four occasions (1 Sam 9:20; Isa 2:16; Dan 11:37; Nah 2:6).
3. As *pleasant* in the sense of fruitful on four occasions (Ps 106:24; Jer 3:19; 12:10; Zech 7:14).
4. As *regret* in the sense of an absence of sorrow on one occasion (2 Chr 21:20). This term never means Messiah. *Treasure* not only makes the best sense in context, but it agrees with the majority of uses in the OT.

The term glory (כבד) is more complex because it appears three times in close proximity (3, 7, and 9) in this prophecy, and may denote more than one thing. The former כבד may not mean the same as to fill the house with כבד which, in turn, may not mean the same as the latter כבד of this house being greater than the former. This term translated as *glory* appears approximately 200 times in the OT and is understood in the following nine senses:

1. As a state of high honor on ninety-six occasions.
2. As reflective of the presence of God on forty-seven occasions.
3. As something being in a highly honored or revered state on thirty occasions.

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220 Logos Bible Software produced the word study of חמידה.
4. As a manifestation of power on eight occasions.

5. As personal glory on six occasions.

6. As wealth on five occasions.

7. As the quality of being honorable on three occasions.

8. As God as the personification of glory on two occasions.

9. As a member of the ruling class in a city or town on one occasion.\(^{221}\)

The lexical data demonstrates that the semantic range of the term translated as “glory” overlaps, making absolute claims of its meaning impossible. Verse 3 makes the best sense if glory is defined in the context of material wealth.\(^{222}\) Conversely, “fill this house with glory” (v. 7) makes the best sense if it includes the visual phenomena associated with the presence of Yahweh. Alfred Edersheim remarks, about the obvious absence of the ark of the covenant, the tables of the law, the book of the covenant, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the pot of manna. Also missing were the fire from heaven and the visible Shekhinah of Yahweh.\(^{223}\) Wright cogently notes, “the geographical return from exile, when it came about under Cyrus and his successors, was not accompanied by any manifestations such as those in Exodus 40, Leviticus 9, 1 Kings 8, or even (a revelation to an individual) Isaiah 6.”\(^{224}\) Including the visual phenomena does not mean divorcing material wealth from the context; these are not mutually exclusive concepts. The mention of silver and gold immediately after כבוד confirms that something like this approach is

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\(^{221}\) Logos Bible Software produced the word study of כבוד.


\(^{224}\) Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 621.
most probably the correct interpretation. In verse 9, the former and latter glory again must, at least in part, be a reference to material splendor. However, if the latter glory exceeds the former in every way, it is very difficult to exclude some type of recognizable divine presence from the meaning.

The prophecy may be contrasting the glory of Solomon’s temple with the rebuilt temple, and then the initial state of the rebuilt temple with its finished state. Alternatively, verse 9 may be making some vague prophetic reference to an eschatological temple. In either case, it is virtually certain that the phrase “fill this house with glory” demands the presence of some recognizable supernatural phenomena and great material wealth.

**Intertestamental and Extra-Biblical Evidence**

The Babylonian Talmud takes two different approaches to interpreting Haggai 2:7. It does this by first claiming that second temple was greater in size, and second, by claiming it stood longer than the first temple.225 The Jewish historian Josephus approaches the issue from another angle by mentioning Herod the Great’s expenditures and embellishment of the temple: “and he laid out larger sums of money upon them than had been done before him, till it seemed that no one else had so greatly adorned the temple as he had done.”226 Tim Shenton nuances his understanding of this text in a slightly different manner;

‘And I will fill this house with glory.’ This is not a reference to Christ’s physical presence in the temple (cf. Matt 21:12–14); nor is it a picture of the splendour [sic] of Herod’s renovated temple or the Shekinah glory of God. Rather it points to the treasures

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of foreign nations that would be brought to God’s temple, thus making it materially glorious.\(^{227}\)

Shenton’s approach implies that the text is describing the eschatological rule of Yahweh; his rule entails the monarchy of Israel and the collection of tribute from the nations. This line of reasoning parallels the interpretation offered by Caroll Meyers and Eric Meyers. They note the “universalistic dimension”\(^{228}\) to Haggai’s prophecy and the collection of tribute, but hold that filling the house with glory signifies the immanence and resplendence of God in the temple.

Running contrary to the modern critical interpretation of the text, some historical evidence exists that demonstrates an early Jewish understanding of Haggai 2:7 and 9 that included a messianic stream of thought. In the Testament of Benjamin (second century BC), the writer affirms that the latter temple will exceed the first in glory, adding that, “the twelve tribes shall be gathered there and all the nations, until such time as the Most High shall send forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique prophet.”\(^{229}\) The text immediately ensuing includes references to the “Lord being raised up on wood…being abused… the temple curtain shall be torn…ascending from Hades.” These additional comments are surely later Christian interpolations, but as H. C. Kee notes, a genuinely predictive element may have existed in the original text. The expectation of an eschatological prophet is not unique to the Testament of Benjamin, a concept built on Deuteronomy 18:15. This same eschatological idea was prominent in the writings of the community at Qumran (1QS IX 10–11; 1QSa II 11–12). The prophet is mentioned in 4QTestimonia I 5–8 and in what appears to be a reference to the star in Balaam’s

\(^{227}\) Tim Shenton, Haggai: An Expositional Commentary, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Leominster, UK: Day One, 2007), 50.

\(^{228}\) Meyers and Meyers, Haggia, Zechariah 1–8, 54.

oracle from Numbers 24 and also referenced Acts 7:37. One who is the star, scepter, and prince interprets the Law according to CD–A VII 15–20.\textsuperscript{230}

The author of 2 Baruch (32:1–4), writing from a thoroughly Jewish and messianic perspective, seems to defer the greater “glory” of the temple to the eschatological future. This text may or may not be alluding to Haggai 2:7 and 9, but it appears that the author was familiar with both the prophecy and the expectation of the Jewish people. Wright explains that the Jewish people had the genuine expectation and desire that Yahweh would return to Zion. From their own historical stories, the people of the second temple period would have known about the glory of Yahweh and what his presence meant for them. Even so, Wright observes the following:

> Never do we hear that the pillar of cloud and fire which accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness has led the people back from their exile. At no point do we hear that YHWH has now gloriously returned to Zion. At no point is the house again filled with the cloud which veils his glory. At no point is the rebuilt Temple universally hailed as the true restored shrine spoken of by Ezekiel. Significantly, at no point, either, is there a final decisive victory over Israel’s enemies, or the establishment of a universally welcomed royal dynasty.\textsuperscript{231}

Wright goes on to explain that it should be no surprise, then, to see the hope of “glory” continued as a theme in the post-biblical writings. The predicted return of Yahweh and the accompanying glory is still awaited.\textsuperscript{232} These obvious ocular absences lend credence to the interpretation that sees the glory and wealth of the nations as recognizable features of a future manifestation of Yahweh (Rev 21:24).

From both a Jewish and a Christian perspective, Michael Brown challenges non-messianic interpretations: “‘to fill with glory’ refers to the manifest presence of God and not to

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 827. Note c.
\textsuperscript{231} Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 621.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 621–622.
physical splendor…. ‘to fill with glory’ always refers to the divine manifestation in the Bible.”

Although material splendor cannot be exclude from the context, several OT passages clearly illustrate the concept of the glory of God and the filling of the temple or tabernacle (Exod 40:34; 2 Chr 5:14; 7:1–4; Ezek 43:5; 44:4). Given the repeated image in which the presence of God and visible phenomena are associated with His glory, completely eliminating this as a concomitant meaning for the text is unjustifiable.

M. Brown also takes stock of the Talmudic citations (above) and the disagreement among the ancient Jewish sages as to the meaning. In summary, he labels their arguments “weak” and refuted by opponents of Christianity.

And if the promise was merely one of physical glory and splendor—which, as we have noted, falls far short of the description of being filled with God’s glory—why then is an additional promise offered in Haggai 2:9, namely, that in the Second Temple God would appoint peace?

Based on these brief representations offered by historical documents and modern scholars it seems impossible to allow an interpretation of the passage that does not include some form of eschatology, material splendor, and the visible presence of Yahweh. The personal presence of Yahweh and His glory may, or may not, include the presence of the Messiah, but the text does not make the presence of the Messiah a necessity.

New Testament Evidence

As established above, the historicity of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the temple is certain. Some Christian interpreters have identified his presence in the temple as fulfilling the

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234 Ibid., 147. Brown citing Batei Midrashot 2, 24:11 lists five things missing from the Second Temple that must return to the final temple based on their exegesis of Haggai 2: “the fire of the Shekhinah, the ark, the kapporet and cherubim, the Holy Spirit, and the Urim and Thummim” (note 300 page 148).
Recognizing the ambiguities of the terms discussed above, others contend for a view involving multiple temples. The biblical historical-evidential data confidently portrays Jesus as symbolically declaring himself as the Messiah, and King of Israel, by his manner of entry into Jerusalem and the temple. Despite this historical evidence, it is difficult to assert dogmatically that his presence constitutes Yahweh’s promise to “fill this house with glory.” Was Jesus’ physical presence, even granting his divinity, more glorious than the divine presence in Solomon’s temple? This certainly cannot be the case if the divine glory requires visible theophanic phenomena. That his presence added glory, making the latter glory of the rebuilt temple greater than its former, could be granted, if that is Haggai’s intent.

The day of Pentecost is another pressing aspect to consider, in relation to the phrase, “fill this house with glory,” and its theophanic implication of God’s manifest presence. The argumentation regarding Haggai 2:1–9 has thus far demonstrated that the latter glory of the temple cannot be pressed into forcing a delimitation on the time for the Messiah’s coming. If Haggai were intentionally speaking in prophetically ambiguous terms, glory could have implications for the phenomena witnessed on Pentecost morning. Taking the description offered in Acts 2 as historical, the visible tongues of fire and audible sound like mighty wind, in

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236 John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 1999), 315.

237 Hans Conzelmann contends that Luke’s Pentecost narrative is the result of sources: two or even more that have been combined. It is possible that these sources included accounts of “mass ecstasy” or the “original substratum” may have included “miraculous speech in many languages.” Conzelmann asserts that the basis for the account “is clearly not a naive legend.” Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews, trans. James Limburg, Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 15. In addition, Craig Keener comments on the historicity of the events described. See the next footnote.
combination with tongues—speech and the other miraculous events, would fit the criteria of greater glory.

This supernatural event may have started either in the temple or in a private dwelling; the temple is the logical place for the overtly public manifestation within the hearing of the crowd.\(^{238}\) Significantly, the theophanic activity on the day of Pentecost is said to have “filled the entire house” (Acts 2:2). Keener highlights the ambiguity of Luke’s use of the term *house* and its reference to both private houses and the temple; the evidence is inconclusive.\(^ {239}\) Nevertheless, the appearance of phenomena such as fire, wind, and noise, combined with the ambiguity of the word *house* creates a context more closely suited to the images of Haggai 2:1–9 than any other known possibility.\(^ {240}\)

In Christian theology, many believe that the day of Pentecost denotes the inauguration of that kingdom who’s full and future glory is yet to be realize. This inaugural event is eschatological and when considered in light of other biblical data signifies a reversal of human disunity, the new creation, and the full recognition of redeemed man as the temple of God.\(^ {241}\)

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\(^{238}\) Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 796. Keener also contends that the evidence for the initial gathering place of the believers is about evenly split between a room in the temple and a private house. Importantly, however, he highlights the fact that the only place large enough to accommodate 3000 people for Peter’s sermon is the area immediately around and in the courts of the temple.

Keener addresses the historicity of the account by acknowledging that some scholars are skeptical about the event. Keener argues, however, that even though Acts is the only historical narrative of the early church, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is mentioned by other NT writers (e.g., Rom 5:5; Tit 3:5–6) and in other settings within the book of Acts (787).

\(^{239}\) Ibid., 798–799.

\(^{240}\) At a minimum, the ἑτέραις γλώσσαις manifestations apparently continued as the Christian message spread across the Roman Empire. It is also possible that the peace (Hag 2:9) prophesied to come during the period of the second temple’s latter glory was inaugurated by Jesus (Luke 1:79; 2:14; 19:42; Acts 10:36), but will find it eschatological fullness—in a latter temple, just as the former glory referenced the first temple.

Pentecost is both present and future; it is thoroughly eschatological and the most probable fulfillment of Haggai 2:1–9 available for consideration.  

**Summary**

In summary, it is not possible to affirm that the latter glory prophesied by Haggai is a specific reference to the Messiah or in some way delimits his debut in Israel to the second temple period. Ample evidence supports the notion that after the renovation begun by Herod the Great (ca AD 19) was finished (ca AD 62) the material splendor of the temple had been greatly enhanced, perhaps even exceeding Solomon’s. In addition, the inescapable association of the phrase “fill this house with glory” with visible theophanic phenomena makes the day of the Pentecost a stronger argument for fulfilling Haggai 2:1–9 than the mere physical presence of Jesus or even the Triumphal Entry. Finally, the first nine verses of Haggai 2 reflect a distinct eschatological apocalyptic tone. This fact makes the terminology “this house” ambiguous; one cannot dismiss the possibility of a double entendre or *sensus plenior* meaning that remains unrealized.

*Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Drawn from the Study of Haggai 2:1–9*

1. After the renovation by Herod, the second temple possessed great material splendor.

2. The meaning of the phrase “this house” in the first nine verses of Haggai 2 is ambiguous.

3. The phrase “fill this house with glory” implies theophanic phenomena.

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242 The primary difficulty for allowing or insisting on a future eschatological temple such as that prophesied by Ezekiel is that unfulfilled prophecy cannot be evaluated evidentially. How these prophecies will be realized is uncertain. There may or may not be a literal eschatological temple filled with the treasures of the nations and the visible presence of *Yahweh*. Perhaps Ezekiel is speaking symbolically. If such a temple is built, it may or may not be as Ezekiel envisioned.
4. Luke describes theophanic phenomena associated with the day of Pentecost that meet the criteria of “fill this house with glory” if “house” (Acts 2:2) refers to the temple.243

Historical-Evidential Facts Drawn from the Study of Haggai 2:1–9

1. No terminus ad quem for the advent of the Messiah can be established from Haggai 2:1–9

Malachi 3:1

Literary and Textual Analysis

The text of Malachi 3:1ff and the identity of its objects and referents generate controversy among biblical scholars. The key issue for the current work is whether the second temple or another temple was specifically in the mind of Malachi. A secondary issue is whether the historical-evidential finding point toward the identities of the characters in Malachi’s prophecy. Christians sometimes interpret the reference to the temple in Malachi 3:1 as mandating that the Messiah appear in the second temple prior to its destruction.

Malachi’s Use of the Terms “Behold I Send” and “Suddenly”

Malachi appears to mix apocalyptic language with more immediate nomenclature by using the terms “Behold I send” and “suddenly”244 in contrast to the arrival of some long-desired or anticipated forerunner. Even though Malachi does not state that the Lord will come into his temple immediately, there is no exegetical rationale for moving the perceived era of fulfillment

243 The objection that Haggai or Malachi (below) perceived continuity between the first, second, and a future or eschatological temple, such as that described in Ezekiel 40–48, is speculative. It cannot be demonstrated that either Haggai or Malachi understood that the rebuilt second-temple would be destroyed or that the temple described by Ezekiel was a literal future structure. The temple vision of Ezekiel may be an extended holiness and purity metaphor.

244 Emphasis is the Author’s.
to the distant (currently more than 2000 years) future. In fact, the opposite is evident. The apocalyptic undertone generated by the phrase “Behold I send” and “suddenly” is present, but subdued. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor specifically tie the syntactical construction_handwritten (hinnî šôlêḥa) consisting of the interjection and participle translated “Behold I send” to “exclamations of immediacy…the here-and-now-ness, of the situation,”245 Andrew E. Hill emphasizes the notion of immediate circumstances or “future circumstances with immanency—the so-called futurum instans participle.”246 It seems clear, that Malachi does not envision a far-distant, but sudden, fulfillment. That would force radically foreign ideas upon Malachi’s sitz en leben and construction of his message. He is writing to his contemporaries, intently focused on the cultic, priestly, and legal traditions of Israel, and the failure of priesthood to live and act faithfully. The second temple is the religious center of all these functions within Israel. M. Brown argues, “the entire context of the Book of Malachi makes it clear that there was to be a time of divine judgment and visitation for the people who worshiped and served at the Second Temple.”247 “The temple is the Temple in Jerusalem rather than a heavenly temple,” declares David Clark and Howard A. Hatton.248 When arguing that the second temple is being referenced, E. Pocock uses the decisive terms “no doubt” to describe his convictions.249


Ralph L. Smith rightly observes that Malachi’s work was not primarily concerned with the eschatological future (this does not mean completely uninterested). Malachi has “no ‘full-blown’ system of eschatology.”250 The ground for the message of Malachi is his observation of contemporary problems and solutions that require swift implementation. Mark J. Boda cogently observes that the language of Malachi will not bear the eschatological weight sometimes placed on it. “The timing and arrival of YHWH is not specified, but it is related to his return to fill the Second Temple.”251

In addition, Malachi does not employ the ambiguous language related to the temple (e.g., “this house”) as did Haggai (Hag 2:3, 7, 9 above) when referring to the temple, neither does the language suggest that Malachi is experiencing a visionary episode pointing toward an hypothesized eschatological temple such as that depicted in Ezekiel. There is no conflating of temple structures, and no other textual indications requiring a double entendre. In fact, little, if any, early historical-evidential documentation emerges that indicates Malachi’s intended referent is anything other than the second temple.

Richard H. Heirs places the emphasis of Malachi squarely in its contemporary sitz en leben. “The writer of Malachi promised his contemporaries that they could look for an end to famine and pestilence and the beginning of blessedness if only the sons of Jacob would keep God’s statutes, especially those concerning tithes and proper offerings in the Temple.”252 Heirs


further remarks that in a generalized way, some of the biblical literature construes the temple reform and renewal that was contemporary with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi as representing the “inauguration of a new era.” In context, Heir clearly means inauguration of the new era in that place at that time. This information and its context are critical for the current study. It is very likely that the second temple period establishes the terminus ad quem associated with Malachi 3:1.

It is also improbable that Malachi was envisioning (1) the judgment of Yahweh directed exclusively to Gentiles, or (2) a means of rescuing Jerusalem without judgment. James Pohlig confirms the import of the term “suddenly” (פתאם) as associated with “ominous conditions or imminent calamities” S. R. Driver and Walter F. Adeney affirm that the text contains the concept of judgment at an unexpected moment. The priestly context and lexical data simply do not allow for “suddenly” to mean something expected but occurring quickly, or something that excluded Israel. The intent of the passage is to give notice that Yahweh will make an unexpected, but immanent, coming into the temple for the purpose of judgment and purification.

The context of Malachi 3 implies that it is Lord himself, האדון (hāʾādôn), who must come to the temple. This Hebrew term, a synonym for Yahweh, appears more than 400 times in the OT. The most prominent aspect of the prophesied coming of the Lord is to render judgment. When the historical context of Malachi is strictly isolated from the NT, the identities of “my

253 Ibid.

254 James Pohlig, An Exegetical Summary of Malachi (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 132.


messenger” and of the “messenger of the covenant” could be either angelic or human. These two statements, as far as they go, are uncontroversial. Following the interpretive process further, G. Mitchell Hinckley, John Powis, and Julius Brewer contend that the “messenger of the covenant” cannot be the identical with “my messenger” (hereafter “the forerunner”).257 This interpretation requires that the two occurrences of the term messenger ( מלאכ) refer to different individuals. Yahweh and the messenger of the covenant (not the forerunner) apparently arrive simultaneously sometime after the forerunner has made his appearance. These observations are logical and generally uncontroversial. They do, however, leave open to investigation the question of whether the messenger of the covenant is the Messiah.

The Structure of Malachi

The chiastic structure of Malachi 3:1 makes it difficult to distinguish between the messenger of the covenant and the Lord. Taylor and Clendenen claim the two are identical and illustrate the structure of verse as follows:

“a—See, I am sending my messenger.  
And he will clear a path before me.  
And suddenly he will come to his temple,

b—the Lord whom you are seeking [ʾāšer–ʾattem mēbaqšîm].

b´—And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight [ʾāšer–ʾattem ḥāpēṣîm],

a´—see, he is coming,’  
says Yahweh of hosts.”258

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258 Taylor and Clendenen, Haggai, Malachi, 384.
Critical confirmation of how closely linked the *messenger of the covenant* and the Lord are in this verse is demonstrated by the observations in the *International Critical and Exegetical Commentary*.

This “messenger” can hardly be identical with the forerunner, viz. “my messenger,” at the opening of the verse; for his coming is here made simultaneous with that of “the Lord,” who can hardly be other than *Yahweh* himself, and the coming of ‘my messenger’ is explicitly announced as preceding that of *Yahweh*. It is not at all unlikely, indeed, that “the messenger of the covenant” is here confused with *Yahweh*.\(^{259}\)

Andrew Malone, after criticizing the less-than-critical evaluations of some scholars, concludes much the same thing. First, Malone observes five potential characters in the verse: (1) the first-person speaker, “I”; (2) “my messenger”; (3) “the Lord” (*ha’adon*, not *YHWH* “the LORD”); (4) “the messenger of the covenant” (*mal’ak habberit*); and (5) “*YHWH* Sabaoth”.\(^{260}\) Second, he reduces the number of characters to two based on their overlap. The first is *Yahweh* Sabaoth and the second is most likely a human messenger. The coming of *Yahweh* is equivalent to the coming of the LORD and the messenger of the covenant.\(^{261}\) Malone is confident that this assessment captures the intent of the passage, something he argues is confirmed by the application of the prophecy to Jesus by the NT writers. They believed that Jesus represented the coming of *Yahweh*.\(^{262}\)

The decisive factor in determining whether the terms *the Lord* and the *messenger of the covenant* are one in the same person, according to Hill, is a grammatical choice. Hill concludes


\(^{261}\) Ibid., 227–228.

\(^{262}\) Ibid.
that regardless of which of two possible options the exeget adopts, the lexical work amplifies how closely Yahweh and the messenger are associated. Option one understands the conjunction (ו) placed before מלאך as serving “epexegetically, specifying the identity of ‘The Lord’ (hāʾādōwn) who is coming, by restating the previous clause which would mean ‘that is’, ‘yea’ or ‘even’”.263 Option two understands מלאך ברית as a third eschatological figure, which Hill deems likely. In this case, “the waw functions as a simple conjunction (‘and’).”264

From the foregoing examples of current critical scholarship, it is clear that the “messenger of the covenant” is so closely aligned with Yahweh that the two are virtually identical; any distinction between the two appears to hang on a waw. An exact parallel to the Hebrew syntax does not exist elsewhere in the OT. Still, Hill notes several similar phrases, for example, malʾak ʾēlōhîm, meaning an angel or messenger of God (Gen 21:17; Exod 14:19) and malʾak Yahweh, meaning the angel of Yahweh (Zech 1:11) or the messenger of Yahweh (Hag 1:13). As is common knowledge, the Hebrew malʾak means messenger, but not necessarily a messenger of a specific type. The messenger could be human, angelic, or divine; it is not always clear which type of messenger is denoted. Various scholars have suggested all three types, and no consensus exists. Nevertheless, this mysterious messenger, whether human, angelic or divine, is to come into Yahweh’s temple. The temple is central to Malachi’s book and cannot be dismissed as window dressing in this specific oracle.

The following section of the work highlights the NT evidence for a supposition about the identity of the messenger of the covenant and his presence in the temple for the purpose of

263 Hill, Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, 269.

264 Ibid. The grammatical reasons for Hill’s choice, can be seen in Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.
purification and judgment. Before addressing that evidence, it is important to observe that no temple was standing after the Romans razed Jerusalem. The temple building was torn down stone-by-stone to retrieve the molten gold that had oozed between the stones as the temple burned. If Malachi did not envision a third temple or the destruction of the second, as suggested above, very little doubt remains that the temple Malachi believes is Yahweh’s, and the one the messenger will enter, is the second temple. If one should argue for a typological understanding of Malachi, including both near and far referents, the current argument is not fatally damaged. Although unlikely, if a typological understanding is correct, it would still require the initial historical actualization of the prophecy during the second temple period.

New Testament Evidence

The NT evidence of importance for the question at hand is whether Jesus is the probable fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. In order to answer this question, six related questions must be posed:

1. Is there a probable identification of Jesus with Malachi 3:1?
2. Did Jesus enter the second temple during his life?
3. Does a plausible forerunner exist?
4. Is it credible to assert that Jesus ontologically constitutes the coming of Yahweh?
5. Did Jesus enter Yahweh’s temple for the purpose of purification and judgment?
6. Is Jesus the messenger of the covenant?

Is there a Probable Identification of Jesus with Malachi 3:1?

Fitzmyer provides the first strand of evidence to demonstrate that Jesus is the best identifiable candidate to fulfill Malachi 3:1. He contends that the “One who is to come” is the

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title of a messianic figure derived from Malachi 3:1 (ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται LXX). Fitzmyer links this prophecy with Matthew 11:3 and Luke 7:19, both of which contain the phrase “One who is to come” (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). He then notes that a connection to Malachi 3:1 may also be apparent in the knowledge of the coming one as expressed by the Samaritan woman (Μεσσίας ἔρχεται). Both NT examples use the same verb as Malachi 3:1. According to the gospel writers, Jesus’ reply in each instance was affirmative. The reconstructed Q document contains these connections as found in the Synoptic Gospels (Q 7:18–19, 20–21, 22–23); however, John is a separate and distinct witness to a connection of Jesus with Malachi 3:1. It is also quite probable, given the context of JTB’s question posed to Jesus (Matt 11:3), that JTB’s own statement as recorded in Matthew 3:11, ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, stands in the background and at least implies a connection to Malachi. Even the language employed by Mark 1:2b to describe the ministry of JTB, ἵδου ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἀγγέλον μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, probably sources Malachi 3:1.266 No exegetical leap is necessary to ascertain that the NT depicts JTB as the forerunner of Jesus, and that his task was to prepare Israel for judgment. A significant affirmation of these statements comes from France, who asserts that the language of Mark 1:2–8 “appear[s] to leave no room for a human figure in the eschatological drama other than John himself.”267 The rest of the book of Mark, and especially the heavens being torn open (ἰσχυρότερος) in Mark 1:2, explain how this remarkable set of circumstances could possibly be the case. France’s exegesis implies that not only that Jesus and JTB are associated with Malachi 3:1, but that Jesus is more than merely human.

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Did Jesus Enter the Second Temple During His Life?

The first strand of evidence for Jesus as the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1 is his presence in the second temple. There is substantial NT evidence that Jesus actually entered the second temple on multiple occasions during his life. All four canonical gospels confirm his presence in the temple. Multiple attestation comes via five of the six recognized gospel sources (including Q). Representative samples of these attestations are found in Matthew 21:12; Mark 12:35, 14:49; Luke 2:22ff, 46; 19:47; John 7:14, 10:23). An important confirmation of Jesus’ presence in the temple surfaces in the hypothetical Q document. Q, as critically reconstructed makes a reference to the temple that must be understood in light of Jesus’ judgment on Jerusalem, his interaction with the religious leaders, and his entering the temple proper (Q 13:35). These observations indicate an affirmative answer to questions one and four. Jesus did enter the temple, and one of his purposes was to declare its impending judgment.

Does a Plausible Forerunner Exist?

The second strand of evidence stems from the first. As indicated above JTB is the most probable historical-evidential candidate to fulfill the role of the forerunner in Malachi 3:1. The earliest gospel places JTB in the role of the forerunner (my messenger) predicted in Malachi 3:1 (Mark 1:1–2; Luke 1:17, 76; 7:27). This claim is also reflected in slightly modified forms in Matthew (Matt 11:10) and in Luke (Luke 3:4–6). JTB dressed in the same clothing as Elijah (Mark 1:6; 2 Kgs 1:8) and ate food associated with the ascetic prophet, both actions denoted his self-designation as a prophet in the OT tradition. Mark cites Isaiah 40:3 with the implication that JTB is the voice, an assertion with which all four evangelists agree. In a section of Luke (Luke
1:16–17), whose origin is independent of either Mark or Q, JTB is identified using language from Malachi 3:1 and 4:5–6.\(^{268}\)

More evidence surfaces in the reconstructed text of Q. Q 3:16b–17 treats JTB as the forerunner and Jesus as the superior who exacts judgment.\(^{269}\) John also affirms these traditions by highlighting the inferior status of JTB in relation to Jesus. According to John, JTB was a witness to the light, while Jesus was the light (John 1:7–8). JTB was before Jesus as his forerunner, yet was after Jesus because of Jesus’ preexistent deity (John 1:15, 30). The baptism in water offered by JTB is inferior to Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33).\(^{270}\) JTB’s ministry decreases while Jesus’ ministry increases (John 3:30). Correspondingly, two of Paul’s speeches, both separated historically and literarily from the gospels, place JTB in the role of forerunner (Acts 13:23; 19:4). Even those skeptical of the historicity of the specific relationship between JTB and Jesus depicted in the NT admit that JTB was a historical person, he preceded Jesus as teacher, and his message was a call to repentance.\(^{271}\)

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\(^{268}\) The references to Elijah in Malachi 4 are usually thought of in literal and eschatological terms among Jewish interpreters. For example, in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, Trypho the Jew contends, “We Jews all expect that Christ will be a man of merely human origin, and that Elias will come to anoint Him. If this man appears to be the Christ, He must be considered to be a man of solely human birth, yet, from the fact that Elias has not yet come, I must declare that this man is not the Christ.” Thomas B. Falls, with Justin Martyr, *The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or The Rule of God*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 221, Justin, Dial 249. Many Christians also believe in a literal return of Elijah before the day of Yahweh.


\(^{270}\) Q adds the element of fire to Jesus’ work of baptizing. Both Matthew and Luke include this element in their accounts.

Is it Credible to Assert that Jesus Constitutes Yahweh Entering His Temple?

The third strand of evidence consists of the claims of Jesus and his followers to his equality with God and as the Messiah. The assertion that Malachi 3:1 is a prophecy that *Yahweh* will enter the temple possesses “almost universal agreement among both Jewish and Christian interpreters.”

Perhaps the earliest written examples of the claim that Jesus is *Yahweh* are those contained in the verses penned by the apostle Paul. Paul routinely uses terms such as Χριστός, κύριος, and υἱοῦ θεοῦ to describe Jesus. These attributions are present in Galatians (perhaps the earliest letter of Paul), written approximately twenty years after the life of Jesus.

In the book of Romans, one of Paul’s most theologically mature works, Paul so closely aligns Jesus with *Yahweh* that they become virtually indistinguishable. Romans 10:9–13 quotes from Joel 2:32, “For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom 10:13). Clearly, “the Lord” in Joel is *Yahweh*. For Paul, however, “the Lord” is clearly Jesus. In Joel salvation is for an Israelite remnant; for Paul salvation is for anyone who confesses Jesus as Lord. James Dunn explains these apparent conflations and resolves them by concluding: “So the fact that Paul refers the same verse to the exalted Jesus presumably means for Paul either that Jesus is *Yahweh*, or, more likely, that *Yahweh* has bestowed his own unique saving power on the Lord who sits on his right side, or that the exalted Jesus is himself the embodiment as well as the executive of that saving power.”

In another of Paul’s works, the alignment of Jesus and *Yahweh* is brilliantly illustrated. Philippians 2:5–11 shows close correspondence with Isaiah 45:23, with knees bowing and

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tongues confessing. In Isaiah, the confession is that there is only one God and no other. Paul’s appropriates this language, however, and applies it to Jesus. Paul so clearly believes that *Yahweh* is glorified by confessing Jesus as Lord; an unequivocally monotheistic OT passage becomes the foundation for a virtual fusion of *Yahweh* and Jesus.\(^{275}\)

One of the NT’s sharpest claims to Jesus’ deity and messiahship is recorded as Jesus’ own words (Mark 14:62). Jesus’ reply to the high priest when directly questioned about his relationship to God leaves little doubt about his claim to sonship, messiahship, and his eschatological role as Israel’s judge. Most critical scholars allow for the historicity of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Some controversy attends, however, how the gospel writers could know Jesus’ reply to his interlocutors. None of them were actually present during the trial. Based on the absence of eyewitnesses, the fellows of the Jesus Seminar ignore or depreciate the available evidence. They describe Jesus’ responses to Caiaphas as “undoubtedly the work of the evangelists.”\(^{276}\)

At the least, it must be acknowledged that the gospel writers could have gathered this information from Nicodemus. John portrays Nicodemus as well-disposed to Jesus (John 7:50–52).\(^{277}\) It is likely that others within the council were also sympathetic to Jesus (John 12:52). In

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\(^{275}\) The current work is not suggesting that Jesus and *Yahweh* are identical economically, but are identical essentially and ontologically. See also 1 Corinthians 8:6. Colossians 2:9 (one of the disputed books) also makes the claim that Jesus is God in all his fullness.

\(^{276}\) Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, 123.


Bauckham makes five cogent points related to how knowledge of Jesus’ answer could have been transmitted to the gospel writers. First, he contends that the name Nicodemus is “sufficiently” rare among Palestinian Jews of the first century to allow for the possibility that the account in John has a historical base. Bauckham argues that the family of Nicodemus is part of the ruling aristocracy of Jerusalem (ἄρχων, John 3:1; 7:26, 48; 12:42). Josephus, he notes, uses the term (βουλή: *Ant* 20:11) to refer to the council, but it is probable that this
Acts 6:7 the historian Luke provides skeptics reason to believe that knowledge of Jesus’ answer to the high priest was not beyond the knowledge of the gospel writers “A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith”.

Paul (Saul of Tarsus) is another source of information concerning the testimony of Jesus. The NT portrays him as a student of the council member Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). The Pauline critic of the 19th century, Kaufmann Kohler, admits the possibility of a historical “kernel” in the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Kohler notes, that Saul was “commissioned with the task of exterminating the Christian movement antagonistic to the Temple and the Law.”

Commissioned by whom? It must be the Sanhedrin. Max Seligsohn never challenges the historicity of either the person of Stephen, his death by stoning, or that Paul is acting on his commission from the Sanhedrin when consenting to the stoning of Stephen. There is no other plausible conclusion. Paul may well have been present during the inquisition of Jesus and related his account to the disciples after his conversion.

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included not only the chief priests, but also leading citizens and other powerful men. Historical persons of the Gurion family (probable relatives of Nicodemus) appear to fit within these categories.

Second, Nicodemus is a Pharisee (John 3:1), but not in the general sense. He is part of a small group of wealthy aristocratic Pharisees who belonged to the ruling elite. Bauckham believes that this may be why John uses the terminology the chief priests and the Pharisees (7:32, 45; 11:47, 57; 18:3).

Third, the research conducted by Bauckham lead to the conclusion that two probable members of Nicodemus’ family (the Gurion family) were teachers of the law, as was Nicodemus (John 3:1).

Fourth, Nicodemus is portrayed as very wealthy, something that is confirmed by the weight (approx. 65 lbs.) of spices provided for Jesus’ burial (John 19:39). Other extravagant claims about the wealth of the Gurion family are present in rabbinic traditions. Bauckham notes that the traditions may be exaggerated. This does not disqualify them as having a historical basis, however.

Fifth, although controversial, Nicodemus became a Christian.

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Additional early evidence supporting the supposition that Jesus claimed to be, and was considered ontologically equal with, Yahweh surfaces in Q. Q contains the narrative of Jesus’ baptism. Although the exact words are uncertain, what has been reconstructed implies that “the voice from heaven” attributed the status of God’s son to Jesus (Q 3:21).

The apostle John likewise makes several claims that align the ontological status of Jesus to be essentially indistinguishable from Yahweh. In John 12:41 the writer ambiguously and with multifaceted implications contends that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus in the throne vision leading to his commissioning (Isa 6:1ff). Other texts in John which unambiguously attribute Jesus’ equality with God include John 1:18, 10:30, and 20:28.

*Did Jesus Enter Yahweh’s Temple for Purification and Judgment?*

The fourth strand of evidence is the role of Jesus as Judge. Judgment is the primary thrust of Malachi 3, and the emphasis of the text is not pleasant greetings, but refining, cleansing, and removing the evildoer. If Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy, he must have acted as judge.

Jesus unmistakably declared his role of judge in Mark 14:62, as argued above. However, this is not the only text to substantiate his claim to be the judge of Israel. The Q source also picks up the motif of Jesus as judge with a saying that references the coming condemnation of Israel by the Queen of Sheba, and by the Ninevites because Jesus’ presence (though unrecognized) was greater than either Solomon or Jonah (Q 11:31–32). Special Matthew places Jesus in the judge’s seat in relation to an eschatological and, apparently, final judgment (Matt 25:31–46). John 5:22–29 designates Jesus as the judge by the delegated authority given to him by God. John 9:39 makes judgment the explicit reason for Jesus’ coming into the world. In addition, the Triumphal Entry and the cleansing of the temple with the resulting condemnation of Jerusalem is recorded in all four of the gospels. This repetition gives the exegete every reason to believe that the NT
writers believed the temple cleansing was an important event. That Jesus both spoke against and acted against the temple is beyond dispute. More than two-thirds of the ultra-critical fellows of the Jesus Seminar affirm this position.\textsuperscript{280} John’s reference (John 2:13 ff.) probably had Zechariah 14:21 in mind, but “equally,” according to D. A. Carson “John may be alluding to Malachi 3:1, 3” to denounce the impure worship.\textsuperscript{281} Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard H. Heirs also cite this same Malachi connection.\textsuperscript{282} Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson explicitly cite John 2:13–22 and what may be a later event as recorded in the synoptic texts (Matt 21:13–13; Mark 11:15–18; and Luke 19:45–47) as fulfillment of Malachi 3:1.\textsuperscript{283}

Finally, consider the possibility that no NT historical evidence supported the idea that “the messenger of the covenant” entered the temple or was associated with the Messiah.\textsuperscript{284} Even if this was true, or if JTB or any other second-temple person is the referent, Malachi’s prophecy is still most probably exclusively directed to the second temple. As controversial as Daniel 9:24–

\textsuperscript{280} Funk and Hoover, The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus, 97–98.


\textsuperscript{282} Andreas J. Köstenberger, John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004). Heirs, “Purification of the Temple: Preparation for the Kingdom of God,” 87–88. Josephus attributes the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem to ancient prophecy. He does not provide any explicit reference, but he does mention these oracles of destruction twice. In both cases, he writes as though these prophecies of judgment were common knowledge. Josephus Flavius and William Whiston, “Antiquities of the Jews,” in The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 4.388 and 386.109. These citations from Josephus alone do not prove that Malachi envisioned the second temple, or that “the messenger of the covenant” is Jesus. Malachi does not refer to the destruction of the temple. However, given the possibility that this is the case, it is significant to find a decidedly non-Christian voice declaring OT prophecy (probably Daniel 9:26) to be fulfilled by an attack against the temple and Jerusalem in what almost certainly must be accepted as judgment.


\textsuperscript{284} F. B. Huey notes that the messenger preceding the messenger of the covenant has been identified by scholars as Malachi, Elijah, Nehemiah, the angel of the Lord, or as a figurative embodiment of all prophets. The NT interprets the messenger as John the Baptist (Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27). The statement rests on the prophecy of Isa 40:3-5, which describes one who will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. F. B. Huey, “An Exposition of Malachi,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 30, no. 1 (1987): 17.
27 is with regard to messianism, one observation seems difficult to refute. The second temple and Jerusalem prior to their destruction are in view. Neither Daniel, Malachi, nor the records of Israel’s readers indicate that another temple is in view. No other conclusion even approaches the same level of plausibility.

Extra-biblical Evidence

In addition to the above evidence, some early church writings interpret Malachi 3:1 in relation to Jesus. Cyril of Jerusalem writes,

The Lord heard the prayer of the Prophets. The Father disregarded not the perishing of our race; He sent forth His Son, the Lord from heaven, as healer: and one of the Prophets saith, The Lord whom ye seek, cometh, and shall suddenly come. Whither? The Lord shall come to His own temple, where ye stoned Him.285

Although this text from Cyril of Jerusalem is not without difficulties, what is obvious is the intent to place Jesus in the role of healer of Israel and representative of Yahweh (if not Yahweh himself) coming to the temple. Cyril is writing long after these events; his interpretive judgment reflected in the quotation above demonstrated his understanding of history.286

Another instance of this same process is found in chapter 17 of Origen’s commentary on the Gospel of John. Origen identifies John and his baptism as the forerunners of Jesus and his

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286 Augustine interprets the passage allegorically, citing or alluding to several texts in Malachi within just a few sentences. Augustine cites Malachi 1:10–11 in relation to the worship and sacrifice offered God in every place, from the rising of the sun to its going down, through Christ’s priesthood. He comments that the Jews’ sacrifices have ceased and cannot be accepted, so why do the Jews still look for another Christ. When they read this prophecy, Augustine reasoned, they should know that it could not be fulfilled except through Jesus. Citing Malachi 2:5–7 analogously, Augustine then applies the title “the messenger of the covenant” to Jesus and the temple to his physical body, his flesh. The coming in judgment is reserved for the Second Advent. St. Augustine, “The City of God,” in St. Augustine’s City of God and Christian Doctrine, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 381.
superior baptism. Irenaeus removes all the ambiguities from his position when writing, “Truly it was by Him, of whom Gabriel is the angel, who also announced the glad tidings of his birth: [that God] who also had promised by the prophets that He would send His messenger before the face of His Son, who should prepare His way, that is, that he should bear witness of that Light in the spirit and power of Elias.” Thus Irenaeus contends that John sent in the power of Elijah, was sent directly by Yahweh to testify of the Light, and the light is the Son. The Talmud also provides a brief reference to the Messiah in association with the “day of the Lord” in the immediate context of Malachi 3:2.

Summary

In summary, the available historical evidence suggests that the most plausible conclusion is that JTB and Jesus are the best historically identifiable candidates for fulfilling Malachi 3:1. No one has suggested a more probable conclusion based on historical evidence or exegesis. Historically and evidentially, JTB is most probably the forerunner and Jesus is “the messenger of the covenant.” This is the answer to the sixth question (above: New Testament Evidence). No other candidates meet the criteria and it is unlikely in the extreme that any future pair of figures will do so. Furthermore, the relation of the second temple to Malachi’s intent is virtually certain. To escape this fact, the exegete historian must resort to speculation or allegorization. It is

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289 Neusner, The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary, b. Shabb. 16:12, II.17.B.
impossible for *Yahweh* or his covenant messenger, if they are distinct individuals, to enter a temple for judgment if a temple does not exist.

The related positions argued herein are that (1) this OT text requires the messenger of the covenant to be present in the second temple, and (2) that no candidate other than Jesus as the incarnation of *Yahweh* adequately fits the facts.

Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Drawn from the Study of Malachi 3:1

1. The historical-evidential data indicate that JTB is the best identifiable candidate fitting the image of the forerunner.
2. The NT gospels and Paul claim that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and judge of Israel.
3. The NT gospels and Paul claim that Jesus is equal with *Yahweh*.

*Historical-Evidential Facts Drawn from the Study of Malachi 3:1*

1. Malachi 3:1 depicts *Yahweh* as coming into his temple for judgment.
2. Malachi provides no indication that he envisions a temple other than the one standing during his lifetime.
3. The historical-evidential data indicate that if the LORD (*ḥāʾādôn*) and the messenger of the covenant are different individuals, Jesus is the best identifiable candidate for the latter role.
4. If the LORD (*ḥāʾādôn*) and the messenger of the covenant are the same individual, Jesus is the best identifiable candidate known to historians.
Chapter 4

The Second Group of Biblical Texts

Introduction to the Second Group of Biblical Texts

The second group of biblical texts probe the claim that the Messiah would spring from the lineage of King David and correspondingly, that Jesus is a descendant of King David. The examined are 2 Samuel 7:13, Isaiah 11:1–2, Jeremiah 23:5–6, Ezekiel 34:23–24, Hosea 3:4–5, Matthew 1:1–17, and Luke 2:4, 3:23.

2 Samuel 7:13

Literary and Textual Analysis

Old Testament Evidence

2 Samuel 7:1–17

The Davidic Covenant is an integral element in the theology of the OT. The textual basis for the idea that Yahweh made a particular covenant with King David and his descendants is found in 2 Samuel 7:1–17. In this pericope four things are promised to David. First, Yahweh will make David’s name great (9b). Second, Yahweh will establish the kingdom of David’s physical offspring (12). Third, this particular offspring will build a house for Yahweh’s name (13a). Fourth, the kingdom of David’s offspring will last forever (13b).

Within this pericope verses 13 and 16 both use the term שְׂדָמַע (’sdm) to describe the perpetuity of the Davidic dynasty. Subsequent statements by David and Solomon confirm forever as the correct understanding of the term (2 Sam 22:15; 1 Kings 2:45; Ps 18:50). Johnston
highlights the fact that Abijah, king of Judah, and a later descendant of David, also claimed the promise made to David as a covenantal basis for a perpetual dynasty (2 Chr 13:5).  

Significant for this discussion is the term מִמֶּךָ (from the bow/ body of you) in verse 12. This term unambiguously indicates that the promised son of David must be the physical offspring of David. The LXX translation agrees, stating that the promised son must be from the κολίας (belly) of David.

The role of Isaiah 11:1 in relation to 2 Samuel 7:13

The text of Isaiah 11:1 is definitely set in the future; it is a prophecy of an ideal ruler stemming from the house of Jesse. This text is almost universally recognized as reaffirming the promise made previously to David. Writers differ, however, in their explanation of the enigmatic reference to Jesse, rather than David. Arnold Fruchtenbaum contends that referencing Jesse means “Messiah would not be born until the House of David had once again returned to the state of poverty which it was in during the days of David’s father, Jesse. Messiah will be born into a house of lowliness.”

Hans Wildberger, citing Geo Widengren, suggests that the selection of an image of the tree (stump) was because the tree of life served as a symbol for the Israelite monarchy. History, in fact, depicts this monarchy as literally cut down. Fitzmyer notes that the MT of Isaiah 11 contains a promise of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty, but this promise gradually evolved into something more. Later interpreters understood Isaiah 11:1 as an explicit promise of a (distant) messianic king, as reflected in the Targum of Isaiah. Bruce Chilton

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290 Johnston, “Messianic Trajectories in God’s Covenant Promise to David,” in Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King, 67.


translates Isaiah 11:1 in the Targum as follows: “And a king shall come forth from the sons of Jesse, and the Messiah shall be exalted from the sons of his sons.”

Regardless of the time for fulfillment envisioned by the writer, no doubt remains about the overall import of Isaiah 11:1. It is a reaffirmation by a writer, coming well after the life of David and probably before the exile, of the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7.

The role of Jeremiah 23:5–6 and Ezekiel 34:23–24 in relation to 2 Samuel 7:13

Despite the well-documented disobedience of the Davidic kings, texts such as Jeremiah 23:5–6 and Ezekiel 34:23–24 confirm a continuing hope for a renewed Davidic leader and kingdom. The historical circumstances of the Babylonian exile were not favorable to the sustainability of such a hope. There is little doubt that the Jewish people’s messianic hope did not suddenly spring into existence because of the exile. Rather, it continued to develop, despite the exile, during the occupation of their homeland and the deportation of their people.

Another paradox, in light of the failure of the Davidic kings, is that the hope for an archetypical Davidic king seems to have grown more prevalent as time progressed. For example, Jeremiah 23:5, indisputably written after the fall of Jerusalem, employs tree-related terminology reminiscent of Isaiah 11:1. Jeremiah speaks of a righteous branch of David. The term פִּיוֹת צַדִּיק צָמָח (ṣaddiq semah), translated as “righteous branch” or “rightful scion” by William Lee Holladay, if not technically meaning Messiah at the time of Jeremiah, was indisputably taken as such by the time Zechariah wrote. According to Holliday, the term contains a

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technically messianic meaning in Zechariah 3:8. Ezekiel 34:23–24 speaks again of the hope for the reestablishment of the Davidic dynasty with a sitting king acting as shepherd of Israel.

The role of Hosea 3:4–5 in relation to 2 Samuel 7:13

The bulk of the book of Hosea is uniformly recognized as pre-exilic, probably written during the reign of Jeroboam II. Hosea 3:1–5 may be the work of a later redactor. For the current purpose, however, as will be demonstrated below, this makes little difference. Hans Walter Wolff argues for the originality of the passage based on genre. He contends that the acting out portrayed in the passage is *memorabile*, which is neither parable, nor allegory. *Memorabile* depicts a historical event in one central point and demonstrates a concern for facts expressed in symbolic action. If Hosea 3:1–5, particularly verses 4–5, is part of the original prophecy, these verses represent a strong affirmation of the Jewish people’s hope for a Davidic king during the pre-exilic period. Other texts such as 1 Chronicles 22:6–10 support this assertion. If Hosea 3:4–5 reflects the work of a later redactor, this passage represents the continuation of a pre-existing messianic hope that extends into the post-exilic period. It is doubtful that Hosea originated such hope.

In either case cited above, the text of Hosea 3:4–5 is not difficult to interpret. The text postpones the realization of the appearance of the Davidic king into the distant eschatological future. It also provides strong evidence for the pervasive expectation of the restoration of the Davidic line, and that ideal Davidic ruler would be the physical offspring of David (2 Samuel 7:13).

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**Intertestamental Evidence**

The historical understanding of the extra-biblical texts, as conveyed by Jewish scribes, expresses the same hope for a coming Davidic scion. For example, during the intertestamental period, the belief that the messiah would be of Davidic decent is articulated in the Psalms of Solomon, “Ἰδέ, κύριε, καὶ ἀνάστησον αὐτοῖς τὸν βασιλέα αὐτῶν νῦν Δαυὶδ εἰς τὸν καιρόν, ὁν εἶλον σύ, ὁ θεός, τὸν βασιλεύσαν ἐπὶ Ἰσραηλ παιδά σου.”

In context, this psalm is a lament over the Hasmonean usurpation of the title king. Apparently, many pharisaic Jews considered the Hasmoneans sinners without legitimate claim to the throne. The rightful king could only be a davidid.

Other evidence temporally proximate to this era is found in the writings of the Qumran Essenes. The messianic expectation of the Essenes included two messiahs; one Davidic and the other an interpreter of the law. In 4Q174 (Frags. 1 i, 21, 2:10–13), the Essene Midrash of 2 Samuel 7:12–14, the Davidic messiah is described as the “branch” (Σταμάτης) who raises the fallen hut of David (Amos 9:11). Another similar pesharim (4Q161 Frags. 8–10:11–25) interprets Isaiah 10:33–34 and 11:1–5 in light of a Davidic messiah. “See! The Lord YHWH of Hosts will rip off the branches at one wrench…. [A shoot will issue from the stump of Jesse and [a bud] will sprout from [its]roots.”

Further evidence arises in 1Q28b Col. v: 20–28. This text echoes the images of Isaiah 11, applying them to their hope for messianic rule.

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297 Josephus records that a great numbers of Jews were slain in the battle against Alexander Janneus and on one occasion approximately 800 Pharisees were crucified. Josephus and Whiston, “Antiquities of the Jews,” in The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, Antiquities 13.379.

Jewish liturgical material also indicates the desire and expectation that the throne of David would be reestablished. The *Shemoneh Esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions), numbers fourteen and fifteen, state:

To Jerusalem Thy city return Thou in mercy and dwell in her midst as Thou hast spoken, and build her speedily in our days as an everlasting structure and soon establish there the throne of David. Blessed be Thou, O Lord, the builder of Jerusalem.

The sprout of David Thy servant speedily cause Thou to sprout up; and his horn do Thou uplift through Thy victorious salvation; for Thy salvation we are hoping every day. Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who causest the horn of salvation to sprout forth.299

Mark. L. Strauss contends that the *Shemoneh Esreh* is the most important prayer in Judaism, with roots predating Christianity. Strauss suggests the Babylonian recension of the *Shemoneh Esreh* or *Tefillah* did not reach its final form until after AD 70. However, based on some textual similarities in the earlier Hebrew text of Sirach (Sir 51:12), textual dependence of the former on the latter may be argued. Strauss states, “the fact that references to the Temple and the Davidic messiah appear together and in the same order as the *Tefillah* suggests dependence of some kind; and it is not unlikely that the common tradition was an earlier version of the *Shemoneh Esreh*.300 Strauss further identifies the phrase “horn of salvation” as common to Luke 1:69 and 2 Samuel 22:3. The author of the fifteenth benediction most probably was not dependent on Luke since the *Shemoneh Esreh* is a Jewish liturgical prayer, not a Christian

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prayer. The phrase “horn of salvation” in this benediction likely stems from an earlier source available to both Luke and the Jewish writers.  

Later Extra-Biblical Evidence

An apocalyptic glimpse of the messianic expectation is provided by the author of 4 Ezra who writes of someone from the posterity of David denouncing ungodliness, while judging and destroying enemies. The davidid 4 Ezra has in mind accomplishes the conquest while delivering a saved remnant (4 Ezra 12:31–34).  

The early church father Augustine also accepted both the idea that the Messiah was to be the physical offspring of David and the tradition that Jesus was this particular descendant. In the classic work The City of God, Augustine exegeses Psalm 89: “I have sworn to David my servant that I will prepare his seed for ever” [sic] (17.9.1). He then affirms in several ways that Christ is the fulfillment of this ancient promise (17.12.1ff).  

Another representative example of the same thought process is located in Cyprian’s claims that David was promised a seed from his own “bowels” that would build a house and have his throne raised forever. These examples, though coming from Christian sources, have continuity with both the OT and intertestamental evidence regarding the key question of how the promise to David was interpreted. The evidence thus far demonstrates a consistent expectation

301 Ibid., 50.


that the seed of David would be a physical descendant. The evidence supports no figurative or symbolic interpretation.305

Davidic Thinking: A Significant Form of Jewish Messianism

Some scholars argue that no normative concept of Messiah existed in Judaism;306 perhaps this assessment is correct, but the evidence suggests an alternative supposition. Fitzmyer, in the concluding remarks of The One Who Is to Come, notes that the messianic figure was not always conceived of as kingly. In some cases he was priestly; in other cases he was of Joseph. However, the “dominate expectation … was one that awaited a human kingly figure who was (and is) to bring deliverance, at once political, economic, and spiritual to the Jewish people, and through them peace, prosperity, and righteousness to all humanity.”307 The significant characteristic of this kingly expectation is the messianic connection to David.

William Horbury provides important insight into the messianism of the OT and pseudepigraphical works. In one instance he observes that the “Davidic monarchy forms a background against which a considerable unity [in messianism] can in fact be perceived”308 Further, Horbury warns that a “sharp division between Davidic and non-Davidic expectations is

305 A small body of Jewish polemical literature exists that denies that Jesus was either a descendant of David or born of a virgin (see below under “Evidence against a Contrived Birthplace.” None of these sources are contemporary with the NT data, with the possible exception of John 8:41. Cf. Origen, “Origen Against Celsus,” in Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second, Orig., Cont. Cels. 1.38. and Markus Bockmuehl, This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2004), 14, 33.


307 Fitzmyer, The One Who Is to Come, 182.

discouraged.”

Why would this be so? The Jews traced their expectation not just to David, but to Genesis 49:10, which includes the whole series of Jewish kings. The Davidic monarchy, both in general and in particular, forms a background against which a unity of messianic expectation can, in fact, be perceived.

Wright acknowledges the Davidic connection in the context of a discussion about the cultural milieu of the first century and the pervasive function and position of the temple in Jewish society. He argues thus:

Dissatisfaction with the first-century Temple was also fuelled by the fact that, although it was certainly among the most beautiful buildings ever constructed, it was built by Herod. Only the true King, the proper successor of Solomon the original Temple-builder, had the right to build the Temple ... and whatever Herod was, he was not the true King. The last four prophetic books in the canon (Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi), and in its own way the work of the Chronicler, all point to the restoration of the Temple under the leadership of a royal (Davidic), or possibly a priestly, figure.

In another location, Wright acknowledges the existence of a “reasonably widespread Jewish messianic hope, including a belief that God would use a coming king to usher in divine rule. At least in one case that messianic hope took ‘explicitly Davidic form.’” Mowinckel affirms that the hope of the Jewish people was for a restored kingdom characterized by a tangible

309 Ibid.

310 Ibid., 53–54. In these pages, Horbury provides a list of pseudepigrapha that attest to messianism as follows: “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in the second century BC, the Psalms of Solomon and relevant parts of the Third Sibylline book in the first century BC, and a series of apocalypses extending throughout and beyond the Herodian period, notably the Parables of Enoch, the apocalypses of Ezra (2 Esd 3–14) and Baruch (2 Baruch, the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch), and the Fifth Sibylline book.”


312 Ibid., 308.
state in the present world, ruled by the scion of David: “The Messiah is the ideal king of David’s line who reigns in the restored kingdom of his ancestor.”

The affirmation above does not suggest that messianism and Judaism were monolithic in nature. Neither does it suggest that the messianic hope instantly sprang ex nihilo into its full-orbed expression. This hope was characterized by variations, sects, and a long history of development partially captured in the OT texts and within the historical records of the nation. Ben Witherington, remarks on these variations, that some specific Jews (the Sadducees) were not looking for a single Messiah figure to rescue them.

Witherington’s conclusion notwithstanding, the OT documents, the extra-biblical documents, and the history of the nation, as documented above, leave little doubt that the hope for Israel’s ideal king was most often grounded in the royal line of David, particularly in the Davidic Covenant. Typically a literal relational understanding existed between the messianic hope and the royal line of David, although some ideological elements are present. Physical descent was undeniably a significant aspect of the messianic hope from the inception of the Davidic Covenant. Even when the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works describe messianic figures with superhuman characteristics, a steadfast connection to the historic Israeliite kings remains.

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315 Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies*, 60. The superhuman features noted in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are frequent and diverse in nature. Is it more than coincidence that many of these characteristics are related to the representations of Jesus in the NT? These characteristics include: (1) pre-existence (2 Esd 13:26; 1 En 48:3; 6; 2 Bar 29:3; Sib Or 5:414); (cf. John 1:1; 8:23, 58; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16–17); (2) Messiah coming from heaven (2 Esd 13:3; Sib Or 5:414; 1 En 48:4–7; 2 Bar 29:3); (cf. Mark 13:26; 14:62; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 1:7); (3) annihilation of foes and establishment of kingdom (1 En 49:2; 2 Esd 13:9–13; 2 Bar 29:3–5; 39:7–40:3; Sib Or 5:414–28); (cf.1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 1:5–9; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 19:11–21).
New Testament Evidence

The Pauline Evidence

Employing the most gracious interpretation of the evidence, the careful exegete cannot press the succession of Davidic kings as the leaders of the Israelites beyond the time of Zerubbabel. Even granting Zerubbabel the status of king involves difficulties. He was more properly a governor of Judah (Hos 1:1) and, at best, a vassal of Persia. As discussed above, a broad range of OT texts support the idea that David’s kingdom and throne would be reestablished (e.g., Isa 9:7; 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15–17; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:25; Hos 3:5; Amos 9:11). The early Christians believed that Jesus (Christ, Messiah, or Anointed One) fulfilled this promise as the ultimate descendant of David (Matt 27:11, 37; Mark 15:2, 26; Luke 23:3, 38; John 18:33–34; 19:19–22; Rev 17:14; 19:16). Thus, Christians contend that Jesus rules an eternal kingdom. Dennis Duling, commenting on the Davidic concept in relation to Jesus’ Davidic heritage, contends that two texts are primary: Romans 1:3–4 and Romans 15:12. Duling argues that Paul’s use of 2 Samuel 7:12–14 in Romans 1:3–4, and the word play in 15:12, in which the “root of Jesse” is parallel to ὁ ἀνιστάμενος, is where the OT promise first enters Christian tradition.316 This tradition includes a physical descendant of David ruling Israel and the nations, plus the OT impress of divine sonship.317 It is Paul’s belief in the physical (κατὰ σάρκα) descent that motivates his assertion that God’s covenant-keeping righteousness is manifest, in the flesh, through Jesus. God’s faithfulness and Jesus’ sonship are both proved by Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation. Drawing from a list of metaphors used in the OT promise traditions, both canonical


317 Ibid., 77.
and non-canonical. In so doing, he demonstrates the likelihood that Paul and the other NT writers were aware of, and embraced, the promise tradition that *Yahweh* would *raise up* (ἀνιστάμενος) a descendant of David. The emphasis of these metaphors is the raising up in the sense of a ruler ascending to the throne to rule over Israel and the nations.\(^{318}\) However, the word play of ἀνιστάμενος also allows for the resurrection motif and the attribution of divine sonship in the same context.

These non-titular metaphors are of such quantity, and their appropriation by Paul of such clarity, that any attempt at dismissing the idea that God had promised David a seed, and that Paul believed that seed was Jesus, is untenable.\(^{319}\) In Paul’s mind, Jesus rules the kingdom and enjoys the status of having a father-son relationship with *Yahweh*.

Jesus’ Genealogical and Family Data

The Davidic descent of Jesus was apparently a given in the early church. It is multiply attested in Matthew (SM) and Luke-Acts (SL) and affirmed by Mark (10:47–48; 12:35–37), in addition to the early, enemy attestation by Paul (Rom 1:3) mentioned above. Later (in what might be considered a satisfaction of the criteria of multiple forms), the author of 2 Timothy (2:8–9)\(^{320}\) and John of Patmos (Rev 3:7; 5:5; 22:16)\(^{321}\) both specifically attribute a Davidic heritage to Jesus.\(^{322}\)

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\(^{318}\) Ibid., 77–78.

\(^{319}\) For example, Num 24:9, 17; Ps 79:25; Ps 132:17; Isa 9:10; Jer 23:5; 30:9;33:14–15; Zech 3:8; 6:12; 4Qflor; T. Jud 24:1, 5b; T. Sim 1bf; T. Dan v. 10; Benediction 15; Targ. Isa 9:1; Pss 17:23.

\(^{320}\) 2 Timothy 2:8–9 states, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.”

\(^{321}\) Revelation 22:16 states, “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

To support a physical-decent claim beyond what the biblical witnesses overtly provide, it is important to note the mention of “brothers of the Lord” (1Cor 9:5) in the context of apostles known to the Corinthians. Apparently, even the Gentile churches were aware of the apostolic ministry of Jesus’ brothers. Yet not a word refuting his Davidic descent can be identified in this passage. If the Gentile churches were aware of these relatives, it is certain that Jewish churches also knew of them. The Jewish churches could have confronted those Gentile churches at any time regarding their false attribution of Davidic descent to Jesus. Richard Bauckham suggests that several relatives of Jesus were known, and his four brothers were “well-known” in the first-century church. 323 These relatives include Joseph and Mary (his parents), James, Joses, Jude, and Simon (brothers in some familial sense); the possible inclusion of Salome and Mary as his sisters must also be considered. Jude has two grandsons, Zoker and James. Clopas and Mary are probably an uncle and aunt who have a son, Simon. In addition, it is probable that Clopas is Cleopas, one of the men mentioned on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–27). 324

The first-century work Didache provides further evidence that the early churches knew that the historical family of Jesus was rooted in the Davidic line. The text in 9:2 explicitly connects Jesus with the Davidic line. 325 The Didache’s later mention of “Ὡσαννᾶ τῷ Υἱῷ Δαβίδ”


324 Ibid., 17–18, 97.

confirms that the author accepted Jesus’ Davidic and divine sonship. The authentic epistles of Ignatius contain several references to Jesus as a son of David, often in the context of his being the son of Mary and the son of God.

Hegesippus reports a Palestinian tradition in which Roman authorities interrogated Zoker and James (the grandsons of Jesus’ brother Jude) regarding their Davidic descent. Julius Africanus attests that Jesus’ relatives claimed Davidic descent in the Letter to Aristides. Given the significant number of witnesses, it is impossible that the relatives of Jesus were unknown in the early church. Yet there is no record of them or Jewish polemicists ever attempting to refute their claim to be of the lineage of David.

Rational Evidence Supporting the Davidic Heritage of Jesus

As Yehezkel Kaufmann observes, it may be impossible to prove Jesus’ lineage using historical-critical criteria. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify other significant indicators of

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326 Didache 10:6

327 See Eph 18, 20; Trall 9; Rom 7; Smyrnaeans 1; Antiochians 4.


330 The Epistle of Barnabas Chapter 12 makes a puzzling statement about Jesus in relation to his ancestry. If that statement is taken at face value it would seem to conflict with every other source that touches on the issue of Jesus’ Davidic heritage:

“Behold again: Jesus who was manifested, both by type and in the flesh, is not the Son of man, but the Son of God. Since, therefore, they were to say that Christ was the son of David, fearing and understanding the error of the wicked, he saith, ‘The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.’” “Epistle of Barnabas,” in, The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 145.

At the least, this pericope affirms that Davidic sonship was the prevailing view of the Messiah among the people. By its reference to Psalm 110, it also elevates Jesus status beyond his human ancestry to one of divine sonship. The text, however, is not clear as to the author’s intent. It seems likely that in a way similar to Mark 12:35–37, this is a subtle way of clarifying that Christians believed that Jesus was not merely the son of David but the son of God.
Jesus ancestry and how he was understood to be the son of David by his contemporaries. Kaufmann contends that Jesus’ redemptive works would have identified him as Messiah, specifically his healing works. These curative acts would have been recognized as messianic behaviors, and the actor would be assumed to have a Davidic lineage—a lineage stemming from Zerubbabel.\(^{331}\) This conviction may surface in Nicodemus’ affirmation that Jesus is a teacher sent from God (John 3:2) an affirmation based on his healing works. Duling describes these healing miracles as therapeutic in nature, especially as employed in Matthew’s references to the title *son of David*. Specifically, Duling draws on the cry of Bartimaeus, who he believes stands in the background of Matthew’s story of the healing of the two blind men (Matt 9:27–31).\(^{332}\) The exegete must acknowledge that Jesus, in his encounter with Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52), did not reject, diminish the significance of, or display any disapproval of the title *Son of David*. Rather he responded affirmatively to it, asking what Bartimaeus wanted him to do.

Negatively, D. F. Strauss believes that the attribution of Davidic descent to Jesus was probably more dogmatic than historical. Even while employing a critical methodology, the skeptical Strauss seems forced to admit, “Jesus is universally represented in the New Testament, without any contradiction from his adversaries, as the descendant of David.”\(^{333}\) Akin to the


conclusion of Strauss, Marshall Johnson argues that the claims of Davidic descent in the birth narratives are more works of art than history. The birth narratives, he maintains, are Midrash (a commentary on what should have been the case) and the historicizing of the unhistorical material. Apparently, Johnson believes the narratives are a type of theologoumenon. However, other able scholars conclude differently, as indicated in the following three paragraphs.

Raymond Brown concludes that Jesus was from Davidic stock. He maintains that the majority of scholars still accept this position, naming Cullmann, Hahn, Jeremias, Michaelis, and Stauffer as examples. Yigal Levin has thoughtfully answered the assertion that the genealogies are a theologoumenon. He did this by demonstrating that, although Davidic descent was an important characteristic for any messianic claimant, it was not of such universal significance that the gospel writers would resort to “invention.”

Robert Gundry cogently argues that Jesus’ ministry through deeds and words drove the attribution of OT fulfillments. The invention of history read back into prophecy is not characteristic of the NT accounts. He further argues that the fabrication of stories are a part of

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335 Raymond Brown cites the following as reason for his conclusion and against the theologoumenon theory: (1) In the early second century AD, Rabbi Aquiba hailed Bar Kochba (Simon ben Kosibah) as a messianic figure, even though he was not a davidid; (2) There were several types of messianic expectation in the first-century, (a) some looked for a hidden messiah with unknown origins, (b) at Qumran, they looked for both a davidid and a Messiah of Aaron; (3) The possibility that if Jesus were not a davidid, he would have been cast into one of these roles; (4) The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews apparently understood that Jesus’ Davidic status and membership in the tribe of Judah was so well-known that presenting him as high priest needed significant explanation. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New updated ed. (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 1993), 505.


the later apocryphal works. If the gospel accounts were manufactured, it would be logical to seek apocryphal literature surfacing concurrent with the gospel accounts. However, this study has not discovered any concurrent apocryphal works touching on the life of Jesus.

While concentrating on Matthew’s use of the OT, Gundry provides several convincing reasons to believe that the NT accounts describing Jesus’ fulfillment of OT prophecies are grounded in historical events. Some of these reasons are paraphrased below and can be applied with equal vigor to the any of the gospel documents:

1. Some texts to which the NT authors give messianic interpretation were not messianically interpreted in Judaism;

2. Matthew’s account (and the other synoptic writers) sometimes receive independent attestation;

3. Some of Matthew’s OT passages are obscure to the degree that no none would have thought to invent a fulfillment from them unless the tradition (event) came before the attribution of fulfillment;

4. Verisimilar details which cannot be ascertained from the OT prophecy are often present and in essential relationship to the NT context;

5. The NT texts demonstrate an absence of some elements found in the OT texts;

6. Invention is repugnant to Christian piety, yet the NT interpretation leaves the OT predictions open to contrary interpretation. Not every detail is covered.338

When thoughtfully weighed, the rational evidence indicates that it is highly improbable that Jesus or his disciples could lie about his ancestry and go undetected. Too many people knew

338 Ibid., 204.
too much about his family; further, too many people, both in the early church and throughout history, have scrutinized his life.

*Jesus’ Mother*

Another conundrum to consider when discussing the ancestry of Jesus pertains to his mother. A suggestive strand of historical thought places her in the Davidic line. Luke 1:32 implies a possible link to the Davidic line through Mary.\(^{339}\) Reasoned according to conventional thinking, if Jesus was from the seed of David, Mary must have been a *davidid*—it could be no other way. How can the exegete reinterpret the terms כָּמִימֶעַי (from bowel/body of you) or κοιλίας (belly) in reference to the original promise? This perceived need for a Davidic pedigree may explain why there are two different NT genealogies. It may also explain why the obvious discrepancies were allowed to remain a part of the texts. Persons with insider knowledge would have immediately recognized falsification in an attempt to harmonize the two accounts.

In contrast to the issue of Mary’s lineage, the adoption of Jesus by Joseph has been one of the most, prevalent ways to defend Jesus’ messianic status.\(^{340}\) If the adoption of Jesus into the family of David is a legitimate way for him to acquire a Davidic pedigree, the problems in the genealogies largely disappear. This tactic is problematic, however. M. Brown has reminds his readers, “This whole argument, [for Jesus’ Davidic heritage] of course, is greatly weakened if the Messiah’s descent cannot be traced through Miriam and if she is not, in fact, in the legitimate Messianic line from David.”\(^{341}\) M. Brown and Levin both remark that many New Testament

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\(^{339}\) Based on her familial relationship with Elizabeth there is probably also a Levitical association.


scholars who believe that both Matthew and Luke give genealogies of Joseph find no contradiction in the idea that adoption is a legitimate way to place Jesus in the royal line. This would, however, require, some form of levirate marriage before reconciliation of the genealogies could even begin. The thesis of a levirate marriage in this case is indemonstrable. However, the simplest levirate-marriage hypothesis contends that Heli and Jacob were half-brothers; they had the same mother but fathers of different names. Perhaps Heli died and Jacob married his widow.  

M. Brown flatly states, “I am not convinced…that Yeshua’s Davidic descent can be maintained without Miriam herself also descending from that line.” Correspondingly, Levin argues persuasively that Joseph’s adoption of Jesus is a non-Jewish concept. “Jewish law, both in antiquity and in the modern era, has no such legal institution.” If Matthew and Luke do actually record anything approaching Joseph’s actual lineage, Mary’s must be sought elsewhere.

following Mary’s genealogy because the definite article is absent before the name of Joseph, thereby separating it from the genealogical record. The implications of ἐνομίζετο (it was thought) is a further indication, according to Stern, that Luke intends to point out the mistake of readers who may be thinking in terms of Matthew’s genealogy. David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament, Electronic ed. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), s.v. Luke 3:23.

344 Levin, “Jesus, ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of David’: the ‘Adoption’ of Jesus into the Davidic Line,” 423. David Lowery commenting on Levin’s work states, “The idea of Jesus’ adoption may not be clear from available Jewish sources. But the issue of human and divine paternity in connection with the titles mentioned probably misses their point and to that extent makes the Roman comparison moot.” Lowery believes these titles should be understood functionally. If that is the correct interpretation, the entire quest to historically authenticate Jesus’ Davidic status, his relationship to OT prophecy, and his divine relationship to Yahweh is futile. David K. Lowery, “Review of Jesus, ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of David’: The ‘Adoption’ of Jesus into the Davidic Line by Yigal Levin,” Bibliotheca Sacra 164 (2007): 102.
The notion that Mary is the source of Jesus’ Davidic status is not novel and may well be necessary to fulfill the Davidic Covenant. However, it is impossible to demonstrate.\footnote{Brown provides a brief survey of the problems with attributing Jesus’ Davidic status to Mary along with some possible answers to the issues. Brown, \textit{Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: New Testament Objections}, 84–97.}

\textit{The Self-Understanding of Jesus and the Early Church}

Approaching the problem of Jesus’ alleged Davidic descent from another perspective, it is fitting to ask how Jesus or (allowing for critical scholarship) the early church understood his relationship to the house of David. Oscar Cullman treats this issue by examining Mark 14:61 ff. Mark 15:2 ff. and Mark 8:27 ff. with their parallels. He also treats Mark 12:35 ff. as perhaps the only text that provides information about whether Jesus designated himself the \textit{son of David}. Cullman contends that the question posed to Jesus in Mark 14:61, and its parallel in Matthew 26:64, is not definitively answered in the affirmative. The ambiguity lies in Matthew’s account. Cullman rightly finds much abstruseness in Jesus’ \σὺ ἔλεγεν answer. The basis for Cullman’s analysis is a presumed Aramaic original text in which the term in question does not mean \textit{yes}.\footnote{Oscar Cullmann, \textit{The Christology of the New Testament}, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1963), 118–119.}

As Matthew records the event, there is no disputing that Jesus does not flatly say \textit{yes}. However, if one considers Mark’s version, Jesus does flatly say \textit{yes} (ἐγώ εἶμι). In addition, if one observes the thoughts connected with the use of the term \σὺ ἐλεγεν (you have said so) in Matthew 26:25 and Mark 15:2 and the hostility surfacing in Matthew 27:1, it is probable that an affirmative answer is implied. Jesus’ elusive answer may have been an attempt to avoid overtly incriminating himself while appearing before those with inimical intentions.
Ulrich Luz notes that Jesus’ vague response in Matthew 26:64 may be a result of his refusal to answer with an oath, in combination with the already mentioned relational distance between him and his hostile interlocutors.³⁴⁷ Immediately following his ἐγώ εἶμι answer in Mark 14:62, Jesus promises the Sanhedrin that they will see him “seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” If this statement is historical, it leaves little doubt about whether Jesus answered Caiaphas’ question affirmatively.³⁴⁸

Mark 8:29 provides another insight into Jesus’ self-perception. Peter’s answer to the question “Who do you say that I am?” was “You are the Christ.” The fact that Matthew does not depict Jesus denying or correcting Peter is often interpreted as Jesus’ acceptance of the title. Conversely, Cullmann is technically correct when asserting that Jesus neither affirmed nor denied Peter’s statement.³⁴⁹ According to this line of argumentation, Peter and the other disciples (especially Judas) have a politically charged view of the Messiah. Peter’s attempt to enforce such a view by rebuking Jesus (Mark 8:32) provokes Jesus’ harsh reply: “Get behind me Satan” (Mark 8:33).³⁵⁰ His unexpected reply leaves little doubt that Jesus’ view of his task contrasts sharply with that of the disciples and the populist hope.

Embracing the politically charged, perspective is, however, very different from assuming that Jesus rejected Peter’s confession. Without question, Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah is often besieged with misunderstanding, even today. That alone, however, does not mean that such a confession is incorrect. Jesus did not reject the title; rather, he rejected Peter’s


³⁴⁸ See the discussion on pages 90–91 above.


³⁵⁰ Ibid., 123.
attempt to intrude into his agenda. In fact, the synoptic evangelists, plus John and Paul, all clearly intended to support the idea that Jesus is the Messiah, not a mere human pursuing a political agenda.

Jesus himself may have intimated of something extraordinary when he asked the controversial question, “How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David”? (Mark 12:35). Clearly, Jesus did not say, how can the scribes say I (Jesus) am the son of David? His argumentation is more subtle. It only touches on his Davidic status if one supposes that Jesus is tacitly claiming to be both a son of David and the Messiah. He certainly is not denying either; a fortiori, it is illogical to conclude that Jesus is denying such designations. That denial would render much of the NT incoherent. R. Brown notes two additional flaws in the proposition that Jesus is denying his or the Messiah’s Davidic status. First, all three synoptic writers offer ample evidence that they believe Jesus to be a davidid. Second, in order to prove that the Messiah was foretold as a davidid, the scribes could have appropriated many texts and traditions. Such denial would have revealed Jesus as a pretender and brought instant ridicule.

Cullmann is right to note that Jesus is not denying his Davidic status; rather Jesus is demonstrating that this status is not the most significant component of his Christological work. Jesus is greater than David. Cullmann, however, overstates both his case and the NT texts when concluding that Jesus “den[ied] any fundamental significance to Davidic sonship.” Jesus is asserting instead that the epithet Son of David is alone not adequate to depict his office: that

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designation is a descriptive prerequisite, but does not exhaust the qualifications of the Messiah. The Messiah is greater than any earthly king. This is the import of Psalm 8:6 and 110 when interpreted by the NT writers. Jesus according to Mark 12:35 also implies the same thing.  

Rudolf Bultmann cogently addresses the import of Mark 12:35–37 by remarking that the passage is the product of a small community of primitive Christians who,

\[ \text{either... intended to represent that the tension between faith in the Son of Man and hope in the Son of David (if, that is, it were not meant simply to refute the accusation that Jesus’ Davidic descent could not be established). Or it comes from the Hellenistic Church, in which case it would be meant to prove that Jesus was more than a Son of David, viz. the Son of God.} \]  

Bultmann obviously desires to establish that the passage comes out of an early church and not from oral or written sources which pre-date Mark. In pursuing this desire, however, he overstates the demonstrable. Even so, Bultmann seems to have grasped the import of the passage as few others have. His dubious conclusion was that the pericope is the creation of an early church community, based on the impossibility of a Davidic Messiah becoming fixed as dogma so early.

Bultmann’s conclusion can be countered by briefly noting three things. First, scholars routinely place the date of Paul’s conversion in the early to mid-part of the third decade, of the first century AD, perhaps as early as two to three years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. If, indeed, Paul was the traveling evangelist portrayed in the NT, knowledge of Jesus as

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353 The question of authorship of Psalms 8 and 110 is irrelevant for the current argument in relation to Mark 12:35–37. The authors of the gospels and the Jewish people accepted these Psalms as compositions of David. Whether or not Jesus believed David was the author is irrelevant to his question.

354 Rudolf Karl Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. John Marsh (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963), 136–137. Another issue arising in Bultmann’s work on Mark 12:35–37 is his admission that it is “not impossible” that Jesus could have spoken the words attributed to him, but not in reference to himself. It seems that the reason for the question is to direct the listeners to understand him paradoxically; both as son of David and greater than David. If Jesus spoke these words, they almost certainly were of himself.

355 Paul Copan, “True for You but Not for Me” (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 158. See also, The Lexham Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Chronology and History of the New Testament Period.”
the son of David could have spread very rapidly. Key accounts in the book of Acts clearly indicate that Paul’s first engagement in a new city was often in its synagogue (Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:4). Acts 17:1 explicitly affirms that Paul customarily went to the synagogue to preach. It is beyond doubt that these Jewish listeners would have questioned Paul about Jesus’ Davidic credentials; they doubtless carried to every part of the Roman Empire Paul’s affirmation of Jesus as a son of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3).

Second, as explained above, several of Jesus’ family members were known and apparently had itinerate ministries of their own. Both the OT prophecies of a Davidic Messiah and Jesus’ Davidic status would naturally have been components of their preaching.

Third, a significant portion of the Jewish world, like Paul (according to Bultmann), already presupposed a Davidic Messiah. Educating the masses as to the fulfillment of the ancient promise easily could have occurred within a couple of decades.

A Contrasting Opinion

The fellows of the Jesus Seminar present a contrasting opinion. They firmly reject the idea that Jesus asked Peter the question regarding his identity or that Peter answered it. They also reject the idea that Jesus answered Caiaphas’ question affirmatively while on trial before the Sanhedrin. In their collective opinion, both questions, and much of the speech attributed to Jesus in the NT, are examples of stylized Christian motifs, the work of the evangelists. Their view entails the idea that Jesus virtually never initiates any conversation about himself. His encounters are usually the result of questions directed to him or already developing situations. Their denials, however, do little damage to the historical textual evidence presented above. The

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opinion of this group of scholars is based on “generalizations”\(^{357}\) and unofficially what “sounds like”\(^{358}\) Jesus, rather than supplying any comparable evidence that contradicts the gospel witnesses. Admittedly, all written history is a reconstruction. Yet the criteria of the Jesus Seminar as applied to this issue does not offer an alternative reconstruction of history. Their
collection is, rather, a subjective assault on the evidence. Their problematic method rejects the
reconstructions of others who were much closer to the events and historical contexts, and who
understood the rhythms of Jewish messianic expectations of the period. Devoid of supporting
contrary documentation, the methodology of the Jesus Seminar irretrievably cascades out of the
scholarly realm and into subjectivity.\(^{359}\)

Even if one grants that Jesus never made an overt messianic claim, this does little damage
to the argument and facts presented above. It is the Davidic status of Jesus that is the issue. To
investigate this issue objectively, one must rely on historical sources. The sources that reflect the
best historical information available contend in a variety of ways that Jesus was a davidid. These
sources, stylized or not, consistently portray Jesus in this way.

**Summary**

In summary, there is ample reason to believe that the Davidic covenant and its promises
were embedded in the Jewish messianic consciousness and gradually expanded from the time of
the monarchy. These expectations survived and perhaps intensified during the exile. Integral to

\(^{357}\) Ibid., 32.

\(^{358}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{359}\) Evan Fales also offers no historical counter-evidence directly refuting the historicity of the gospel
accounts when he attacks them as “designed to exaggerate Jesus visibility among contemporaries.” He adds further
that any historical core (especially of the crucifixion) has been “thoroughly obscured for the sake of the message.”
The basis for his critique is anthropological/sociological comparative studies leading to the contention that the genre
of the gospels is myth, including the outright invention of many of the accounts. Fales notes that these accounts are
symbolic in nature and that the meanings are readily understandable when understood symbolically. Fales,
this covenant was the idea that a messianic kingly figure would be the physical offspring of the historical King David. Even when the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works present messianic figures in a superhuman fashion, there is an identifiable connection to the historic Israelite Davidic kings. The NT and early church documents that address this issue uniformly place Jesus within the Davidic house. No early source attempts to refute this claim. Finally, even if the NT accounts of Jesus and his life are stylized works of the evangelists, that alone does not disqualify them as historically based facts. Stylization only proves that the early church universally understood Jesus as the Davidic Messiah.

**Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Drawn from the Study of the OT and NT Davidic Claim**

1. The messianic expectation of the Jewish nation was rooted in the Davidic Covenant.
2. The messianic expectation was varied, but its chief characteristic was kingly.
3. The kingly aspect often contained a significant Davidic stream of thought.
4. Jesus’ relatives were known in the early church.
5. Jesus was probably a descendant of King David.

**Historical-Evidential Facts Drawn from the Study of the OT and NT Davidic Claim**

1. No first-century evidence suggests that Jesus was not a descendant of King David.
2. Neither Jesus’ adversaries nor his friends challenge his Davidic status.
3. Paul, a former enemy of the church, claimed Jesus was a physical descendant of King David.
4. Multiple NT and early extra-biblical sources attest Jesus’ Davidic status.
Chapter 5

The Third Group of Biblical Texts

Introduction to the Third Group Biblical of Texts

The actual birthplace of Jesus is an important issue because the OT prophecy recorded in Micah 5:2 declares that a ruler will come from Bethlehem Ephrathah, later delineated Bethlehem of Judea. In John 7:42 the Jewish people are portrayed as giving assent to the idea that Messiah must have genealogical roots in Bethlehem; this seems to accord with some known messianic expectations of the period. According to Benjamin A. Foreman:

The messianic interpretation of Mic 5:2 was not simply an overzealous Christological exegesis promoted by the early followers of Jesus to justify their belief that he was the messiah. The conviction that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem was also current in (at least some streams of) Jewish theology in the first and second centuries AD.

The fact that Matthew mentions the knowledge of the chief priests and scribes in reference to the child’s birth in Bethlehem indicates that some first-century Jews believed the messiah would have roots in Bethlehem of Judea (Matt 2:6). Conversely, according to the Enlightenment philosopher John Locke, the Jewish people apparently questioned how someone passing for a Galilean could be Messiah (John 7:42). Matthew and Luke both make the claim

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362 See Mayhew note above and John Locke, The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures (London, UK: C. and J. Rivington; T. Egerton; J. Cuthell; J. and A. Arch; Longman; T. Cadell; J. Richardson; J. and W. T. Clarke; J. Mawman; Baynes and Son; Harding and Co.; Baldwin and Co.; Harvey and Darton; R. Scholey; J. Bohn; J. Collingwood; T. Tegg; G. and W. B. Whittaker; G. Mackie; W. Mason; Hurst,
that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. What available evidence supports this claim? Is the evidence sufficient to make a factual statement regarding the birthplace of Jesus? As suggested above, the investigation to evaluate the claim that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea begins with Micah 5:2. Additional texts investigated are those making the parallel claim that Jesus was actually born in this small village: (Matthew 2:1–12, and Luke 2:1–7).

*Micah 5:2*

*Literary and Textual Analysis*

*Old Testament Evidence*

Although vague, perhaps intentionally so, the text of Micah 5:2 is most often interpreted as prophesying the birth of a future ideal ruler, a ruler like David. He in some fashion springs from the house of Jesse, and David in the area of Bethlehem. This Davidic ruler represents, according to Delbert Hillers, a David *redividus* who will reestablish the kingdom and end the exile. Broadly conceived, this is still the opinion of the majority of scholars. Bethlehem of Judea is the place predicted from which the ruler comes. The import is the same, whether dated to

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363 *Johnston, “Messianic Trajectories in Amos, Hosea, and Micah,” in Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King, 125.*


the eighth-century BC\textsuperscript{367} and a prophecy of exile and restoration, or to the post-exilic era,\textsuperscript{368} prophesying only the return from exile. J. J. M. Roberts suggests that Micah 5:2 and several other prophecies that foresee an ideal Davidic scion are more than predictive; they are also criticisms of the current king as an inadequate heir to David. He asserts that both Isaiah and Micah probably envisioned a time of cleansing and trial prior to the arrival of the new David; certainly this is true for Isaiah and is probably true for Micah.\textsuperscript{369} The dishonorable past, and present, conduct of the monarchy would be superseded by a glorious future ruler, one that Micah symbolically associates with the same geographic locale and to the same shepherd role (Micah 5:4)\textsuperscript{370} as characterized David the son of Jesse.\textsuperscript{371}

\textit{Intertestamental Evidence}

The first fragment of intertestamental evidence that must be considered is the Jewish cultural expectation building up to the first century. Many among the population expected a messianic figure. As noted in chapter 4 this expectation was not monolithic in nature, however. The most prevalent characteristic among those looking for a messianic figure was the royal or kingly image. Messianism in general became increasingly important from the time of Herod the

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Great, as attested in the Parables of Enoch (1 En 37–71). The messianic motif’s historical development also included concepts such as “earthly warrior (1QM; Pss. Sol. 17–18),… preexisting and transcendent figure (1 Enoch; 4 Ezra),” and other relevant ideas. Several later pseudepigraphical works also contain messianic components: some Davidic and some non-Davidic. Evidence does emerge, however, to support the notion that some pre-Christian Jews believed the leader prophesied in Micah would be closely associated with Bethlehem.

Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin associate Micah 5 with early rabbinic messianic expectations and the work of salvation. Later, Jewish ideas that likely reflect pre-Christian interpretations of Micah—interpretations in concord with the messianic understanding are recognizable in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets and Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations 1:16. Bethlehem is stated as the birthplace of the Messiah-king in the Jerusalem Talmud. Origen (Against Celsus, I, 51) alleges that, in a plot to discredit Christianity, Jewish teachers withheld information from the public about the birthplace of Jesus. They did this despite knowing the prophecy of Micah and the truth about Jesus’ birthplace.

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373 Michael F. Bird, Are You the One Who Is to Come?: The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 33.

374 Horbury, Messianism among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies, 54.

375 “In allusion to Micah 5:4, it is asserted in the old rabbinic literature that when the Messiah is about to start his work of salvation, he will be furnished with a council of fourteen members to assist him.” Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin, Legends of the Jews, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 99, fn 142.

Extra Biblical Evidence

The extra-biblical witnesses to the birthplace of Jesus are several and varied. In the second-century work *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin reiterates what, by then, must have been an established tradition: Bethlehem was the place of Jesus’ birth. Interestingly, and in contrast to most modern depictions, Justin places the birth in a cave.\(^ {377}\) This detail, however, fits well with the known geography of the area and the habits of the local population; they still use the caves located on the outskirts of the city for the protection of livestock.\(^ {378}\) This detail may also reflect an independent line of attestation by relating facts not included in sources used by the biblical authors. Local tradition and the routine practices surrounding the care of animals often are trans-generational: they are practiced in the same way from generation to generation, using the same locations and techniques.

Origen wrote his tractate *Against Celsus* sometime in the first half of the third century AD. In that work he asserts not only his understanding that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but also that evidence supports the claim:

With respect to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, if any one desires, after the prophecy of Micah and after the history recorded in the Gospels by the disciples of Jesus, to have additional evidence from other sources, let him know that, in conformity with the narrative in the Gospel regarding His birth, there is shown at Bethlehem the cave where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. And this sight is greatly talked of in surrounding places, even among the enemies of the

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faith, it being said that in this cave was born that Jesus who is worshipped and reverenced by the Christians.\textsuperscript{379}

The evidence Origen speaks of is uncertain. Taken as written, however, Origen’s text notes that even those who opposed the Christian faith could (and apparently did, since it was “talked of in surrounding places”) journey to Bethlehem to see what was supposed to be the birthplace of Jesus.\textsuperscript{380}

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, although not specifically mentioning “Bethlehem,” is clearly drawing on the traditional material when writing to the church at Ephesus. He speaks of Jesus’ miraculous birth being from the house of David and of the star that shone brighter than did all others. The letter is usually dated prior to AD 117 and virtually always before AD 138.

Documents such as those cited above affirm the earlier gospel witnesses who support the contention that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. All of the cited witnesses date from long before the Roman Empire was declared Christian and the Church of the Nativity sanctioned as the birthplace of Jesus. Constantine ordered the construction of the Church of the Nativity in AD 333. That imperial order essentially verifies the general belief that Bethlehem was the birthplace. It is even possible that the Romans correctly assessed the tradition and correctly designated the actual cave in which Jesus’ was born. When objectively weighed, the probability that the main aspects of the story have a factual basis are well supported.

William Mitchell Ramsay mentions several issues that would support the thesis that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. First, Luke has unambiguously claimed to be writing history and to have gathered facts in order to compile a narrative of the things derived as least in part from first-hand

\textsuperscript{379} Origen, “Origen Against Celsus,” in Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second, 1.51.

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
observers; he did this for the stated purpose of helping Theophilus gain certainty about the things he had been taught. During Luke’s birth narrative, for example, the importance of these alleged first-hand observers initially emerges when Mary, on two occasions, is described as treasuring up things and events, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). The account describes details of which only Mary had firsthand knowledge. Ramsay is convinced that Luke intends the reader to understand that Mary is his source: “the historian by emphasizing the silence and secrecy in which she treasured up the facts, gives the reader to understand that she is the authority.” Perhaps this is not an account directly delivered to Luke by Mary, but may have been handed down through one or more intermediaries. In either case, the intimate nature of the narrative comes through to even the most uniformed reader.

In contrast, Meier argues against the historicity of the account and disputes the participation of Mary, or someone close to the events, as a Lukan source. At least in part, Meier contends that Luke is either mistaken or conflates Mary’s purification with Jesus’ redemption. This error or conflation, according to Meier, is something of which no informed Jew would be guilty. If Luke’s purpose was to write about the intricacies of Jewish redemptive and purification rites, Meier could be correct. Nonetheless, Meier is unconvincing in his attack on the historicity of these events. It seems fallacious to critique Luke as though he is writing about the intricacies of the Mosaic Law, thereby conflating two completely different Jewish rites. The

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differences in the emphases of Matthew and Luke, and their respective audiences, have already been noted.

The majority of scholars today conclude that Luke is writing in historiographical style appropriate to his period.\textsuperscript{384} Ostensibly, he is writing to one individual, Theophilus, conveying basic facts and information in order to ground his research and conclusions. It is true that Luke does not mention that payment was made during Jesus’ presentation and consecration at the temple. It is also true that his account contains the textually difficult term αὐτῶν (them) in 2:22. Still these facts are probably not the result of Lukan legal incompetence. It is much more plausible that the whole event was viewed as a family affair, not the private purification of a single family member.

If Mary or someone very close to her is the source of Luke’s infancy narrative, there could be no better verification for the historicity of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Who better to verify these events than Jesus’ mother? Luke’s account as the recollection of an eyewitness cannot be demonstrated, but it is clear that Luke expects his account to be accepted as credible. Indeed, when objectively judged by the canons of historical criticism, and in accordance with the standards of his time, the Lukan account fairs well.

\textit{New Testament Evidence}

In the NT book of Matthew, Micah 5:2 is interpreted by the author, and ostensibly by the scribes of Herod the Great’s court, as referring to the Messiah (Matt 2:5–6). The Matthean text states flatly that Jesus was born in “Bethlehem of Judea;” after the family’s flight to Egypt,

Joseph and Mary wanted to resettle in the same area. However, Joseph’s fear of Archelaus motivated them to move on to Nazareth.

The Lukan account also flatly states that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4–6), but the historical context provided by Luke includes an initial travel sequence from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Specifically Luke’s account asserts that the travel is compelled by the first registration during the governorship of Quirinius (discussed below). Luke gives the reader the impression that the family spent only a few weeks in the area before moving back to Galilee. The difficulties in integrating the accounts of Matthew and Luke have led scholars such as Sanders to claim that the accounts present “irreconcilable” ways of moving the family from one place to another.385 Ehrman doubts the historicity of the stories, but admits that “completely different” accounts of historical events do not necessarily create problems. In another publication Ehrman states, “Now it may be that Matthew is simply telling some of the story and Luke is telling the rest of it, so that we are justified every December in combining the two accounts into a Christmas pageant where you get both the shepherds and the wise men, both the trip from Nazareth and the flight to Egypt.”387 Christoph Burger states, what is probably still the consensus of critical scholarship, “Daß Bethlehem nicht der historische Geburtsort Jesu ist, wurde unter der erdrückenden Last der Gegeninstanzen zur communis opinio neutestamentlicher Wissenschaft.”388 Often rejections, such as those offered by Sanders and Burger, are based on

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385 Sanders, The Historical Figure of Jesus, 85–86.
386 Ehrman, Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium, 36.
388 Christoph Burger, Jesus als Davidsohn: eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 104.
what is not present in the account, rather than what is represented. A cursory reading of these biblical texts demonstrate that the two versions are not intended to be unadorned, banal historical recollections. Rather they are intended to highlight specific motifs. If creatively read, most of the apparent difficulties are plausibly resolved by allowing for divergent authorial purposes and acknowledging that neither account is exhaustive. This does not establish the historicity of the whole nor of any individual element; it does, however, compel a closer examination of other evidence.

Where Did Mary and Joseph Live?

The Matthean account makes no assertion about where Joseph and Mary lived prior to the birth of Jesus. When Matthew identifies Bethlehem as Jesus’ birthplace, in reference to the visit by the Magi, he provides no details on the previous geographical location of the couple. Their previous living arrangement apparently was of no concern to this author and his purpose. Yet the possibility that Bethlehem was the home of Joseph’s relatives is at least lexically possible, based on the incidence of the term καταλύματι in Luke 2:7. It is even possible, if not likely, that Joseph lived in Bethlehem for most of his life before his formal betrothal to Mary required his presence in Nazareth. The term καταλύματι is just as likely to have designated a guest room in the family home as some public accommodation (Luke 22:11). In addition, the text of Luke states that the reason for the travel was Joseph’s familial relationship to David; that relationship

389 Justin Martyr also claims that Arabian Magi who had first visited Herod visited the family. “As soon as He was born in Bethlehem, as I previously remarked, king Herod, having learned from the Arabian Magi about Him, made a plot to put Him to death: and by God’s command Joseph took Him with Mary and departed into Egypt.” Martyr, “Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, A Jew,” in The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, 250. Justin, Dial. 102.

required him to go to Bethlehem. It is reasonable to think that Joseph would seek to stay with his family, if possible. Elsewhere Luke designates public accommodation by the term πανδοχείον (Luke 10:34). Καταλύματι and πανδοχείον are clearly distinct terms with distinct meaning. How the author intends for them to be understood is not perfectly clear, however. If the hypothesis is valid that Luke is referring to a family guest-room, this may explain why there was no space for Mary and Joseph. Perhaps others of Joseph’s family had already arrived for the census and the house was full. Mary and Joseph’s journey from Nazareth may have been slowed by Mary’s advanced pregnancy. It is also plausible to think that giving birth would require some level of privacy and the best accommodation the family could provide was a cave or structure attached to the property. If the family of Joseph did own a home in Bethlehem, it also could explain why the Magi found the infant Jesus living in a house (Matt 2:11) sometime after his birth.

Sanders claims that Luke has the family returning directly to Galilee after the scene at the temple during Jesus’ presentation. It is true that Luke does not mention the family’s flight to Egypt or the events leading to that episode. On the other hand, Sanders’ analysis seems to place the burden of an exhaustive account on Luke rather than one that includes only essential details. If one assumes (1) the historicity of Herod’s order to kill the children of Bethlehem under two years of age, and (2) that Luke was aware of the order, one must conclude that for some unstated reason he chose to exclude it from his account. How does this affect the gospel’s historicity? If Luke was not aware of the event, the lacuna cannot be fairly characterized as evidence of a


contrived narrative. A fair assessment suggest this omission of details was more likely an irrelevant lacuna in Luke, rather than an inventive apologetic element of Matthew. Scholars such as France have acknowledged that the overall population of the area around Bethlehem would have been small and the number of deaths probably would have not exceeded twenty. This small number of deaths would not have attracted empire-wide attention. Large numbers of people were killed in battles and executed for various reasons on a routine basis. In the first-century Roman world, Herod and many other royal figures dealt harshly with sedition. Additionally, Josephus is silent on this particular matter, despite recording details of Herod’s ruthlessness on several other occasions.

The Herodian order to kill the children under two probably entailed a small number of deaths. Even so, Matthew appears to be true to his form and intent by tying the episode typologically to OT prophecy (Matt 2:13 ff.). The alleged fulfillment of OT prophecy would have been of great interest to the Hebrew reader. Luke, on the other hand, is probably writing to a Gentile audience that may not have readily grasped Matthew’s interpretive method. Both Luke and Matthew place the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the family’s final residence in Nazareth of Galilee. This fact is confirmed in multiple ways throughout the various written accounts. Both authors also seem to have selectively chosen the elements of the total story.


Which Bethlehem?

Both Matthew and Luke take pains to explain that Jesus was born while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem of Judea. This southern village has sometimes been confused with the northern village “Bethlehem,” located in Galilee and currently known as Beit Lahm. This northern Bethlehem was located about eleven kilometers northwest of Nazareth. Chilton has argued for this northern city as the place of Jesus’ birth. The rationale for his position is grounded in his rejection of the virgin birth and the proximity of the Galilean Bethlehem to Nazareth. The problem with Chilton’s analysis is that he does not deal with the biblical texts or the claims made by the authors; instead he summarily discards those claims as inventions. Chilton, in fact, provides no positive textual or historical evidence for his claim. As a result, his conclusions logically follow from presuppositions based on difficulties in the text and a priori dismissal of the supernatural.

The textual and historical evidence for Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus, as noted above, begins with Matthew 2:1 and Luke 2:11, 15. These are the earliest extant tractates for the origins of Jesus. Luke claims to be writing from sources; at least some of these sources had provided eyewitness testimony. Evidentially it is important to note that birth narratives of both Matthew and Luke are neither a part of the Q material nor are they of Markan origin. They both appear to be parts of distinct lines of source material: one unique to Matthew and the other unique to Luke. Support for this assertion arises in the work of Kim Paffenroff, who authored a widely-cited work dealing with Luke’s unique contributions to the overall gospel data. Paffenroff does not place the birth narrative among her specially selected “L” group of material, as one

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might expect. The “L” material consists of all the material gathered into a single source prior to Luke’s appropriation of the documents. Paffenroff contends that “much of the infancy narrative most likely derives from Luke himself.”

Regardless of where and how Luke gathered his information, his birth narrative delineates Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus. Further, that narrative contains wording and elements that come from distinct historical sources. Luke’s affirmation of Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus must be counted as a distinct source using early material that agrees in several ways with the Matthean witness.

The Matthean birth narrative is also an original composition based on unknown sources. Although some common elements with the Lukan account are present (as detailed below), the apologetic purpose, content, and arrangement are distinctively Matthean. Any lacuna in the two accounts cannot fairly be judged to be a contradiction, at least not without an evidential basis. In fact, the distinctive nature of the two versions constitutes evidence that no collusion occurred between authors and that subsequent smoothing is minimal.

The integrity of many of the elements in the infancy narratives are further supported by R. Brown’s research. He asserts two important points for consideration. First, the infancy narratives are late additions to the basic gospel material that is centered on the resurrection and the recognition that Jesus is the Messiah. These additions became necessary as Christological developments pressed the inquiries about Jesus back beyond his baptism to his birth, and even to his preexistence. This observation makes sense if one considers the content of the Gospel of

John.\textsuperscript{397} Second, much of the material for the birth narratives, although affixed to the basic gospel proclamation, were of pre-Matthean and pre-Lukan origin.\textsuperscript{398} More to the point, all three of the angelic dream appearances are among the material R. Brown places within the pre-Matthean designation: (1) 1:20–21, 24–25; (2) 2:13–15a; and (3) 2:19–21.

The total amount of material attributed to the pre-Matthean sources are significantly reduced from what is contained in the narrative. The remaining elements, however, give virtually all of the historically significant details, including Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus. The narrative elements in R. Brown’s reconstruction are as follows: betrothal, pregnancy, birth during the reign of Herod the Great, expectation that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, search for the child, escape to Egypt, and later return to Israel.\textsuperscript{399}

In his examination of Luke’s narrative, R. Brown contends that 2:6–20 are not pre-Lukan in form; he maintains, however, that the interpretive reflection on Gen 35:19–21 and Micah 4–5, found also in Matthew 2, is of pre-Lukan origin. The rationale for this conclusion is complex, beginning with the annunciation to the shepherds being paralleled by the \textit{magi} story in Matt 2:1–12.

In both Matthean and Lucan infancy narratives, after a first chapter which informs one parent of the forthcoming birth of Jesus, there is a similar sequence of events early in ch. 2: a brief mention of birth at Bethlehem; the revelation of that birth to a group who were not present (magi, shepherds); the coming of that group to Bethlehem under the guidance of the revelation.\textsuperscript{400}


\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{399} Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., 412.
If R. Brown’s deductions are correct, the outright invention of the material in the birth narratives, especially Mathew’s version, is improbable. Simply too much of the content that has its roots in the early history of the church and it’s recollections of the birth of Jesus.\textsuperscript{401}

Evidence Against a Contrived Birthplace

When approaching the evidence for or against Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus, one must seek to understand the motives of the biblical writers. One motive offered in the literature to explain Matthew’s insistence on Judean Bethlehem as the location is that he created the account as a historicized \textit{theologoumenon}. Many Jews expected that Messiah would have his roots in that city. Several problems attend this approach, however, parallel the alternate theory that insists the narrative is simply fictitious.

Four distinct lines of argumentation demonstrate the improbability that Luke or Mathew invented a fictitious account intended to make the masses believe something false. First, Jesus’ relatives could not have remained unknown during the early years of the church. If Jesus was not born in Bethlehem, at the least several key people in the early church would have known. These include Jesus’ immediate family (James and Jude), JTB, and the disciple John as Mary’s caretaker. It is not plausible to believe that JTB would have accepted Jesus’ claim had he been aware that Jesus did not fit the criteria. Even those present at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) included James, the leader of the church of Jerusalem. He certainly knew the truth about the birthplace of Jesus, yet we hear no word of refutation from him. Further critical thought reveals that even Josephs’ brother would have to be involved in a deception. Eusebius, in his

\textsuperscript{401} A significant part of the argument below utilizes some of the same material and rationale as the section titled \textit{Rational Evidence Supporting the Davidic Heritage of Jesus}, above. Most of the lines of argumentation for Jesus’ Davidic heritage also support Bethlehem of Judea as his birthplace.
ecclesiastical history, records that Symeon succeeded his cousin, James the brother of Jesus, as leader of the church in Jerusalem. Symeon was the son of Clopas (an extremely rare name, one of the men on the road to Emmaus); Clopas, according to Hegesippus, was the brother of Joseph. Is it plausible to believe that Joseph’s own brother did not know the truth? Would he not have warned his son not to become involved in a deception?

The second line of argumentation builds on the fact that many Jews were expecting a messiah born in Bethlehem of Judea. That thought was not universal, however; competing expectations are identifiable in the literature. For example, R. Brown notes a parallel expectation of a hidden messiah who would appear suddenly, seemingly from nowhere (John 7:27). The Zealots, a revolutionary messianic movement opposed to Roman rule, represented another messianic philosophy present during Jesus’ life. And according to Robert Charles, the Zadokites were a fourth messianic movement composed of a priestly group. This movement accepted both prophetic and apocalyptic writings; they also expected the advent of the Messiah from the seed of both Aaron and Israel: “Messiah was to be a son of Mariamne and Herod (i.e., from Aaron and Israel)” This Zadokite expectation may explain why Herod had three of his sons executed; the potential competition must be eliminated. However, if invention or deception


403 Richard J. Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2006), 47.


is the goal of the NT gospel writers, toward which messianic group would they direct their fictions? It does not seem possible to invent a set of circumstances that would satisfy everyone.

A third line of argumentation against the invention of the Bethlehem story is the silence of the Jewish religious leadership. The Jewish polemic against Jesus included his alleged illegitimate birth, charges of blasphemy, and even an alliance with Satan. Despite the uproar, however, none of these diatribes challenged his alleged place of birth. As noted in detail below, Origen seemed to believe that even enemies of Christianity knew the place where Jesus was born. The absence of any polemic against Jesus being born in Bethlehem does not fully meet the criterion of enemy attestation. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that their silence on the matter at least suggests that they believed he was born in Bethlehem.407

The fourth line of argumentation surfaces when attempting to understand why the authors of the birth narratives would risk stigmatizing Mary and shock the sensibilities of the first readers. An attempt to deceive the general population with a false birthplace would be indiscriminate and arbitrary, especially in light of the scandal of a nine-month pregnant, unwed Mary claiming a virgin conception and birth. Luke even places the couple on a seventy-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Traveling while pregnant is something from which Mary did not shy away. On two previous occasions, she made a journey of similar distance (Luke 1:39–45, 54). If Matthew, Luke, or one of their respective sources was inventing the stories, these details could only serve to undermine their credibility.

407 Some authors contend that Matthew depicts Bethlehem as the home of Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus. The text does not say this: it is an inference drawn from presuppositions that may not be accurate. Perhaps Joseph was a former resident and traveled to Nazareth, met Mary there, and so on. What the text does not say is important, and it does not say that Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem before traveling there from Nazareth.
Regardless of the mode of transportation for the journey, an unwed mother in the first-century Jewish culture was no trifling matter. Such a pregnancy could mean death, and virtually always meant a life ostracized from the main stream of Jewish life. The accusation that Jesus was illegitimate was neither trivial nor a fleeting problem. It may be intimated in John 8:41; it certainly was an issue for Celsus.\(^{408}\) Centuries later these allegations were still a part of Jewish polemic against Jesus’ family and Christianity. Examples from the third century documented by Bockmuehl include references to Jesus as son of “Pandera” or “Pantera.”\(^{409}\) References such as these also appear in the \textit{Toledot Yeshu} and may have been intended as a disparaging comment on, or corruption of, the term \textit{parthenos} (virgin) as originally applied to Mary.\(^{410}\) In addition, the idea of a virgin conception was not necessary to the messianic concept. The thought of a woman conceiving without the participation of a man was foreign to any Jewish understanding of the procreative process. God’s activity in that process has several OT precedents, but in no case is virginity in view. These elements certainly meet the criteria of surprise and embarrassment, as established by critical scholarship,\(^{411}\) and therefore point to the authenticity and unwashed character of the narratives. Something as banal as the place of Jesus’ birth was most likely not contrived.

\(^{408}\) Origen, “Origen Against Celsus,” in \textit{Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second}, Cont. Cels. 1.38.

\(^{409}\) Bockmuehl, \textit{This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah}, 14, 33.

\(^{410}\) Ibid., 14.

\(^{411}\) François Bovon and Helmut Koester, \textit{Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002). Bovon and Koester acknowledge the shocking aspect of what Luke records. They contend these elements are “difficult to justify even by recourse to the nature of engagement, which legally constitutes marriage.” A “novelist,” they assert, might argue that the necessity of her traveling may have been prompted by her family owning land in the area (85). It also could have resulted from her being from the Davidic linage.
The Registration of Augustus

One of the primary arguments leveled against the authenticity of the Lukan birth narrative is the mention of the registration ordered by Augustus. The goal here is not to make any claim to have solved the historical problems associated with dating the registration. Rather, the goal in exploring this problem is to point out that allegations of invention overlook significant evidence that supports the basic historicity of the Lukan account.

Without recounting the entire history of the registration debate, it is noteworthy that Ramsay suggests that three scholars known to him discovered indictional cycles of fourteen years for “enrolment” in Egypt after it became part of the Roman Empire.¹⁴² Ramsay also observes that the same Greek word that Luke employs for “enrolment” (ἀπογραφή) occurs in the papyri discovered in Egypt. François Bovon and Helmut Koester, commenting on this Greek term, note that it should be distinguished from “ἀποτίμησις (both translate the Latin census).”¹⁴³ The ἀπογραφή mentioned in Luke and the Egyptian papyri, “is the official registration of every inhabitant (age, occupation, wife, children), in order to establish military service and head tax. The ἀποτίμησις, on the other hand, aimed at registration of goods and income.”¹⁴⁴ Ramsay claims that actual papers verifying the enrollments in Egypt have been found for several of the cycles (AD 34, 62, 90, 104, 118, 132, etc.) until AD 230 with some indirect references to the census of AD 20 and 48.

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¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
The facts presented above inform the inference that another registration occurred in AD 6 and is likely the one mentioned in Acts 5:37. If the pattern held true to form, 8 BC would be a probable date for the registration Luke mentions in the birth narrative. Ramsay’s citation of Kenyon clearly supports his conclusions. In addition, Adolf Deissmann and Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan document that the alleged taxation requiring individuals to return to their own city was known in Egypt. They argue that the taxation made by Quirinius was “no mere figment of St. Luke or his authority, but that similar things took place in that age, is proved by an edict of G. Vibius Maximus, governor of Egypt, 104 AD.”

In a subsequent book Ramsay emphatically maintains:

What a series of distinguished and famous scholars have blindly assumed that their inability to estimate historical evidence correctly was the final and sure criterion of truth. This we can now say freely, because the whole matter, so far as the census is concerned, has passed out of the sphere of speculation into the region of definite historical truth.

A. T. Robertson, commenting on Ramsay’s conclusions and the census question, stresses the need to actually read the text. Negatively, it does not say “‘that a single census should be held of the whole Roman world,’ but ‘there went out a decree from Cæsar [sic] Augustus that all the world should be enrolled.’” The emphasis is on the present tense. Robertson further argues that current knowledge—information not available to Ramsay in 1898—demonstrates that Augustus’s governmental plan for a census was successful. “We have evidence for its operation

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in both West and East, though most for the East.” 418 Robertson positively recounts the arguments of Ramsay in general.

The evidence presented above would seem to vindicate Luke. Adding some certitude to this line of evidence is the work of Martin Hengel. Hengel observes that both Greek terms in question were employed in provincial census taking, however, given the use of ἀποτίμησις, and ἀπογραφή by Josephus and Luke they must be considered interchangeable; the choice of which is driven by stylistic reasons. 419 For example, Josephus appears to employ both interchangeably in the span of a few sentences in one of his works. 420

F. F. Bruce argues to the same conclusion from two documents known from the period. The first document is the Titulus Tiburtinus. This document provides information that leaves open the possibility that Quirinius was a political leader prior to AD 6. Quirinius may have been appointed to the position of governor or imperial legate in a province other than Syria several years prior. 421 Nikos Kokkinos ventures much further when arguing that the evidence demonstrates that the ignotus (unbeknown) of the Titulus Tiburtinus can only refer to either Saturninus or Quirinius. He prefers Saturninus, but admits there is reason to believe it could be

418 Ibid., 122.


420 Antiquities 18:3; 18:4

Quirinius. No other candidates meet the requirements.\textsuperscript{422} If his conclusions are accurate, Kokkinos has removed the clutter from the field of history, making Luke’s account even more probable.

The second document is the \textit{Titulus Venetus}. This Latin inscription set up in Beirut by one of Quirinius’ officers provides information about a census held in the Roman province of Syria. The information contained in the \textit{Titulus Venetus} is consistent with a fourteen-year cycle for census taking during the reign of Augustus and continuing until at least the third century AD.\textsuperscript{423}

Indisputable documentation to support the specific registration of Luke 2 does not exist in the known literature. However, the existence of such \textit{ἀπογραφή} within the provinces of the Roman Empire lends credibility to the account. Even though no specific record of a general decree exists, charges of fabricating the story are excessively skeptical in light of (1) the positive data for provincial registrations, (2) the absence of any data capable of refuting the claim, and (3) empire-wide implications of what is known. The obligation of the historian is to evaluate with an open mind. The available evidence disallows the possibility that Luke is inventing his account simply to support a theological agenda. What Luke reports or something similar is probable.\textsuperscript{424}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{423} Bruce, \textit{Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament}, 192–193. In addition, Bruce reasons that if the Greek text of Luke is translated as “before that made when Quirinius was governor” the problem disappears.
\item \textsuperscript{424} Elements that appear in both birth narratives: (1) a betrothed couple named Mary and Joseph, (2) Joseph’s Davidic family heritage, (3) supernatural conception and birth without human intercourse, (4) angelic revelation of the name Jesus, (5) the baby’s birth in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great, (6) later residence in Nazareth.

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A Contradicting Historical Voice

In Origen’s work Against Celsus, the accusation is made that Jesus was a product of a sexual relationship between Mary and a Roman soldier (Panthera). The text reads as follows:

For he represents him disputing with Jesus, and confuting Him, as he thinks, on many points; and in the first place, he accuses Him of having “invented his birth from a virgin,” and upbraids Him with being “born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.” Now, as I cannot allow anything said by unbelievers to remain unexamined, but must investigate everything from the beginning, I give it as my opinion that all these things worthily harmonize with the predictions that Jesus is the Son of God.\(^\text{425}\)

This accusation is far-fetched considering the ethnicity of Mary and what is known about the family. Origen flatly denies that it is true. The idea certainly has an aura of fiction for three reasons. First, Panthera was a common way to refer to any Roman soldier.\(^\text{426}\) Second, it would have been thought a double disgrace to have a young Jewish girl willingly participate in a sexual escapade with a Roman. The whole idea was likely a way to discredit Jesus and the Christian sect. Third, and more relevant for the current discussion, this particular accusation makes no attempt to discredit the alleged place of Jesus’ birth. The focus is to discredit the possibility of a

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\(^425\) Origen, “Origen Against Celsus,” in Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second, 408.

virgin conception and birth.\textsuperscript{427} On another occasion, however, Origen specifically alleges that, in a plot to discredit Christianity, Jewish teachers withheld information from the public about the birthplace of Jesus.\textsuperscript{428} They did this despite knowing the prophecy of Micah and the truth about Jesus’ birthplace.

\textit{Summary}

Clearly some, and perhaps many, Jews during the first-century believed that the Messiah would have roots in Bethlehem of Judea (Matt 2:6; John 7:42), as prophesied in Micah 5:2. The obvious differences in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke are problematic but are not contradictory. If all the details were known, and if those details were considered in light of the differing audiences and theological purposes of the authors, the accounts would not appear to be irreconcilable. Both narratives present evidence of being based on independent sources without collusion. Luke’s accuracy, in particular, has often been vindicated by independent research. Even the decree of Caesar Augustus and the first registration when Quirinius was governor, perennial related problems, are supported by solid historical data that imply the accuracy of Luke’s account.

Culturally, little reason can be found to doubt the biblical narratives. No Jewish leader contemporary with the events is known to deny that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In fact, the stigma and shock factors attached to a pregnant unwed Jewish girl possess a degree of defamation and scandal that opportunist critics certainly would have exploited. It is also certain that no Christian would have invented stories that placed Mary, or the other living members of

\textsuperscript{427} This work makes to attempt support the virgin conception or birth of Jesus.

\textsuperscript{428} Origen, “Origen Against Celsus,” in \textit{Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second}, I, 51.
Jesus’ family, in a position susceptible to unjust ridicule. In total, a crucial lack of evidence exists for dismissing Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus. Skeptical scholars have little basis for claiming any other locality for this event.429

Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Gathered from the Study of Micah 5:2 and the Birth Narratives


429 This footnote anticipates and answers questions about why this dissertation does not treat Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ family fleeing Herod and living in Egypt. The typological elements of Hosea 11:1 as related to Matthew 2:15 make them unsuitable for the current purpose. In addition, this story is unique to Matthew’s gospel. In context, Hosea 11:1 is almost universally recognized as referring to Israel as a nation, not to any single individual.

However, at least four pieces of evidence support the historicity of Matthew’s account: these are summarized by Bockmuehl and France. Bockmuehl, This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah, 34–36. R. T. France, “The Infancy Narratives of Matthew,” in Gospel Perspectives: Studies in History and Tradition in the Four Gospels, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1981), 266. Challenges to the historicity of the account are summarized by Paul Maier. He argues that a challenge to the historicity of the account usually employs three criteria: (1) the silence of Josephus; (2) Matthew’s fulfilled-prophecy construction; and (3) the argument from analogy. Paul L. Maier, “The Infant Massacre—History or Myth?,” Bible and Spade 6, no. 4 (1977): 99–102.

Without undo rehashing of longstanding controversy, a historian in search of explanations for these conditions does not need to search far. First, an argument from silence regarding a localized atrocity is not a convincing refutation. The second objection, Matthew’s fulfilled-prophecy construction, is actually no objection at all. Few biblical scholars suggest that Matthew has no theological agenda in mind. The third objection (the argument from analogy) is based on Matthew’s theological agenda. Those who apply this argument believe Matthew must contrive a baby-slaughter-and-rescue story if the Moses-and-exodus motif is to be successful. Maier makes the simple observation that “the premise here seems to be that no atrocity can happen twice.” If this principle of analogy was valid, there could not have been two Asian countries internally at war, divided north against south. There could not have been more than one tragic school shooting the United States, nor any other evil scheme perpetrated on mankind more than once. In fact, the principle of analogy as a rule of historicism is usually applied by critical scholarship and has the opposite meaning and effect. It elevates present “experience and occurrence” as the criteria of probability. Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method, 55.


Luz contends the “only point that must be taken seriously is whether there is a ‘kernel of truth behind the tradition of Jesus’ sojourn in Egypt.” He argues that in light of the Jewish sources familiar with the tradition, the “oldest formulation could not have been dependent on Matthew.” Ulrich Luz, Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 120.
2. Matthew and Luke do not show evidence of narrative smoothing in an attempt to minimize the difficulties in the accounts.

3. Either Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea or both Matthew and Luke recorded erroneous sources or independently invented fictitious accounts.

4. There is insufficient evidence to support the charge of an invented narrative in Matthew or Luke.

5. The preponderance of the evidence points toward a historical basis for the birth narratives.

Historical-Evidential Facts Gathered from the Study of Micah 5:2 and the Birth Narratives


2. Both Matthew and Luke emphasize that Joseph’s ancestor was David.


4. No written source earlier than Celsus denies that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Chapter 6

The Fourth Group of Biblical Texts

Introduction to the Fourth Group of Biblical Texts

In the fourth set of passages, Jesus’ miracles in relation to the expectations of the messianic age, the Messiah himself, and the predictions of the OT prophets are analyzed. Jesus’ self-described titular nomens such as “prophet” (Luke 4:17–19), “son of man,” “son of the Blessed” (Mark 14:61–62), and “son of David” (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9; Mark 10:47) all bear implications for his assertion of a future “seated at the right hand of God” (Mark 14:62). In fact, various people referred to Jesus as Son of David (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9; Mark 10:47). The best, and perhaps only currently available, means of verifying whether these titles attributed to Jesus are justifiable, is an examination of whether Jesus performed the miracles that the OT prophets allegedly predicted would accompany the preaching of the good news in the messianic age (Deut 18:15–18; Isa 29:18; 35:5–6; 61:1–2; Matt 9:35; 11:4–6; Luke 7:22–23).

Jesus the Miracle-Worker: A Synopsis

The purpose for this section of the work is not to provide exhaustive support for the thesis that Jesus performed miraculous acts. Rather, it is to offer the rationale for the presupposition that Jesus did so. A subsequent section of the work will then investigate whether the Messiah must perform such acts.

Miraculous acts attributed to Jesus are multiply attested in a variety of ancient books. Conversely, no sources touching on the issue of the miraculous in general, or the life of Jesus in

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430 The argument for not rejecting miracles a priori is presented in Chapter 2, Section 3: The Possibility of Miracles.
particular, deny his miracle-working activity. The NT gospels affirm Jesus as performing various miracles in Q, Mark, special Matthew, special Luke, and John. Ostensibly, Peter also believed that Jesus was a miracle-worker (Acts 2.22). Beyond the NT, numerous reports of miracles performed by Jesus are extant; a few examples will suffice.

The church historian Eusebius records the words of a lost work written by Quadratus (circa AD 120) that describes the working of miracles during the life of Jesus:

But the works of our Saviour were always at hand, for they were true, those who were cured, those who rose from the dead, who were seen not only when being cured and when rising, but also, being always at hand, not only when the Saviour was on earth, but even after he had departed, survived for a considerable time, so that some of them have even come down to our own time.431

Commenting on Quadratus, Habermas carefully points out that these miracles consist of people who were “both healed and raised from the dead, concerning which...some of the eyewitnesses to these events were still alive.”432

The Epistle of Barnabas 5:8 (before AD 132) designates Jesus as both a teacher and miracle-worker. Justin (circa 150) avows Jesus as a miracle-worker in clear terms:

And that it was predicted that our Christ should heal all diseases and raise the dead, hear what was said. There are these words: ‘At His coming the lame shall leap as an [sic] hart, and the tongue of the stammerer shall be clear speaking; the blind shall see, and the lepers shall be cleansed; and the dead shall rise, and walk about.’ [sic]433

Justin mentions that Jesus fulfilled many OT prophecies during his life. Documentation of his contentions about Jesus are said to have been recorded in the lost document, Acts of Pontius Pilate. To clarify for the reader, this is not the same work as the apocryphal document


432 Habermas, The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ, 239.

mentioned in the footnote treating *Hosea 11:1* and *Matthew 2:15* in the current work. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* is a spurious document. In contrast, a genuine report from Pilate to the Roman Emperor Tiberius is historically probable. Tertullian (circa AD 200) also appears to make an allusion to such a document.  

Enemy attestation of Jesus’ miracles appear in the work of Celsus titled a *True Discourse*. Although this work is lost, it is sufficiently quoted by Origen to establish that Celsus believed that Jesus performed miracles in accordance with miraculous powers acquired in Egypt. These same allegations also appear in rabbinic literature attributing miraculous power to Jesus through sorcery.

Among modern scholars a broad consensus exists that Jesus was a miracle-worker. Eric Eve verifies this assertion:

First, there is a consensus among virtually all the scholars reviewed here that Jesus did indeed perform healings and exorcisms that his contemporaries thought remarkable, and that this can be regarded as virtually certain. There is also a growing consensus that this miraculous activity formed an integral part of Jesus’ ministry, and should not be brushed aside to leave room for a Jesus who was almost entirely a teacher.

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Such records detailing events and acts by the Roman Senate and provincial leaders are known to exist. These records are of two types. The *Acta Senatus* are also called the *Commentarii Senatus or Acta Patrum*. They contain accounts of “matters brought before the senate, the opinions of the chief speakers, and the decision of the house.” *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 2nd ed., s.v. “ACTA.”
The other type of documentation archived by the Romans were the *Commentarii principis*. They were letters composed of the correspondence sent to the emperors from various parts of the empire. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, 215.


436 See b. Sanh 6:1h, II.1 and footnote 328 above. The Jewish historian Josephus, at the least, makes mention of Jesus in the context of a virtuous life. The problems with the *Testimonium Flavianum* as a historical source are well-known. The attribution of “wonderful works” to Jesus is probably a Christian interpolation. Thus, little support for Jesus as a miracle-worker is evident in Josephus.

Similarly, Graham Twelftree, after having done extensive research on the subject, concludes:

The necessary conclusion, in light of our inquiry, is that there is hardly any aspect of the life of the historical Jesus which is so well and widely attested as that he conducted unparalleled wonders. Further, the miracles dominated and were the most important aspect of Jesus’ whole pre-Easter ministry.\textsuperscript{438}

Based on the data provided in this brief survey of the available evidence, ample historical and scholarly rationale exists for the current investigation to proceed from the presupposition that Jesus was a miracle-worker. In fact, the belief that Jesus performed miracles (healings and exorcisms) is widely supported and is rarely challenged. Yet to be established, however, is that the Jewish messianic expectation included a significant strand of thought requiring a miracle-working Messiah.

\textit{Did the Jews Expect a Miracle-Working Messiah?}

The OT, NT, and modern scholarship provide ample reason to investigate if one aspect of the Jewish expectation for the messianic age included the working of miracles. From the perspective of the casual reader, it would seem axiomatic that the OT contains the expectation of miracles and miracle working, in the context of the expected messianic restoration of Zion. This statement, however, conflicts with the negative assessment of this possibility by scholars such as Sanders and Keener. Sanders argues, that the Jewish people were not expecting a miracle-working messianic figure. However, since Jesus did perform miracles, “many modern Christians think that first-century Jews looked for a Messiah who performed miracles, and that Jesus’ contemporaries would conclude that a miracle-worker was the Messiah.”\textsuperscript{439} Sanders explicitly

\textsuperscript{438} Graham H. Twelftree, \textit{Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 345. Emphasis in the original

\textsuperscript{439} Sanders, \textit{The Historical Figure of Jesus}, 132.
describes this view as “incorrect.” Keener similarly writes, “We lack substantial contemporary evidence that Jewish people expected a miracle-working messiah.” Conversely, M. Brown emphatically argues that the expectation of a miracle-working Messiah definitely existed in Israel. He describes those who doubt or dismiss this expectation as “misinformed” and self-deceived.

The investigation of this important question will proceed by employing the same general methodology as utilized above. The most relevant OT texts, extra-biblical texts, and NT texts will be examined; additionally, any cultural-historical evidence available will be examined.

Old Testament Evidence Supporting a Jewish Expectation of a Miracle-Working Messiah

Deuteronomy 18:15–18 and Moses/Messiah Typology

In Jewish thought, Moses may be the most important person to have existed. Moses was the liberator, mediator of Yahweh’s revelation, miracle worker, and “absolute teacher” of the nation; he was a divine prophet for the nation and the whole world (As Mos. 11:16). In Deuteronomy 18:15–18 Moses asserts that Yahweh promised Israel that he would raise from among them another prophet like himself. Jeffrey H. Tigay’s confident exposition of the passage takes the view that a succession of prophets is in view and that the preposition “like” indicates that no prophet could ever equal Moses. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for Tigay’s assertion

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440 Ibid., 133.
442 Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: General and Historical Objections, 98.
is the frequent presence of the miraculous in the OT accounts of the life of Moses. Ideologically, it is difficult to imagine a Moses without the miracles before and after the exodus from Egypt. These elements flow together as two threads in a single story. Any individual’s claim to be a prophet, *a fortiori* a prophet like Moses, logically carries the burden of requiring miracle-working activity. Without the miracles to verify such a lofty title, rapid dismissal of the assertion would soon follow. Matthew 11:56 and Luke 4:18–19 provide reason for the biblical exegete to believe that Jesus self-identifies as the prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15–18. In addition, John 1:21 and 6:14 portray the coming of a specific prophet as a common understanding of the Jewish people. The implication of the question posed by the crowd, recorded in John 6:14b “ότος ἐστιν ἄληθος ὁ προφήτης ὁ ἐρχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον,” is that they were expecting a specific eschatological prophet, not simply another cult prophet within the succession of OT prophets. Modern readers approaching these texts from a canonical reading conceptually grasp the connection between (1) Jesus’ related claims of setting Israel free, and healing the nation, (spiritually and physically), and (2) Moses, the Exodus, and the expectation of the coming prophet (cf. Isa 11:10–16). Historically, however, the parallels between the succession of prophets, the prophetic office, and the coming of the Messiah are not unilinear. The Moses/Christ typology certainly exists; similar to other aspects of messianism; the typological aspects appear gradually, however, as did the latter technical use of the term Messiah.

In context, the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15–18 is debated. The majority of scholars today argue for a non-messianic referent. For example, S. R. Driver maintains that no single prophet is intended: the reference is to a permanent institution. The need for the prophet was
recurring; to avoid the pagan diviners, *Yahweh* supplied Israel with a succession of prophets.\textsuperscript{445} Conversely, interpretations exist that attach fulfillment of this prophecy to individual prophets such as Joshua, Jeremiah, and several other well-known prophetic figures of the past.

Interpretations have also arisen which place the antitypical prophet who would be like Moses in an eschatological role. In early Jewish thought, according to J. Jeremias, the eschatological prophet is not necessarily the Messiah. That eschatological prophet, in some instances, inflicts plagues reminiscent of those in Egypt to secure the freedom of Israel. In other literature, he arises in the manner of other prophets, or represents the return of one of the old prophets. However, at least in the early literature Jeremias references, the prophet’s role is limited to a messianic forerunner who acts alongside Elijah and the Messiah.\textsuperscript{446} Nevertheless, he judges as “extremely likely”\textsuperscript{447} that later Judaism and the Samaritans knew of a messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.

The Moses typology within the OT cannot be arbitrarily limited to an eschatological Messiah. Several OT prophets are variously portrayed with actions intended to bring events related to the life and Moses to mind. The text of Deuteronomy 34:9–12 is of particular importance to this discussion. The prophet Moses promises to Israel will be like him (Deut 18:15, 18). The Hebrew term כֵּמוּ (kêmô) translated “like” has a broad semantic range that includes ideas of *similarity*, not necessarily *equality* or of two identical things. In Deuteronomy 34:9–12 Joshua’s endowment with the spirit of wisdom to lead Israel is described with reference to Moses’ unsurpassed status in Israelite thought. Joshua as the designated successor to Moses


\textsuperscript{447} Ibid., vol. 4, 859.
receives a promise in Joshua 1:5 that *Yahweh* would be with him as he was with Moses. Clearly, Joshua’s designation and *Yahweh*’s promise constitute the raising up of a prophet “like,” or similar to Moses, to lead Israel into the promised land. During Joshua’s period of leadership, several miracles are manifest (e.g., Josh 3:7, 6:20, 10:13), that affirm his anointed position. Significant among the miraculous events recorded in relation to Joshua is the crossing of the Jordan River. It is noteworthy that in the language employed in Joshua 3:7 *Yahweh* promises to be with Joshua “as” with Moses. The Hebrew term used contains the same basic preposition as found in Moses’ promise (Deut 1:15, 18), and the ensuing stoppage of the Jordan River is reminiscent of the parting of the Red Sea. In addition, after crossing the river, Joshua leads Israel in a covenant renewal that includes circumcision and observance of the Passover.448

An exhaustive exposition of the second Moses typology in the OT is beyond the scope of this work; even so, several scholars have noted that the OT portrays several prophets with some second-Moses themes. In addition, to Joshua these include Ezra,449 Elijah,450 and David.451

In contrast, Michael Rydelnik is among the few current scholars espousing the view that Deuteronomy 18:15–18 is originally messianic. Arguing from the perspective that the *Tanakh* is...
rightly read as canon, he analyzes the textual/lexical data. In his estimation, the overall import of the Pentateuch is that Deuteronomy 18:15–18 refers exclusively to the Messiah.\footnote{Rydlehnik, \textit{The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?}, 59.}

Jeremias agrees that the kind of reductionism that isolates Deuteronomy 18 from the rest of the \textit{Tanakh} is improper. However, his contention is that exclusive use of later Jewish exegesis of Deuteronomy 18:15–18 cannot govern the extent of the Moses/messiah typology. Several additional OT passages (i.e., Isa 11:11; 48:21; Mic 7:15; Hos 2:16; 12:10), (as demonstrated above) typologically connect Moses and messianic redemption with a second Moses motif. These texts do not specifically reference Deuteronomy 18, yet they do contain images related to Moses.\footnote{Jeremias, “Μωυσῆς,” in \textit{Theological Dictionary of the New Testament}, vol. 4, 859.} Strack and Billerbeck elevate the second-Moses concept to a position of near primacy in Jewish redemptive thought. They state,

\begin{quote}
\textit{Der Heranziehung von Hos 11, 1 liegt der Gedanke zugrunde, daß die Erlösung Israels aus Ägypten ein Typus der messian. Erlösung sei, ein Gedanke, der (vom AT angeregt Jes 11, 11; 48, 21; Hos 2, 16; 12, 10; Micha 7, 15) wie kein anderer neben ihm die Ausgestaltung des Lehrstücks von der Enderlösung schon frühzeitig in umfassendster Weise bestimmt hat.}\footnote{Strack and Billerbeck, \textit{Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch}, Vol. 1, 85. Cf. v. 1, 68 ff.; v. 2, 284 ff., 293.}
\end{quote}

Strack and Billerbeck affirm that in multiple contexts, the Talmud and other rabbinic literature correlate the foretold prophet with the Messiah. This was especially prominent in the thinking of the Israelites in the period just prior to AD 70.\footnote{Ibid., 591. Cf. v. 2, 626}

Much disparity of opinion exists about early Jewish interpretation of Deuteronomy 18:15–18 and how the text was originally understood. Nonetheless, it is certain that at least some later Jewish and Christian exegesis inculcated the passage with messianic elements. This
conclusion is evidenced in the teachings and actions of the Qumran community authoring 1QS Col. ix:11 and 4Q175, the NT authors,\textsuperscript{456} Origen’s work Against Celsus (1.57), and Eusebius’ Theophania (Bk 4, 35). The Jewish historian Josephus also confirms the conceptual connection between the promised prophet and the Messiah. He mentions two self-described prophets: Theudas (Ant 20, 97) and an unnamed Egyptian (20, 169); both promised the working of miracles on behalf of those that followed them (cf. Bell 2, 261).

Collectively considered, it is probable that the correct understanding of Israel’s expected salvation must include some form of second Exodus, including miracles performed by the Messiah, whose antitypical role is the prophet like Moses. This eschatological role is predicated on Deuteronomy 18:15–18. The prophetic connection may be either direct (the original intent of the oracle), typological, or as indirect as an ultimate prophet who stands within the succession of prophets. In either case, no prophet could credibly lay claim to either an individual or successive fulfillment without the miracles to attest his claim.

*Isaiah 29:18*

During his analysis of the messianic concept, Mowinckel makes this important observation: the eschatological sayings of prophetic books, in a strict sense, all belong to later strata. These strata all presuppose the catastrophe inflicted by the Babylonians. His analysis, although controversial in light of Amos 5:18, makes a cogent point. The expectation of Israel regarding the Day of Yahweh gradually developed, from one centered on national and cultic experience to something that required more than national restoration. Individual and cosmic

elements were infused into the eschatological vision alongside the nationalist vision.\textsuperscript{457} Isaiah 29 is a case in point. The presence of several proto-apocalyptic elements in this chapter show affinity with the work of Deutero-Isaiah or his disciples. These elements include the voice of a ghost, a visit by the LORD, thunder, an earthquake, and a great noise. Other elements that cannot be ignored include a whirlwind and tempest, a devouring fire, a dream, a vision, wonder upon wonder, and gloom and darkness.

These proto-apocalyptic elements contribute to the lack of consensus among scholars as to the dating of Isaiah 29 and to whether it is the work of Isaiah or a later redactor. For example, Payne places the entire chapter in the period concerning Sennacherib’s advance into Israel. The thrust of Isaiah 29:18, according to Payne, is that “divine restoration brings true illumination.”\textsuperscript{458} Dating the chapter prior to the exile makes tenuous any attempt to attach a miracle-working messianic expectation to this chapter. However, if the dating of critical scholarship remains the predominate view, as presupposed in the current work, artificially imposing a meaning from the period of Sennacherib is not only anachronistic, but also self-defeating.

Working from another strand of argumentation, the question arises: Is the healing described in Isaiah 29:18–19 physical or spiritual? The text’s reference to the healing of the blind, deaf, meek, and poor, in light of other Isaianic texts, give reason to conclude that the description includes a mixture of literal and spiritual states. The language is reminiscent of Isaiah 35:6; 42:7; and 43:8, all of which are closely related to the inability of Israel to hear and see the truth (Isa 6:10), and to the promise of a coming scion of David (Isa 11). Likewise, present in

\textsuperscript{457} Mowinckel, \textit{He that Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism}, 132, 270 ff.

these verses is the reversal of the people’s vision being shrouded by darkness and gloom (Isa 8:22). Wildberger comments that the deaf being enabled to hear the words of a book is unique to this passage. It is probable that this is the result of Yahweh’s acting again on behalf of Israel, reversing the perceptive stupor described in Isaiah 29:9–11. The idea that the deaf will be enabled to hear the words of the writing may mean that history and contemporary events will speak, thereby demonstrating the accuracy of Yahweh’s message.\footnote{Hans Wildberger, A Continental Commentary: Isaiah 28–39 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 111.}

The overall import of the passage is summed up well by John D. W. Watts: “The deaf, the blind, the meek, and the humble have suffered much in a world that honors power and cunning. But their day will come when God changes all the rules to work to their advantage.”\footnote{John D. W. Watts, Isaiah 1–33, vol. 24, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 389. (Emphasis in the original)}

These observations suggest a key question: Is there any physical element in view? If Watts’ summary is correct, the answer must be yes. Given the ideological affinities with other texts in Deutero-Isaiah, the “blindness” of verse 18 must have some correlation with the blindness of 35:5–6; 42:7; and 42:16. Further, the “poor” (יִנֹּֽפֶךְ) in verse 19 is very similar in nature to the content of Isaiah 61 where physical helplessness cannot be excluded.\footnote{Isaiah 61:1–2 are treated below in relation to David Stern and Luke 4:18.} In point of fact, a restoration that leaves individuals infirmed is only partial and does not fit with the overall idea of Isaiah 29. Nevertheless, the physical aspect of the passage takes a subordinate role to its spiritual import. Israel’s problem, in context, is not limited to physical infirmities. Spiritual blindness and deafness make the nation poor and weak; in Isaiah 29 both are miraculously reversed.
The text likely contains restorative elements that are best described as miraculous and, thus, related to the messianic era. Even so, any direct messianic implication is difficult to establish. The passage bears verbal correspondence with several elements of Isaiah 11 and the Servant Songs. Verbal parallels alone, however, will not support the needed weight. Thus, it is not possible to find a clear-cut expectation of a miracle-working Messiah in Isaiah 29. More likely, Isaiah 29 is part of a cadre of texts that imply eschatological restoration for Israel.

Isaiah 35:1–5

The thrust of Isaiah 35 is the healing of infirmities and the breaking forth of life-giving water in the wilderness. Other prominent themes are peace, safety, and purity, all of which are enjoyed by the redeemed of Yahweh. These pleasant themes are set in stark contrast to Yahweh’s perpetual judgment on Edom (Isa 34:10). This judgment was executed so thoroughly as to make Edom the haunt of wild animals and the resting place of demons. Chapter 35 and the realization of its images ostensibly occur at the institution of the messianic era. Despite the exalted language, however, George Adam Smith argues that the return of the exiles from Babylon may partially be in view. Smith contends that the infliction of vengeance on Edom, described in Chapter 34 and the opening two verses of 35, transitions with the remaining text, addressed to a people still in captivity. From Smith’s perspective verses 3–4 and 10 markedly betray this quality. This conclusion is questionable, however, given the numerous reasons cited by critical scholars to date the text as part of the Deutero-Isaiah corpus (see below).

462 The four-fold repetition of terms indicating the unending ruin of Edom, night and day, forever, generation to generation, and forever and ever offer no reason to reject the implication that the judgment is the preliminary preparation for the messianic age.

A line of argumentation that yields reason to believe that the messianic era is in view is visible in the detailed work of R. B. Y. Scott. Scott contends that the “central theme of Deutero-Isaiah is the announcement of the imminent, supreme, and final theophany of Yahweh…. demonstrated by the return of the Jews to Zion, the judgment of the nations and Israel’s exaltation among them, of which ‘His Anointed’ is to be the agent.”

Scott perceives that Isaiah 35 and 40:1–5 contain the basic thoughts of Deutero-Isaiah: thoughts further illuminated in the rest of Deutero-Isaiah. Scott identifies these “unit ideas” as follows:

1. The rejoicing of the wilderness (Isa 35:1; 42:11; 51:3; 52:9)
2. The blossoming of the desert (35:1–2; 41:19)
3. Lebanon as a symbol of magnificence (35:2; 40:16)
4. The glory of Yahweh manifest (35:2; 40:5)
5. A command to encourage the weak and fearful (35:3–4; 40:1–2; 40:29; 41:10, 13–14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; 51:7; 54:4, 14)
7. God will come to save (35:4; 45:17; 46:13; 49:25)
8. The physically afflicted to be healed (35:5–6; 42:7, 16)
9. Streams in the desert (35:6–7; 41:18; 43:19–20; 44:3)
10. Wild beasts no longer present (35:7, 9; 43:20)
11. The holy way (35:8; 40:3; 43:19; 49:11)

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465 Scott notes here that his interpretation is without prejudice toward metaphorical interpretations of the healing language.
12. The unclean excluded (35:8; 52:1, 11)
13. The joyful return of the redeemed (35:9–10; 48:20; 52:8–9)
14. The banishment of sorrow and pain (35:10; 49:10; 51:22; 54:14)\(^\text{466}\)

The point made from these observations is that miracles of some nature are in view. The anointed agent of \textit{Yahweh} is the actor; the concomitant implication is that the messianic age is the period the author is describing.

Another line of argumentation emerges in the work of H. G. M. Williamson. In the context of a discussion of whether an early date is appropriate for Isaiah 32:1–5, Williamson detects that 35:5–6 provides evidence for a movement from metaphorical healing of blindness and deafness to the physical healing for blindness and deafness. He argues that the progression from the metaphorical (Isa 6:10) to the literal (35:5–6) indicates that this transition is a later addition to the thought of the narrative and introduces concepts from Deutero-Isaiah or even later to the earlier texts (cf. 29:18). For Williamson the scene in Chapter 35 is set in the eschatological future; his position is strongly influenced by Isaiah 6 and 11.\(^\text{467}\)

Paul D. Hanson specifically places Isaiah 34–35 among the works of the disciples of Deutero-Isaiah. For Hanson the increasingly prominent apocalyptic elements of the pericope are evidence that the particular and concrete elements of plain history are gradually supplanted in favor of the mythic. Restoration is in view without doubt, but the restoration according to

\(^{466}\) Scott, “The Relation of Isaiah, Chapter 35, to Deutero-Isaiah,” 185–188.

Hanson, like Mowinckel mentioned above, is not as firmly attached to Israel’s nationalistic hopes as it was in the earlier literary strata.\textsuperscript{468}

J. Barton furthers the discussion by arguing that chapters 34–35 are not a part of Isaiah’s original work. Whether the two chapters originally were penned together or as separate works; Barton concludes they should be understood as eschatological in nature. These two chapters, he argues, are of the genre \textit{apocalyptic prediction} and contain a mixture of literal and metaphorical language. Key for the present analysis is when the oracle of salvation depicted in Chapter 35 was written and what salvation event is intended. Barton states,

Commentators have usually seen the chapter as ‘deutero-deutero-Isaianic’, much like Isaiah 56–66: the work of a disciple, close in time but probably already back in Judah, rather than, like Deutero-Isaiah himself, still in Babylon awaiting the return. Isa. 35:10, it should be noted, is a quotation from Isa. 51:11—which implies that the author of Isaiah 35 knew Deutero-Isaiah’s work, and hence wrote at a later time.\textsuperscript{469}

If Barton’s assertion is correct, the oracle could not be both prophetic prediction and have any reference to the return of the Babylonian captives. It must have the eschatological future in mind. This is the logical conclusion and one that Barton shares when closing his excursus on these chapters. He maintains, “Whatever the origin of the ‘Little Apocalypse’, its contribution to chs. 1–39 is to focus attention on Israel’s eschatological hope.”\textsuperscript{470}

The question of whether the prophet is speaking figuratively or spiritually in Isaiah 35 appears to be answered decisively by Hans Wildberger. He identifies Matthew 11:5 as a loose quotation and notes the phrase “lame leap like a deer” in Isaiah 35:6a. Wildberger’s comments,\textsuperscript{468} Paul D Hanson, \textit{The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology} (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 128–129.

\textsuperscript{469} J. Barton, \textit{Isaiah 1–39} (London, UK: T & T Clark, 1995), 94.

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., 95.
especially those related to verse 6a, indicate that he understands the text as a literal promise, with the result that diseases and other calamities now commonly affecting mankind, will find no place in the future messianic age.\footnote{Wildberger, A Continental Commentary: Isaiah 28–39, 351.} There is no denying the physical aspect of the prophecy; however, a clear line of argumentation is evident that attaches spiritual blindness and deafness to Israel. The text of Isaiah 6 reads as though the infliction of these conditions on the nation came as a result of (1) the prophet’s preaching and (2) the people’s continued rejection of Yahweh. In light of the overall context, both spiritual renewal and the healing of physical infirmities are probably in view.

\textit{Extra-Biblical Data}

\textit{An Overview of Miracles and the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha}

As previously established, Jewish messianic hopes were not monolithic in nature. The several OT texts discussed above demonstrate that miracle language in relation to the messianic era is more than an isolated anomaly. Further support for this relationship is presented in the extant Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works.

According to Mark Saucy the Pseudepigrapha do not contain explicit statements “for or against” a miracle-working Messiah.\footnote{Mark Saucy, “The Kingdom-of-God Sayings in Matthew,” Bibliotheca Sacra 151 (1994): 180, ftnt 117.} The Pseudepigrapha portray the messianic age as a time of miracles, including a strong Moses typology and a Messiah bearing the power of the miracle-working Holy Spirit.\footnote{Ibid. (e.g. 2 Baruch 51:7)} However, this nuanced statement by Saucy should not lead one to assume the obscurity of a miracle-working Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha. The Messiah is referenced in various contexts with several exalted functions. J. Collins identifies the title “Son
of Man” with “Messiah” in the Similitudes (Parables) and describes his several exalted functions. He “casts down kings” from thrones and kingdoms, “takes his seat on the throne of glory,” receives worship, and “seems to be assimilated to deity.” In another work, A. Collins and J. Collins remark that the word messiah “is used unambiguously with reference to a heavenly judge.”

Robert Henry Charles demonstrates: “The Messiah in the Parables is (1) Judge of the world, (2) Revealer of all things, (3) Champion and Ruler of the righteous.”

In a directly miraculous claim, the Messiah raises the dead in 1 Enoch 51:1 and 61:5.

The Messiah in the narrow technical sense of the term is mentioned on several occasions in the Pseudepigrapha (1 En 48:10; 52:4; Pss Sol 17:36; 18:6, 8; 4 Ezra 7:29; 12:32 and 2 Bar 29:3). In other contexts, the messianic age is in view, with the actions of a messianic figure implied. For example, the book of Jubilees 23:29–30 describes days of healing and blessing in the context of eschatological restoration and greatly increased human lifespans. These states of affairs are a miraculous turnabout from the previously described condition of Israel.

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475 Collins and Collins, King and Messiah as the Son of God, 94.


477 Interestingly, there is one mention of an eschatological Melkisedek [sic] bearing significant messianic resemblance: “And afterward, in the last generation, there will be another Melkisedek, the first of 12 priests. And the last will be the head of all, a great archpriest, the Word and Power of God, who will perform miracles, greater and more glorious than all the previous ones” (2 Enoch 71:34–35). The original documents are lost and the dating and recension history of 2 Enoch are difficult to establish. Even so, Charlesworth notes that 2 Enoch’s portrayal of Enoch as God’s chosen and exalted agent is incompatible with Christian belief. This does not mean the document is Jewish, but it does provide reason to think that an early sectarian group equated eschatology with miracle-working. Charlesworth, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 208.
An Overview of Miracles and the Messiah in Qumran, First-Century Thought and Later

Talmudic Evidence

Another strand of argumentation emerges in the work of Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson. They note that in the first-century miracles were often associated with prophets. Some of these prophets promised signs, especially acts of deliverance, like those carried out by Moses or Joshua.\(^\text{478}\) Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson concede that while few Jewish texts speak of the hope for a “wonder-working” messiah, it is possible that the concept had developed by the NT period (John 6:15; 7:31; Mark 13:22).\(^\text{479}\) This appears to be an understatement, given the known texts of the NT and the existence of 4Q521 directly linking miraculous deeds with the messianic era:

> [the hea]vens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones.
> Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourselves in His service!
> All you hopeful in (your) heart, will you not find the Lord in this?
> For the Lord will consider the pious (hasidim) and call the righteous by name.
> Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power.
> And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom,
> He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent].
> And f[or] ever I will clea[ve to the h]opeful and in His mercy …
> And the fr[uit …] will not be delayed for anyone
> And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as [He …]
> For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor.
> … He will lead the uprooted and knowledge … and smoke (?)\(^\text{480}\)

Fitzmyer may be overly cautious when he warns against reading 4Q521 with such dogmatism that it necessitates a miracle-working messiah. His objection is two-fold. First, he argues that the text is better understood as including miraculous works and the resuscitation of

\(^{478}\) *Antiquities*, 20.5.1; 20.8.6. Cf. *Wars*, 2.13.5


\(^{480}\) *Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 244–245.
the dead, rather than the resurrection. Second, the agent of the miracles may or may not be the Messiah. The messianic eschatological agent of *Yahweh* is clearly in view in the first three verses, but in verse four the actor appears to be the *Lord*. Conflating the two images may not be the correct way to understand the text.\(^{481}\) Whether the actor instigating the miraculous acts is *Yahweh* or the Messiah, the people of Qumran clearly expected miracles to accompany the age and work of the Messiah. This is an important detail. The messianic age, according to the sect living at Qumran, would be marked by miracles. Strack and Billerbeck demonstrate how this was a normative thought in latter Judaism,

> In der messian. Heilszeit erwartete man Heilung aller Krankheiten. Man nahm an, daß der Messias seinem Volk Israel alle jene Güter wiederbringen werde, die durch Adams Fall verloren gegangen waren; dazu gehörte natürlich auch die Beseitigung von Krankheit u.Tod. Diese Erwartung hatte übrigens für das jüdische Denken nichts Exorbitantes. Die Tage des Messias erreichten damit nur die Höhenlage der Zeit der Gesetzgebung am Sinai; denn auch damals war Israel frei vom Kranken u. Sterben.\(^{482}\)

A confirmation of the investigation above is located in the work of the Jewish scholar M. Brown. He cites the *Genesis Rabbah* to support his argument that the signs associated with Isaiah 35:5–6 indicate the arrival of God’s kingdom. When these signs are present, it is understood to be an affirmation of the presence of the messianic era: the visitation of *Yahweh* to his people.\(^{483}\) The *Genesis Rabbah* 95:1 confirms these assertions by specifically mentioning that the blind, lame, and dumb are healed, as Isaiah 35:5 promises.\(^{484}\) Later works, such as the Babylonian Talmud (Sukkah 52a), also associate miracles with the Messiah (e.g., Messiah ben David raising

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\(^{481}\) Fitzmyer, *The One Who Is to Come*, 97.

\(^{482}\) Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 1, 293.


Messiah ben Joseph from the dead). In addition, M. Brown notes that the messianic pretenders Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina Ben Dosa were thought especially favored by God because of miracle-working power.485

**New Testament Evidence**

Additional evidence for a pronounced strain of Jewish messianism that included miracles emerges when one examines the NT documents. The evidence begins with the hypothesized Q source and recurs in Matthew 11:3 ff. and Luke 7:18 ff. These pericopes consists of JTB messengers questioning Jesus concerning his messiahship and Jesus responding to them. His answer is undeniably intended to demonstrate to JTB and the disciples of JTB that he is the Messiah. “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt 11:4b–5). In this case fulfillment of OT prophecy is directly associated with proof for Jesus’ messianic status. David Stern remarks that the book of Isaiah provides six signs that the Messiah will give to authenticate his person:

- He will make the blind see (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5), make the lame walk (Isaiah 35:6, 61:1), cleanse lepers (Isaiah 61:1), make the deaf hear (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5), raise the dead (implied in Isaiah 11:1–2 but not made specific), and evangelize the poor (Isaiah 61:1–2 in the light of 4:23N above). Since he has done all these things ([Matt] chapters 8–9), the message should be clear: Yeshua is the one; Yochanan need not look for another.486

Although the details of Stern’s assertions do not receive unanimous support from scholars, the grounds for the overall import of his comments are correct. The exegetical rationale for Stern’s reference to Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18, with reference to the cleansing of lepers and

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healing of the lame, entail that the "poor" (עָנָה) in Isaiah 61:1 or “poor” (πτωχοὶς) in Luke 4:18 encompass more than the economically disadvantaged. The term עָנָה (ʿānāwîm) has the basic entomological meaning of bowed. However, the semantic range of the family of terms conceptually encompasses both poverty and emotional and physical affliction. According to Leonard J. Coppes, the slightly different term ἄνι (ānî) is more likely to specifically designate physical affliction, yet the overall semantic range allows for some overlap. The translators of the LXX and Luke appear to agree that more than mere financial poverty is in view by employing exactly the same term (πτωχοὶς), which carries the expanded meaning. The lexical work by William Arndt, Fredrick Danker, and Walter Bauer clarifies: it is those who are oppressed, disillusioned and in special need of God’s help who are intended. John N. Oswalt’s comments on Isaiah 61:1 further reveal this semantic overlap in the meaning of the terms. He contends the connotation of the term is not restricted to financial, material conditions, or to an oppressed minority of righteous persons. He argues for a reference to “all who are distressed and in trouble for any reason.” Based on these findings, there is no reason to discard the idea that the translators of the LXX and the author of Luke intended their readers to understand “poor” with the expanded connotation of their overall circumstances, including physical afflictions. More than economic disadvantage is clearly in view.

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Mark 1:44 contains additional support for the forgoing assertions. Jesus commands the healed leper to go and show himself to the priests for a proof (μαρτύριον) to them. What would this healing prove? The implication is that the cleansing of a person of what was normally an incurable disease was a messianic sign. The priests verifying the cleansing would tacitly be admitting the sign while contradicting themselves by rejecting as Messiah the one who had performed the miracle.

The witnesses to Jesus’ life and ministry agree that Jesus did these things in accordance with what the OT prophets predicted. These miracles carry the implication that the messianic age had, in some sense, arrived. Roy Zuck observes that the sign of giving sight to the blind is especially significant since it carries both physical and spiritual adumbrations. Giving sight to the blind was associated with the activity of Yahweh (Exod 4:11; Ps. 146:8). It also carried connotations associated with the arrival of the messianic age (Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:7) and the work of the Servant.  

The miracle-working strand of Jewish messianism and the current analysis of Isaiah 61:1 receives further support in Saucy’s study of the kingdom of God motif in Matthew 1-10. Saucy correlates Jesus’ preaching (κηρύσσω) the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) with the healing of diseases and infirmities; this correlation “inherently” ties the kingdom motif to the hope for fulfillment of the OT promises. Saucy remarks that twice in the first nine chapters of Matthew, Jesus’ ministry is “summarized as teaching in the synagogues, preaching the ‘gospel of the kingdom,’ and healing every disease and infirmity (4:23; 9:35).” This particular insight is important for

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understanding why the Jews of the first century associated feats of power with the coming of the messianic age. Jesus and the people apparently understood this association and required both the preaching of the εὐαγγέλιον, and the working of miracles to authenticate the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age. According to the synoptic writers, Jesus gave the disciples power to work miracles in combination with preaching the gospel. There is little doubt that both elements were intended to confirm the coming of the Messiah and messianic age.

Twelftree argues that the twin themes of Jesus as teacher (Matt 5–7) and the miracle stories associated with Jesus (Matt 8–9), as they are presented in Matthew form a two-part panel intended to highlight Jesus as the new Moses. Both Exodus 7–12 and Matthew 8–9, according to Twelftree’s analysis, contain ten miracles.492 Significantly, Twelftree, like Saucy (see above) correlates the coming of the kingdom with miracles, but not miracles alone. Miracles must be accompanied by the preaching of the good news. In fact, miracles are not the most prominent or important aspect of Jesus’ “new Moses” persona. Without these deeds of divine power as witness to his status, the Jews generally, would not have designated him Son of David.

Exorcism is widely recognized as a form of miracle. In the NT exorcism directly correlates with the coming of the kingdom and the power of Yahweh. That Jesus was recognized as an exorcist by his contemporaries is acknowledged by a wide variety of scholars. Ehrman describes Jesus’ exorcisms as “among the best-attested” of his deeds.493 The incident recorded in Matthew 12:22–32 is especially important because it consists of a total package of messianic healing elements. The man brought to Jesus was blind, mute, and demonized. The people

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493 Ehrman, Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium, 197.
witnessing Jesus’ actions against the demons had one of two reactions. Some, particularly the religious elite, alleged that the power behind Jesus’ ability to cast out demons was effected by the prince of demons (Matt 12:24). Others recognized the messianic implication of Jesus’ deeds and asked, “Can this be the Son of David?” (Matt 12:23). The wording of this question demonstrates that the deeds Jesus performed were anticipated from the OT and had a direct mental correlation with the Messiah, Son of David, and perhaps even the Son of God in the popular conscience. James Brady forwards the work of several scholars who argue that exorcism was thought to be a keystone of Davidic royal power often associated with Solomon as the “Son of David” and the only king to be called “God’s son.”

M. Brown construes the meaning of the crowd’s comments as a reminder that the title “Son of David” in that era meant “Messiah.” “Son of David” as a Christological messianic title is significant for Matthew (Matt 12:23; 21:9, 15) in that it is associated with healing miracles (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; cf. Matt 1:1, 20; 21:9, 15) and exorcisms. Jack Dean Kingsbury has taken this concept further by demonstrating that for the author of Mark, the titles “Messiah/Christ” (Anointed One), “King of the Jews,” “Son of David,” “Son of the Blessed,” and “Son of God” interrelate and inform one another. He then argues that the title

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494 See Antiquities of the Jews 8.45


496 Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: General and Historical Objections, 99.

497 Jack Dean Kingsbury, The Christology of Mark’s Gospel (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 55. Further establishing this point is the fact that the titles “Son of God” and “Christ” are juxtaposed in Matthew 16:16 and 26:63.

Kingsbury also notes several minor Christological titles in Mark (e.g., “bridegroom,” “shepherd,” “coming one,” “prophet,” “teacher-rabbi,” and “Lord” (or “lord”) (p. 53).
“Messiah” is interpreted by each of the other titles. (1:1; 15:32; 12:35; 14:61) The evidence indicates that all function three function together, the titles, the preaching of the gospel, and the miracles that accompanied that preaching.

Summary

Jesus appears to have believed that the particular work of exorcism demonstrated that the kingdom of God had arrived (Matt 12:28), and that he was the Messiah and Son of David. Jesus’ miracles, in combination with his exorcisms and the preaching of the good news, affirm that his work and his self-understanding were, at least, the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of the Jewish nation’s messianic expectations, as foretold in the OT. In fact, Jesus’ work as a fulfillment of OT prophecy is depicted in the NT as involving more than the individual miracles. The overall intention of the writers was to display Jesus’ announcement and inauguration of a reordered kingdom of peace emerging out of the chaos of fallen humanity. Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies of miracle-working, not only by bringing individual relief from affliction, but by bringing soundness, health, and peace to Israel. In this way he exemplified the image of the expected prophet like Moses pattern. This conclusion aligns seamlessly with the texts and ideas examined above and may be why many of the people desired to make Jesus king by force (John 6:15).

Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Gathered from the Study of the Miracles in Relation to Jewish Messianism

1. Israel’s expected salvation includes some form of second Exodus.
2. Israel’s expected salvation includes miracles performed by the Messiah.

498 Ibid.

499 Brady, “Do Miracles Authenticate the Messiah?,” 107.
3. The Messiah’s antitypical role is the prophet like Moses.
4. Isaiah 29 likely contains miraculous transformations related to the messianic era.
5. Isaiah 29 is part of a cadre of texts that imply eschatological restoration for Israel.
6. A pre-exilic date for Isaiah 35 is improbable.
7. Isaiah 35 primarily describes the messianic era.
8. Isaiah 35 contains images of miraculous activity.
9. Isaiah 35 contains elements of both physical and spiritual healing.

Historical-Evidential Facts Gathered from the Study of the
Miracles in Relation to Jewish Messianism

1. The OT contains evidence to support the concept of a miracle-working prophet and messianic figure.
2. The Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and latter Jewish literature depict miracles in relation to the Messiah or the messianic age.
3. The NT depicts the expectation of a particular prophet.
4. The NT depicts miracles as an authentication of Jesus as the Messiah.
5. The NT records that Jesus performed miracles in accordance with the OT, certain sectarian, and proletariat Jewish messianic expectations.
6. Jesus believed he was the particular prophet and Messiah.
7. The Gospel writers believed Jesus was the particular prophet and Messiah.
Chapter 7

The Fifth Group of Biblical Texts

Introduction to the Fifth Group of Biblical Texts

The fifth group of biblical texts include Psalm 2:1–12, emphasizing verse 7; Psalm 16, emphasizing verses 9–10; and Psalm 22:1–31, emphasizing verse 16. Psalm 2 is often interpreted as a description of the unique relationship Jesus claimed to have with the God the Father. Psalm 22 is allegedly messianic, with some interpreters claiming it reports circumstances related to the crucifixion of Jesus. Psalm 16 contains language that may also be indicative of the resurrection of Jesus. As stated in Chapter 1, this portion of the work will not deal in depth with the actual NT data concerning the reported resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection proper has been extensively treated by other scholars.\(^\text{500}\)

Psalm 2:1–12, Emphasizing Verse 7

Literary and Textual Analysis

Old Testament Evidence

Psalm 2 is usually classified as a Royal Psalm, marking the enthronement of the king of Israel. Several scholars, both modern and ancient, have considered Psalm 1 and 2 a single unit that forms the introduction to the Hebrew Psalter.\(^\text{501}\) The specific occasion for its writing is


unknown, and no particular king or author is named in the Psalm. Some scholars argue this
psalm may have been utilized on multiple occasions as part of the official liturgy for the
installation of a new king or at an annual festival.\footnote{Hans-Joachim Kraus, A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1–59 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 126.} Most scholars affirm something similar as
the basis for interpretation. Further, it seems clear that the most controversial aspect of Psalm 2 is
not about what letters or words are present. In must be acknowledged that a minor issue exists
with the Aramaic loanword רֶּב (son), in the MT and whether it needs emendation or is original to
this psalm usually dated during the monarchy. The Aramaic word is clearly different from the
one used in verse 7 (תֺּב) when Yahweh is speaking to his king. However, the whole argument may
be moot, since the majority of manuscripts use the Hebrew, not the Aramaic term.

The most controversial aspect of the work is prophetic and eschatological in nature.
Does the text in its current form refer to an eschatological messianic agent? The crux interpretum
for the passage when viewed from this perspective is verse 7. For example, Peter C. Craigie
states, “‘I have begotten you’ is metaphorical language; it means more than simply adoption,
which has legal overtones, and implies that a ‘new birth’ of a divine nature took place during the
language be both metaphorical and actual divine intervention of some sort create a “new birth”
of a “divine nature”? As will be further developed below, categorically ruling out the possibility
that the referent of the psalm maintains a status beyond metaphorical adoption overstates the
demonstrable. It is possible the psalm unveils some metaphysical relationship between the king
and Yahweh. It seems inconsistent to argue, as Craigie has done, for both a metaphorical
meaning and some actual change resulting in the impartation of a divine nature. However, Craigie has acknowledged that something more than purely metaphorical ideals is present.

Similarly, John T. Willis has documented four of the most often proffered arguments supporting an eschatological messianic understanding of Psalm 2. The third of his counter-arguments deals with the ambiguous phrase “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (v. 7). Willis rejects a messianic referent, arguing instead for an intimate relationship between the historically enthroned king and Yahweh. Conversely, other interpreters, including Augustine and some early Jewish documents, argue that “son” and “begotten” mean something more literal. Theologically, as most orthodox Christians would agree, even Jesus is not the son of God in the normal procreative sense that literal begetting and sonship require. The troubling fact, however, is that without justifiable warrant, one cannot dispose of the odd and infrequent application of begetting in relation to Yahweh. Allen P. Ross is on a slightly more consistent track when remarking that the phrase “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” is a reference to the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:14) and “is appropriated by the king to show his legitimate right to rule. ‘Today’ then refers to the coronation day, and the expression ‘I have begotten you’… refers not to physical birth but is an extended metaphor describing his becoming God’s ‘son.’” Even this explanation, like that proposed by Craigie, fails to adequately treat the unique use of “begotten.” Psalm 2 is the only OT context where uncontested manuscripts evidence suggests


that *Yahweh* begets (יהֵּלְדוּ) a son. However, Psalm 110, a verbally and conceptually similar passage according to one reading contains (v. 3) the same implication. As seen above, the “begotten” language of the psalm is usually explained as part of near-eastern coronation rituals and the concomitant adoption of the king by a deity. J. J. M. Roberts disputes this conclusion, however. While noting the ubiquity of this claim and its acceptance, Roberts thinks the generally held assumption that the statement in Psalms 2:7, “You are my son, today I have begotten you,” represents a legal formula of adoption is unsupported by evidence. Citing the work of Martin David, Roberts finds only three examples of an adoption formula in Akkadian texts, none of which contains the language “you are my son” as used in Psalm 2:7. Further, he observes that none of three examples are a second-person address as in Psalms 2:7. They are, instead, addressed to the nobles of the royal court. Most importantly for the current study, the language of begetting is completely absent in these formulas. Roberts explains that the Akkadian verb *walādu*, meaning to give birth, never appears in any Akkadian adoption formula. Yet the Hebrew equivalent of *walādu*, *yālad*, is present in Psalm 2:7. Roberts argues that adoption, if it existed at all in Judaism, was not a widespread practice; the explanation for the supposed

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metaphorical begett in Psalm 2 is not from near-eastern adoption texts. Jeffrey Howard Tigay, Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, and Yisrael Gilat maintain that “the evidence for adoption in the Bible is so equivocal that some have denied it was practiced at all in the biblical period.”

Evidence from Postexilic Redaction and Arrangement

Considering the probability that the current form of Psalms 2 is a product of a postexilic redactor provides additional reasons for questioning the currently held consensus that the term “begotten” and the concept of sonship do not contain a metaphysical element. According to Mowinckel, the final form of the psalms could be as late as 200 BC and pointedly later than the demise of the last Davidic king. The composition of the psalter and its history are important to help understand the development of messianism in Israel. Joachim Schaper notes the work of H. L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger in demonstrating the likelihood that Psalms 2–89 are the result of combining two earlier collections (Ps 3–41 and 42–89) with Psalm 2 prefixed to the finished collection. Collectively, this constituted a “messianic psalter.” Schaper thinks this psalter was probably edited during the period from Cyrus to Alexander. Gerald Henry Wilson confirms these findings; he “examined the evidence for purposeful editorial activity in the Psalter and found confirmation for the reality of the five books as editorial divisions.” This approach suggests that by the postexilic period, the interpretation of God’s Davidic promise was in relation


to a future anointed one. This line of argumentation is particularly virulent when the eschatological connotations of both Psalms 1 and 2 are considered as a unit, in respect to their utopian, not merely restoration, implications. For example, Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore detect several reasons supporting the notion that Psalms 1 and 2 were once separate, and subsequently placed together to form a literary unit introducing the psalter. First, both psalms lack a superscription. Second, several of the early church fathers considered the two psalms as a single unit. Third, the emergence of many verbal correspondences implies a thematic relationship.

The first verse of Psalm 1 (1:1a) and the last verse of Psalm 2 (2:12b) begin with 'ašré ('fortunate'), forming an inclusio framing the introduction. The introductory stanzas of both psalms use hāgā ('to meditate,' 1:2; “to plot,” 2:1). The last verses of both psalms use the metaphor of derek ('way') in connection with 'ābad ('perish,' 1:6; 2:12). Both Psalms also employ terms belonging to the semantic domain of ‘mock’ (lēšîm, ‘mockers’ [against I AM’s law], 1:1, and “lā‘ag, ‘derision’ of [I AM against rebels to his rule], 2:4). Third, the two psalms expound a uniform message: the pious and righteous are fully rewarded, and in the time of judgment, they triumph over the wicked.

John J. Whiting notes the long-standing recognition that Joshua 1:7 and Psalm 1 have connections. More particularly, Joshua 1:7 and Psalm 1:3 both contain encouragement and a promise of success if one meditates on the law day and night. Perfect adherence to the Law guarantees success. “Perhaps,” Whiting argues, the editors of the Psalter are echoing a concern for an ideal leader. Such a leader would be a type of second-Joshua, an ideal king who enjoys total (not partial) victory over all enemies because of his perfect faithfulness to Yahweh and Torah. The image of this ideal king receives further illumination in Psalm 2. Clearly, no historic

516 Ibid., 145. Among them are Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Origen, and Tertullian.
517 Ibid., 160–161.
518 Whiting, “Psalms 1 and 2 as a Hermeneutical Lens for Reading the Psalter,” 255.
king of Israel has fulfilled or brought to realization the full implications contained in these psalms.

Psalm 1 and 2 also contain an eschatological dimension. The identification of the wicked with chaff (Psalm 1:5) is a metaphor that elsewhere in the prophets “unambiguously reflects eschatological judgement (Isa. 17:13; 41:15; Hos. 13:3 and Zeph. 2:2).”\(^{519}\) This theme receives further expansion in Psalm 2:8–12 when the victor triumphs over the “nations” and they perish in a universal judgment.\(^{520}\) Jerome F. D. Creach suggests a close connection between the verdant tree of Psalm 1:3 and the tradition equating Zion and the temple with paradise, including the image contained in Ezekiel 47:12.\(^{521}\) This image intimates that the agent of the judgment (Ps 2:8–12) is the righteous king/tree reappearing in Psalm 2:6.\(^{522}\)

A compelling piece of evidence for questioning the rejection of a metaphysical relationship between Yahweh and the “begotten” son is the juxtaposition of the scoffers and their plotting council, from which emerges rebellion, and the righteous king sitting (not in the council of the wicked) in the council of Yahweh, from which emerges universal dominion. Robert Luther Cole identifies the individual who sits in the heavens (Ps 2:4a) not as Yahweh,\(^{523}\) but אֲדֹנָי

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\(^{519}\) Ibid.


\(^{522}\) Cole, “An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2,” 76.

\(^{523}\) BHS critical apparatus does identify one manuscript that contains the יהוה perhaps in an attempt to remove the ambiguity of the reference. Weil, Elliger, and Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, s.v. Psalm 2:4.
(‘ādōnāy), as his “Anointed,” who is identified in Psalm 110:1 as sitting in the heavens at the right hand of Yahweh. The rationale for this identification is that consonantally, ʾādōnî (‘dōnî, Ps 110:1) and ʾādōnāy (‘ādōnāy, Ps 2:4a) are identical (ʿādōnî). In addition, the response to the scoffing of the unrighteous rulers seems best understood as an earthly activity responded to by the righteous earthly, but exalted, king. The king in both psalms rules from Zion, a “holy hill” (Ps 2:6) and in “‘holy array’… or more closely to the possible ‘holy mountains’” (Ps 110:3). This king is addressed by Yahweh with second masculine singular pronouns in both Psalms 2:7 and 110:4, with the common enemy expressed as the nations. Citing David C. Mitchell, Cole contends that the “conflation” of Yahweh and the king in Psalm 110 is intentional, and designed to hearken the attentive reader back to ʾādōnî in Psalm 2:4 as the heavenly-seated one. The ambiguity is intentional, according to Cole, who amplifies his conclusions by noting the role reversal in Psalm 110:5, where ʾādōnî is at the right hand of the king. Consequently, according to Cole, he who “sits” and the divine name ʾādōnî are deliberate fusion of Yahweh and his anointed king. Cole’s conclusion, simply stated, is that the full integration of Psalms 1 and 2 function as the introduction to the entire psalter.

Evidence from the Genre of the Royal Psalm

This brief mention of the function of the Royal Psalm in the psalter also provides evidence to support the supposition that dogmatic denials of Psalm 2 as referring to a metaphysical relationship between the king and Yahweh go beyond what the evidence supports.

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525 Ibid.


Detailed treatment of the genre is beyond the scope of the current work, but some evidence emerges even when the function of royal psalms are broadly outlined. Concisely defined, the royal psalms affirm the Davidic Covenant and the promises it contains. M. L. Strauss summarizes these elements as follows:

God’s faithfulness to his ‘covenant’ (Pss. 89:4, 29; 132:12) guarantees the perpetuity of David’s line (Pss. 18:50; 45:6, 16–17; 132:10–12, 17). The Davidic king’s divine sonship is affirmed (Ps. 2:7), together with his enthronement on Mount Zion (Pss. 2:4–6; 110:2), his reign in justice and righteousness (Pss. 45:7; 72:1–4, 7), his victory over enemies through the Lord’s power (Pss. 2:1–9; 18:31–42; 20:1–9; 21:1–13; 45:5; 72:9–11; 110:1–2, 5–6) and material prosperity in the land (Ps. 72:16). New features introduced include worldwide dominion (Pss. 2:8; 72:8–11), a privileged position at the Lord’s right hand (Ps. 110:1), and a perpetual priesthood ‘according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Ps. 110:4, NRSV). Though not of Levitical lineage, the Davidic king oversees the temple cult and serves as a priest in his own right.528

Gunkel affirms ten Royal Psalms, all of which deal with Israelite kings and their celebrations or festivals.529 He contends that “often” (not always) the particular occasion is clear.530 Other scholars expand the list substantially.531 As articulated above the division of the Hebrew Psalter into units is universally recognized. The five-fold division, as understood by Wilson, is the result of organization specifically directed to place royal psalms at the seams of the first three books of the Psalter (Ps 2, 72, 89).532 Schaper, agrees with the likelihood that Psalm 2–89 are the result of combining two earlier collections (Ps 3–41 and 42–89), as discussed


530 Ibid.


532 Wilson, “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter.”
above, with Psalm 2 prefixed to the finished collection to create a “messianic psalter.” Wilson argues that Psalm 1 represents a late addition as an introduction to the whole Psalter, and that book one begins with Psalm 2. He also recognizes the connection to the David Covenant present in Psalm 2. Kaiser contends that Psalm 2 treats the institution of the Davidic Covenant; he also contends as Wilson that the placement of Psalm 89 at the end of Book III of the psalter represents a lament over what appeared to be Yahweh’s ultimate “(if in our view only a temporary)” rejection of the Davidic kingship. This rejection and the failure of the Davidic kings may be reflected in the diminished role of Royal Psalms in books four and five of the Psalter.

If due consideration is given to the context of the covenant promise contained in the text of 2 Samuel 7:13, 16 and the implication of “forever,” why must Psalm 2 be arbitrarily limited to a historic enthronement? The psalm celebrates the institution of the Davidic covenant with an unnamed king, in an unidentifiable sitz en leben, with flawless idealistic imagery. The idealistic ultimate Davidic scion may have been in view from the beginning. Perhaps the ideal of the promise preceded, and was recorded, before the flawed imperfect descendants of David appear on the historical scene as kings. David is clearly already enthroned in 2 Samuel 7 and has sons, none of whom become king.

These observations and possibilities based on OT literature and exegesis seem to cast a shadow on dogmatic rejections of the possibility of a metaphysical link with the “son” king of


Psalm 1 and 2 and the certainty of a historical Davidic referent. Perhaps a future ideal utopian conception was present in the original versions of Psalm 1 or 2, or both. If Psalm 2 can be legitimately restricted to metaphorical adoption in any sense, it must have originated in the covenants between Yahweh and Israel, and later with David. Still, this explanation leaves at least four questions unanswered. First, since no historical king can be identified, what evidential ground mandates that Psalm 2 refer to a historical king? Second, since no other near-eastern royal-adoption formula contains the “begotten” language, what evidence mandates metaphorical adoption? Third, can all other relational possibilities be excluded, given the probable intentional arrangement of the psalms? Fourth, in light of the fact that Psalm 1 and 2 contain much the same imagery and ideals and have numerous textual parallels with Psalm 110, is it inconceivable that a metaphysical relationship exists between the king and Yahweh?

**Intertestamental Evidence**

Four of the most cited extra-biblical works that bear on the interpretation of Psalm 2 are 4Q174, 1QSa, 1 Enoch 48:10, and Psalms of Solomon 17. The first text, 4Q174 is among the several scrolls from Qumran that in some way employ the term כובע (māšîaḥ) in the narrow sense of an anointed eschatological agent of Yahweh. The inclusion of a reference to Messiah as a branch or scion of David, for whom Yahweh will be a father (and the branch a son) heightens the importance of this text. Fitzmyer laments that because the beginning of the pesher is lost,
“one will never learn how Psalm 2 was interpreted eschatologically.” 537 A cogent point must not be lost here, however. The process of interpretation (how) is secondary to the fact that, according to Fitzmyer, Psalm 2 was interpreted eschatologically. It was so interpreted using the language of “the scion of David…who is to arise… in the last days” and “seed/son” language from 2 Samuel 7:11–14. If Fitzmyer is correct: it was not interpreted as pertaining to a historical king of Israel.

J. Collins emphatically stresses the futuristic intent of 4Q174. He states, “a future ‘successor to the Davidic throne’ in an apocalyptic or eschatological context is by definition a Davidic messiah.” 538 Collins continues his exposition by vesting 4Q174 with exactly this type of messianic significance. 539 In fact, according to a later work authored by Collins, this text does not specifically delineate how sonship should be understood; in some sense, however, the future Davidic scion is the son of God. 540 L. H. Schiffman affirms the eschatological nature of the text by noting that the temple is eschatological in character and at the end of days a “shoot of David… the ‘Davidic Messiah’ arises to save Israel.” 541

The second of the relevant texts, 1QSa, contains a reading that has stirred much controversy among Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship. J. Colling remarks that some scholars read “when God begets the messiah with them.” Others have suggested various readings such as, “when God sends the Messiah to be with them.” 542 Another reading includes “when God leads

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537 Fitzmyer, The One Who Is to Come, 98–99.


539 Ibid., 185.

540 Collins and Collins, King and Messiah as the Son of God, 64.


the Messiah.” In a later work, coauthored by Adela Yarbro Collins, J. Collins affirms that most scrolls scholars of the 1950s held to the “begets” reading, rather than the “leads” emendation. Robert Gordis argues that the reading that identifies “God” as the begetter is virtually certain, based on normal Hebrew grammar. He reads the text as follows:

This is the order of sitting for the men of renown invited to the convocation, to the counsels of the Community: When (God) begets the Messiah, with them shall come the Priest, head of all the Congregation of Israel and of all the elders of the sons of Aaron, the priests, invited to the convocation, men of renown. And they shall sit before him, each man according to his dignity. And afterwards the Messiah of Israel shall sit, and there shall sit before him the heads of the clans of Israel, each according to his dignity and his post, in their stations and according to their marchings.

As Gordis highlights, it is of great importance to know if 1QSa does contain an affirmation of divine begetting in relationship to the Messiah. Vermes also confirms the translation of the problematic term יְלִידָה as “engendered” the reading supported by computer enhancement. Jan Willem van Henten directly associates 1QSa with messianism, “the end of time,” Psalm 2, and God’s begetting the messiah.

The third important document is 1 Enoch 37–71 (the Parables or Similitudes). This text is a significant source for the study of Psalm 2: on at least two occasions, the Similitudes use the title Messiah in the narrow sense of the term (48:10; 52:4). This portion of 1 Enoch is a Jewish, probably pre-Christian, work usually dated after the final redaction of Daniel and before the late

543 Collins and Collins, King and Messiah as the Son of God.


first century AD. The Similitudes contain what George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam identify as the first use of titular language such as Son of Man/Chosen One—titles drawn from biblical texts about the Davidic king, in combination or “together with the expression ‘the kings of the earth’ (and ‘the strong’?) in 48:8a.” All of these titles and descriptions occur in the context of the eschatological Anointed One/Messiah. This allusion to Psalm 2:2 provides a second pre-Christian verification that Psalm 2 was understood eschatologically by some Jews.

Another of the Similitudes that requires a brief comment is 1 Enoch 52 and the reference to the Messiah/Anointed One in relation to “the earth” (v. 4). Nickelsburg and VanderKam, in agreement with Fitzmyer, note the royal authority or kingly image adhering to this messianic figure. However, Nickelsburg and VanderKam extend their analysis by observing the possible connection between the sovereignty of the Anointed One over “the earth” and similar words in Psalm 2: “the ends of the earth your possession” (v. 8) and “O rulers of the earth” (v. 10). If a connection exists, which is likely, it serves to underscore again the eschatological nature of Psalms 2.

None of texts in the Similitudes or 4Q174 and 1QSa permits a factual statement about precisely when Psalm 2 acquired a messianic eschatological interpretation. Pace Puech, however, delimits the terminus ad quem to the middle of the second century BC, “Je serai pour lui un

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The fourth significant text for our current purpose is the Psalms of Solomon 17. Kiwoong Son captures the essence of its relevance: “\textit{Psalms of Solomon} 17 refers to the ‘son of David’ as the eschatological king who will judge the nations and purge Jerusalem. The iron rod in Psalm 2:9 is applied to him and he is described as a righteous king who will not rely on horse and rider and bow but rule with his word.”\footnote{Kiwoong Son, \textit{Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18–24 as a Hermeneutical Key to the Epistle} (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 114.}

Max-Alain Chevallier surveyed the \textit{Psalms of Solomon}, and concludes:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

In the quote above, Chevallier connects not only Isaiah 11, but the tradition of a strong earthly Davidic messiah with Psalms of Solomon 17. Other pre-Christian Jewish texts frequently associated with Psalms 2 are also among those analyzed by Chevallier. He includes the Parables of Enoch, Sirach, 4 Esdras, and Baruch. Whitsett translates Chevallier as contending, “Insofar as
the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha represent Palestinian Judaism, ... it developed its messianic beliefs from two or three foundational scriptures: Isaiah 11:1–10, Psalm 2 and, interestingly, Isaiah 49:1–9, the second song of the Servant of YHWH, which already combines Isaiah 11 and Psalm 2 in its own original fashion."

The medieval commentator Rashi affirmed that the “Sages” of the Jews interpreted Psalm 2:1 as referring to the King Messiah (b.Ber 7B). Rashi, however, thought it was proper to interpret it as referring to David (2 Sam 5:17). Strack and Billerbeck reference several Talmudic eschatological interpretations related to Psalm 2. They contend that the messianic interpretation related to messiah ben David is the oldest and most common. They state:

sie findet sich bereits in den Psalmen Salomos u. hat gewiß wesentlich dazu beigetragen, daß der messianische König kurzweg der „Gesalbte” מָשִׁׁיח u. der „Sohn” (Gottes) genannt wurde (s. Ps 2, 2 u. 7). Besonders gern ist der 2. Psalm auf die Empörung Gogs u. Magogs wider Gott u. seinen Messias bezogen worden.

In addition, Strack and Billerbeck note the significant number of later messianic interpretations offered by rabbinic scholars in relation to Psalm 2, while demonstrating in accordance with Psalms of Solomon 17, that the Targum on Psalms 2 is eschatologically and messianically oriented:

Vermutlich hat auch der Targum Ps 2 messianisch gedeutet; denn die spätere Zeit hat bei dem „Gesalbten” Jahves kaum an etwas andres als an den messianischen König gedacht.

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553 Whitsett, “Son of God, Seed of David: Paul's Messianic Exegesis in Romans 1:3–4,” 678. According to Whitsett, of special value to Chevallier’s analysis are Pss. Sol. 17:23–45; 1 Enoch 46:3–6; 48:2–5; 49:1–4; Sir. 47:11. Whitsett further argues that Chevallier found the same OT texts (Isaiah 11; Psalm 2; and Isaiah 49) form the basis for messianic exegesis in the Sibylline Oracles, in Philo and in the LXX texts of Numbers 24:7, 17, (Balaam’s oracles). These texts all build an exegetical structure leading to Paul’s work and the grounding assumption that Jesus is the Son of God, Messiah, and the σπέρμα.


555 Strack and Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, Vol. 3, 675 ff. Although Strack and Billerbeck contend the messianic interpretation is the oldest, it is not the only interpretation of Psalm 2 in the Talmudic and midrashic exegetical traditions. Psalm 2 has also been interpreted in relation to Aaron, David, and the people of Israel during the messianic age.
Die Targumübersetzung lautet: Warum toben die Völker u. sinnen (lies מַרְגָּנִין statt מַרְנָנִין) die Nationen Eitelkeit? Aufstehen die Könige der Erde, u. die Herrscher vereinigen sich, um sich vor Jahve zu empören u. um zu hadern wider seinen Gesalbten (= Messias).  

Considered as a whole, the extra-biblical evidence cannot demonstrate a direct and original messianic interpretation of Psalm 2. It does, however, demonstrate that the messianic understanding is no late entry into the interpretive stream. This messianic stream has a long history; given the ambiguities of the text itself, discarding any thought of an original messianic intent is unwarranted. At the least, a messianic perspective is possible, if not probable.

New Testament Data

Psalm 2 is quoted or alluded to on a number of occasions in the NT (e.g., Mark 1:11ff.; Acts 4:25ff; 13:33; 17:13; Rom 1:4; Heb 1:5; 5:5; Rev 2:26–27; 12:5; 19:15). In each instance Jesus is an integral part of the reference with the implication that he is the anointed king/son. These multiple contexts and authors further heighten the likelihood that Psalm 2 is prophecy, not enigmatic poetry that by default should be bound to a pre-exilic referent. The various NT contexts evoke images of anointing, sonship, resurrection, enthronement, and rulership that may contain better explanations than those offered by current critical scholarship. Most importantly,

556 Ibid., 675. Cf. Moses Maimonides, Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin, trans. Fred Rosner (New York, NY: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981). Maimonides contends that the “prophets desired and rightly yearned for the days of the Messiah” (148). Rosner in note 273 remarks on two other translator commentators of Maimonides. Rosner tacitly concurs with them, arguing that Maimonides takes sonship in Psalms 2:7 in the sense of kinship, nearness in the moral and spiritual senses and that “The Messiah is the son of God insofar as he is, humanly speaking, as near God as possible in possession of the highest virtues.” This is another proof that many Jewish rabbis have historically understood Psalm 2:7 as messianic and not merely as adoptive of every Davidic king.

A. Lukyn Williams, A Manual of Christian Evidences from the Jewish People, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), 121 ff. Williams lists several Jewish and some critical Christians scholars who leave open the possibility that Psalm 2 is originally intended messianically.

however, is the evocation of the unique relationship of Jesus with God (μονογενής) in John 1:14, and 18: a relationship that conceptually intimates of another, just as unique relationship, (Psalm 2:7, γεννάω). That they are not the same term is obvious; they do not share the same etymology. However, both terms do indicate that the subject enjoys a unique status in relationship to God. Whether the correct object is God, Son, or One is irrelevant for our purpose. The relationship of Jesus to the Father indicated in John 1:14 (and John 3:16) is one of an absolute unique person entering the human condition from outside. The begetting in Psalm 2:7 and John 1:14, according to J. MacArthur and R. Mayhue, “clearly refers to something more than the conception of Christ’s humanity in Mary’s womb.”

MacArthur and Mayhue argue for an understanding of the eternal sonship of Jesus and a begetting that is not temporally located.

Both Matthew and Luke also indicate the unique relationship of Jesus to God (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). The author of 1 Clement clearly ties the divinely begotten status of Jesus to Psalm 2 with the statement, “Ask of me, and I will give you the Gentiles for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession” (36:4). This unique status is discussed by Spiros Zodhiates, who first points out the distinction between μονογενής and γεννάω. The former describes the unique class or kind of relationship of Jesus to God the Father, while the latter describes something that is the result of birth: “beget, engender or create”. Interestingly, the

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558 Ibid.


NT establishes that both apply to Jesus: it claims Jesus holds both a special economic and metaphysical relationship to God:

1. Economic as he fulfills his special positional, redemptive role as son.

2. Metaphysical as God incarnate, which implies begetting or engendering as indicated by the frequent references to his divine origin (Rom 1:3; 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7, 8; Col. 1:22; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).

The point here is that Jesus is Son of God by position (2 Sam 7:14; Matt 1:1), but unlike the historic kings of Israel, he is the Son of God by nature (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5). The nature of an individual is, at least in part, inherited from his progenitors. This understanding of Jesus aligns better with the overall semantic range and implications of the term *begotten*, as it appears in Psalm 2 and possibly in Psalm 110, than it does with a metaphorical adoption. It also conforms more closely to an open-minded appraisal of the historical-evidential basis for the NT claims of Jesus’ origin.

Craigie observes that the phrase “You are my son,” from Psalm 2 is quoted or paraphrased “at a number of points in Jesus’ life: (a) at his baptism (Matt 3:17); (b) at the Transfiguration (Matt 17:5), and (c) with reference to the Resurrection (Acts 13:33).” One such occasion is Mark’s appropriation of Psalm 2 (Mark 1:11pp). Mark 1:11 appears to be designed to identify Jesus as the anointed son of *Yahweh*. Unlike the psalm, though, it contains no hint of a coronation, enthronement, or rulership in the traditional sense. Interestingly, Psalm 2 is written from the perspective that the king’s anointing, begotten sonship, and exaltation to the

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throne are accomplished facts and public matters. Psalm 2 is not a private acknowledgment, but Mark 1:11 clearly pictures something less than a nation-wide public coronation complete with all the pomp usually associated with such occasions. Although a significant number of people must have been present to witness the identification of Jesus as God’s anointed Son, Mark and the other NT authors’ defer the more regal aspects of the king’s public introduction to later texts (discussed below).

In Acts 4:25–26 the image of Jesus as the anointed of God surfaces again in relation to Psalm 2. This passage explicitly cites David as the author, but implied in the citation and application to Jesus is the statement that David is writing prophetically, not autobiographically (προφητεύω). In addition, the Acts 4 citation stops at a precarious place in the Psalm. It does not mention smashing the nations with a rod of iron or any activity to designed to squelch a rebellion.

Paul’s use of the sonship concept in Acts13:33;17:31 and Romans 1:1–6 demonstrates not only the consistent messianic exegesis of Psalm 2 by the NT authors, but marks a transition to an explicit nation-wide and empire-wide declaration of Jesus’ sonship, beyond those detailed in the gospels. For Paul the declaration that Jesus is Yahweh’s son is directly affixed to the resurrection and obedience of the Gentile nations.563

Paul’s use of Psalm 2:7 in Romans 1:4 require some additional comments. For Paul Jesus’ resurrection marked the beginning of the large-scale fulfillment of God’s promises to David. Whitsett describes his understanding of Paul’s thought on the resurrection as the “royal

563 Acts 13:34 explicitly references Psalm 16:10 in relation to the resurrection of Jesus. Given this, there is some question as to whether Luke intends for the reader to understand the previous verse (33) as referring to the resurrection of Jesus, one of the earlier event in Jesus’ life (Luke 1:32–32; 3:22; e.g. birth or baptism), or his emergence into the sphere of humanity. In any case, it is certain that for Luke and Paul the resurrection stands as a universal declaration of Jesus’ divine sonship.
investiture” of Jesus. The term ὅρισθέντος in Paul’s works, according to Whitsett, encapsulates Jesus’ exaltation and enthronement. In combination, themes such as sonship and resurrection point directly to Psalm 2. In Romans 1:4, for example, Jesus is declared (ὁρισθέντος): the son of God. Interestingly, 1 Corinthians 2:7 uses the closely related verb προορίζω in a way reminiscent of Acts 4:28, in relation to a decree made beforehand. Whitsett concludes, “If Paul’s use of προορίζειν in 1 Cor 2:7 is part of an interpretation of Ps 2, the probability of its use in Rom 1:4 is markedly enhanced.”

Whitsett’s case relies in part on the work of Leslie Allen. Allen convincingly argued that ὅριζειν and προορίζειν in the NT, especially in the speeches in Acts, occur in contexts proximate to affirmations of Jesus’ sonship or in reference to Psalm 2:7. Specifically addressing 1 Corinthians 2:7–8, Allen contends that Paul had the terms κύριον and δόξης, in mind from previous uses: both carry resurrection overtones, and both point toward Psalm 2. This observation confirms that the conceptual tie between the divine decree in Psalms 2, the speeches in Acts, and Paul’s use of ὅρισθέντος (the language of marking out or appointment) is virtually certain.

565 Ibid.
566 Leslie C. Allen, “The Old Testament Background of (προ-) ὅριζειν in the New Testament,” New Testament Studies 17, no. 1 (1970, 71). Other comments made by Allen are paraphrased below: (1) Acts 10:42, the resurrection of Jesus is closely associated with the decree, or his appointment (ὁρισμένος) as judge; (2) Acts 17:31 He, [God] has appointed (ὁρίσεις) a judge and given assurance of this by raising him from the dead; and (3) Acts 4:25–28, in the context of group prayer, ostensibly led by Peter, is a slightly different matter. God predetermined (προὁρίσειν) or decreed beforehand the events according to His plan.
567 Ibid., 108.
568 Ibid., 106.
On two occasions the writer of the book of Hebrews affirms the OT exegesis of Paul. The text of Psalm 2:7 is applied to Jesus in both instances 1:5 and 5:5, probably as related to his exaltation. Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester remark that the affirmation of Jesus in relation to his exaltation is probably earlier than those related to his baptism. They suggest the question as to when the sonship portrayed in the Psalm is affected. Attridge and Koester offer two possible solutions to the conundrum: (1) the term Son “is properly applied at the point of exaltation, but prophetically in other contexts”; and (2) the term Son applied “not as the creation of a new status but as the definitive recognition or revelation of what Christ is and has been.”

In either case the tension between the declarations of sonship at Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:11), his transfiguration (Mark 9:7), and his resurrection (Rom 1:4) are satisfactorily resolved.

The book of Revelation contains two references to Psalm 2 that clearly associate the psalm with Jesus (12:5; 19:15). In Revelation 12:5 Jesus is depicted from birth—to ascension—to parousia “in one fell swoop.” G. K. Beale concurs, adding that this kind of telescoping is consistent with other presentations of the life of Jesus (John 3:13; 8:14; 13:3; 16:5, 28; Rom 1:3–4; 1 Tim 3:16). The primary image of interest to this study is that of ruling the nations with a “rod of iron.” This citation from Psalm 2:9 is set in the eschatological future, as is Revelation 19:15, which again uses the image of the “rod of iron” in relation to the rulership of Jesus over the nations. Revelation 2:26–27 provides additional reason to believe that Psalm 2 should be


570 Ibid., 54.


understood eschatologically. In these verses, Jesus promises to delegate authority to rule the nations. Conspicuously, the image of the “rod of iron” is still the reference point connecting Psalm 2 with Revelation 2:26–27.

Three Additional Objections to the Eschatological Messianic Interpretation

As explained above, Willis addresses the four most proffered arguments supporting an eschatological messianic original intent for Psalm 2. In this section, the remaining three arguments, and Willis’ objections to them, are examined for methodological errors and evidence allowing for an original eschatological messianic referent. The first of these arguments is that the NT quotes and arbitrarily applies the text to Jesus as the Messiah. Willis objects to this type of canonical reading in which NT meanings are given priority over the OT contexts and meanings. For the current work, this objection is accepted and the NT witnesses do not receive priority. The fact remains, however, that the NT writers are a legitimate source and any demand that they be disregarded also constitutes a methodological error. The NT witnesses possessed insight into how the Hebrew Scriptures were traditionally understood, and that insight is not wholly accessible to the modern exegete. They were Jews, and at least in Paul’s case, knowledgeable about traditional Hebrew exegesis. The incomplete transmission of the oral traditions of the Jews, the fragmentary nature of many historical manuscripts, and the frequent citation of now lost works all indicate the need for an inclusive evaluation of all relevant data. Given these factors, dismissing too quickly the exegetical contribution of the NT authors seem impetuous.

The second of Willis’ objections addresses the argument that the universal scope of Psalm 2 (vv. 2, 7–8, 10) requires a messianic referent. Willis maintains that this argument constitutes a hermeneutical error that interprets the text as messianic based on the limited scope of Israel’s kingdom (at its largest) or one of the historically enthroned kings. The basis for this messianic argument is that Israel never enjoyed universal dominion. History supports this position, but such a simplistic approach fails to account for the poetic language and devices of the Royal Psalm genre. Psalm 2 includes a four-part synthetic parallelism (v. 12) and perhaps twenty synonymous parallelisms that may not be intended as woodenly literal statements. In addition, Gunkel asserts that the enthronement and dominionist poetry employed by Israel is idealistic to some extent. This idealism imitates, in a livelier and more diverse way, rites found in Egypt and Babylon; they remain imitations nonetheless. The hyperbolic language seems appropriate for the occasion of a coronation requiring a significant amount of pomp.

James E. Smith provides an example of what seems to be a demand for an over-literalization of the language. He assumes Davidic authorship and then poses two significant arguments: first, that no mass rebellion of Gentiles against David occurred, and second, that David was anointed king at Bethlehem and Hebron, not on Mt. Zion. Therefore, David must be speaking “strictly as a prophet.” In response, rebellions of vassal states were commonplace in the ancient world. The Philistines did rebel against David when he was publically installed as king (1 Chr 14), and David somehow earned a reputation as a slayer of ten thousands (1 Sam 21:11). The second objection Smith records is his rejection of the notion that the Psalm is

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intended to describe an enthronement. The king in the Psalm is installed on Zion; simply stated, this could refer either Jerusalem as a city or some part of the city, such as the Jebusite fortress conquered by David.

Gunkel affirms that the nations of the world never rebelled against any newly installed Israelite king. In fact, he refers to this language as “arrogantly presumptive” and “a concrete example of an imitation of a foreign pattern.”577 Perhaps, however, the universalistic and dominionist emphasis of Psalm 2 is, as Mowinckel asserts, due to the implicit promise that the king, as Yahweh’s anointed son, had a rightful claim to dominion over the whole world.578

J. Smith’s approach to distinguishing between David and the king described in Psalm 2 is not satisfying. Still, a clear distinction must be made between David’s anointing and his coronation. George A. Gunn argues that in the normal course of events a king is anointed and coroneted on the same day.579 However, in the particular case of David, years ensued between his anointing by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13) and the beginning of his rule and subsequent anointing in Hebron (2 Sam 2:1–4). Even more years passed before he began ruling from Jerusalem. During this entire period, however, David was called God’s king (1 Sam 16:1).

In the last of Willis’ objections he offers a counter-argument to the assertion that “there is no known historical setting which would fit the scene portrayed in Psalm 2; therefore, it must refer to the future coming of the Messiah.”580 This is perhaps the weakest of the four arguments, although it is not completely without merit. There is no specifically known historical setting for


579 Gunn, “Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah,” 432.

580 Willis, “A Cry of Defiance—Psalm 2,” 34.
several psalms, including Psalm 22 (addressed below). That lack may contribute to a hasty messianic conclusion. The absence of a known historical setting does not necessitate a chronological leap into the eschaton, however. Conversely, the positive evidence for a historical fulfillment seems to entail the same truth. The presence of the Psalm 2 in the Psalter is not evidence of, nor does it necessitate, a historical sitz im leben. Logically a future realization is just as likely; other evidence must settle this question. Cohen remarks that “interpreters both ancient and modern differ as to whether the subject of the Psalm is the Messiah or historical king.”

One cannot leap into the eschaton without evidence, but it is also methodologically improper to insist on a historical actualization for Psalm 2.

This brief synopsis of the arguments most often forwarded to support an original messianic referent for Psalm 2 leaves the question open. In each of the four objections documented above, questions remain that make the absolute rejection of an eschatological king as the original referent an overstatement of the facts. In addition, nothing this study has discovered has addressed the birth/begotten (יְלִדֵה) nomenclature used in Psalm 2:7 as consistently as the NT data.

Summary

Data gathered from the various sources reviewed in this section conflict with the perspectives of most critical scholars. Johnston determined in his analysis of Psalm 2 that the best approach to interpreting the text was a “‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’ approach to its prophetic nature.” He prefers to interpret Psalm 2 typologically. Mowinckel rejects the idea

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582 Johnston, “Messianic Trajectories in Psalm 2,” in Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King, 76.
that Psalm 2 (or any other OT passage) is a direct reference to the eschatological Messiah. Fitzmyer and Gunkel steadfastly ground the entire psalm in the historical Israelite monarchy.

The above perspectives notwithstanding, allowing for the genre of the Royal Psalm, the purposeful arrangement of the texts, and interpreted charitably, the prophetic features of Psalm 2 are not identifiable with any certain historical king or sitz im leben. This study agrees that the singular appearance of “Anointed” in Psalm 2 cannot be tortured into meaning the eschatological Messiah. Even so, without historical or other types of evidence relevant to Hebrew culture, the rare appearance of the term “begotten,” in light of Psalm 110, the intertestamental literature, and the NT data, cannot be legitimately truncated to mean adopted. No other near eastern enthronement text provides an adequate parallel from which to judge the meaning. The current study concludes that Psalm 2 is probably eschatological in nature, not typologically or historically constituted. David cannot be demonstrated to be the type.

Three facts are evident in relation to Psalm 2: (1) no certain historical king or occasion can be assigned to the psalm, (2) the peculiar begotten language is found in no other near-eastern enthronement narrative and is never applied to a known historical Israelite king, and (3) the earliest documents that address Psalm 2, consistently interpret this psalm in an eschatological or messianic sense. It is certainly possible, if not probable, that Psalm 2 was originally written as messianic prophecy, rather than an account of the enthronement of a historical king. The NT


586 The results of this study appear to confirm that something similar to the “canonical process approach” of Waltke carries significant explanatory power in relation to the Royal Psalms. Bruce K. Waltke, “A Canonical
data does not even hint otherwise, and Acts 4:25–28 overtly supports this assertion. Perhaps Lange, Schaff, Moll, Briggs, Forsyth, Hammond, McCurdy, and Conant are correct when they state,

The prophetic or direct Messianic explanation can alone explain this Psalm (all ancient Jewish and ancient Christian interpreters, with some from all periods); neither the typical (Hofmann), nor the historical (the later Jewish and many recent interpreters), nor the poetical (Hupf., as a general glorification of the theocratic kingdom), nor indeed the explanation to be found in the transition from the typical to the prophetic (Kurtz) can suffice.587

Given the increasing pressure of critical scholarship for its exegetes to produce positive evidence for their positions, it seems only fair to ask the same in reply. Perhaps the accusations of eisegesis leveled at scholars who argue for the messianic interpretation588 actually constitute a symptomatic response to their failure to produce or address all of the available evidence.

*Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Gathered from the Study of Psalm 2:1–12*

1. It is possible that Psalm 2 was originally written as prophecy and not as an account of the enthronement of a historical king.

*Historical-Evidential Facts Gathered from the Study of Psalm 2*

1. No certain historical king or occasion can be assigned to Psalm 2.

2. The peculiar Hebrew term ḥab translated as the English term begotten is found in no other near-eastern enthronement narrative.

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3. The Hebrew term ש"ת is never applied to a known historical Israelite king.

4. The earliest documents available consistently interpret Psalm 2 from an eschatological messianic perspective.

Psalm 16, Emphasizing Verses 9–10

Literary and Textual Analysis

Old Testament Evidence

Scholarly Opinions

Traditional Christian teaching often interprets Psalm 16 as a prophecy of Jesus’ resurrection. As is consistent with the methodology of this study, however, historical evidence about the text, the immediate context of Psalm 16, and its developmental history must first be considered before accepting this traditional view. The primary question is whether sufficient evidence exists to substantiate the claim that the author of the Psalm directly prophesied regarding the resurrection of Jesus. Several scholars have labored extensively on Psalm 16 and this section will reflect their efforts.

The general tenor of the psalm allows it to be broadly classified as a psalm of “confidence.” Several divergent interpretations have arisen based on differing views of the context, date, authorship, and theological development of the Jewish nation. Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reyburn contend that verse 10 is a declaration of confidence that Yahweh

will protect the psalmist ("your Holy One") from an early death.\textsuperscript{590} A number of scholars share this common view.\textsuperscript{591}

William A. VanGemeren believes verse 10 speaks of David’s (God’s Holy One) confidence that after death and going into the grave, he will not “suffer eternal alienation.” He also believes the reference to “decay” is a “metaphor for total isolation and abandonment from God’s presence.”\textsuperscript{592} There exists, VanGemeren argues, no certainty about whether the psalmist thought in terms of some form of afterlife\textsuperscript{593} or resurrection of the body.\textsuperscript{594} Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs contend for the psalmist’s security after death, but modify the way in which this security is envisioned. They interpret verse 10 as an expression of confidence that Yahweh will not allow the psalmist to be consigned to the cavern under Sheol: the “deeper place…Abaddon, the dungeon of Sheol.”\textsuperscript{595} The pit is for the wicked and the righteous ones will not go there. Thus, the path of life will lead him into the presence of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{596}

\textsuperscript{590} Bratcher and Reyburn, \textit{A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms}, 146.


\textsuperscript{594} VanGemeren, \textit{Expositors Bible Commentary}.


\textsuperscript{596} Ibid.
Conversely, the Roman Catholic Church’s official interpretation of Psalm 16 specifically denies that it concerns any person other than Jesus Christ:

Is it right for a Catholic, especially after the authentic interpretation given by the Princes of the Apostles (Acts 2:24–33; 13:35–37) to interpret the words of Psalm 15:10 ff.: ‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life’, as if the sacred author did not speak of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ? Answer: In the negative.597

Based on this brief survey of opinions, it becomes clear that no consensus will emerge about the overall interpretation of the psalm. Nevertheless, it may be possible to narrow the number of possibilities somewhat by examining lexical and other evidence. 598

Lexical Evidence

Unlike some of the other texts this study evaluated, Psalm 16 contains several lexical problems that potentially affect the meaning of verses 9 and 10. The first issue requiring clarification is authorship. It is not possible to categorically disallow the possibility that someone other than David wrote the psalm. However, the psalm bears the title לֶדְוִד (lĕdāwîd) as do Psalms 56–60, which are also usually attributed to David. Additional support for Davidic authorship


598 Trull divides the range of opinions concerning the meaning of the psalm into five categories: First Dahood is perhaps the only scholar to contend that the psalmist’s hope is for a physical translation such as that experienced by Enoch and Elijah. Second, Trull names Briggs, Constant, and VanGemeren as advocates for the belief that the psalmist means communion with God after death. Third, Weiser and Aparicio are named as those who “interpret verse 10 as referring to unbroken fellowship (without clarifying the mode)” (308). Fourth, Trull names a substantial list of scholars who contend that the author expected to be preserved from an untimely death. Fifth, he names some who hold to an interpretation that the verse in question prophesies of a personal resurrection from the dead. Gregory V. Trull, “An Exegesis of Psalm 16:10a,” Bibliotheca Sacra 161 (2004): 308.
arises because Psalm 16 contains some verbal similarities with other Davidic psalms and a possible link to the covenantal language of 2 Samuel 7:22–23. 599

Second, and key for the interpretation of the psalm, are the grammatical difficulties contained in verses 9–10. For example, some authors have argued that the Septuagint translators forced a meaning on the term נֻבָּל (labeṭaḥ) (in verse 9) that allowed for their theology of resurrection to be read into verse 10. The Seventy translated the Hebrew term as ἐπὶ ἐλπίδι. The difference lies in the fact that נֻבָּל is usually understood as security or confidence, whereas ἐλπίς is most often understood as hope or expectation. The distinction seems negligible for the meaning of verse 10; what substantive difference exists? On one hand, Lange et al. remark based on 9b that the psalm “may indeed speak of the preservation and secure rest of the entombed body.” 600 If so, the thought anticipates the Septuagint’s κατασκηνώσει ἐπὶ ἐλπίθε. 601 On the other hand, one could argue for a forced change in perspective from the present to the future. This charge is problematic, however, it requires intimate knowledge of the psalmist’s mind; it also fails to account for the future orientation of the next verse. For certain verse 10 contains a future tone. Given the presence of the conjunction כִּי (kî) (“for or, because”) that causally connects verses 9 and 10, 602 the alleged eisegesis makes little difference. 603 The psalmist describes the

599 Ibid., 305. Dating Psalm 16 after the Babylonian exile or even the Maccabean period, as do many critical scholars, enhances the likelihood that the eschatology of Jewish people had developed a theology of resurrection.


601 Ibid.


prophetic protagonist\textsuperscript{604} as dwelling securely or expectantly \textit{because} he was confident that \textit{Yahweh} would not abandon him.\textsuperscript{605}

Third, although the conjunctive aspect of verse 10 is uncontroversial, scholarly opinions related to the meaning of other key terms often result in mutually exclusive conclusions. The verb רוא (ʿăzōb), for instance, is one of the focal points of the controversy surrounding Psalm 16:10. HALOT designates the basic concept as “to leave,” which would support a translation similar to \textit{desert} or \textit{abandon}. The perception impressed on the reader’s mind by the yiqtōl prefix reflects an action participated in, or seen from the inside of, the unfolding events.\textsuperscript{606} The \textit{prophetic protagonist}\textsuperscript{607} will not be \textit{left} in Sheol. However, Mitchell Dahood, one of the most cited authors treating this text, disagrees. He offers instead a distinctive interpretation in which he used the English construction similar to \textit{put} or \textit{place}, “For you shall not place me in Sheol.” He supports this reading by citing Ugaritic language similarities and his belief that נטרב לilestone (taʿăzōb lišʾōl) is not essentially different from the Ugaritic \textit{db lars}, meaning placement in the \textit{underworld}. Dahood connects the sentiment expressed in this psalm with those of Psalms 49:16 and 73:24, concluding, “These texts imply the assumption of the righteous by God to himself, a belief which developed more fully in later Judaism.”\textsuperscript{608} The fundamental idea, if Dahood’s

\textsuperscript{604} The current work uses the terms \textit{prophetic protagonist} as the referent of the psalm. No consensus exists on either authorship or the date of writing, it is methodologically inconsistent to demand that the author be speaking of himself.


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construction is correct, does not support the idea that the prophetic protagonist was confident that he would not experience abandonment or being left in Sheol; rather, it indicates never being placed there at all. The psalmist’s hope, if Dahood’s exegesis proves correct, is an outright escape from death similar to that experienced by Enoch and Elijah.609

The difficulty with Dahood’s analysis is that no parallel usage of the root עזב (or a different root that is a homonym from the biblical text) supports the meaning of place or put as it appears in Psalm 16:10. Most often, the sense of the passages containing the root עזב connotes leave or abandon; this usage often extends to forsakenness. Considering Dahood’s work in particular, this study has encountered no other exegete supporting his analysis.610 Holding this view requires that that עזב actually means never put or never see, rather than not leave or abandon permanently. The term עזב cannot support the meaning necessary for Dahood to be correct. Therefore, the psalmist’s hope cannot be for the complete avoidance of Sheol.611 There is little ambiguity remaining as to whether the psalmist intends to convey the idea that his hope for the prophetic protagonist is to never to be placed in Sheol in any sense—that is, not


610 Assuming the conclusions of critical scholarship and the late dating of Psalm 16, it is improbable that the psalmist is thinking in terms of bodily translation rather than death without the loss of relationship with Yahweh or outright resurrection. In addition, given Davidic authorship, it would be both inconsistent and contradictory for David to believe that he would escape death. The Davidic covenant predicted David’s death and the rise of his offspring. Some critical scholars date the finished Psalter to the period of the postexilic diaspora. Gunkel, Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of Religious Lyric of Israel, 319 ff. Gunkel argues that material from the individual “psalms of confidence” such as Psalm 16 developed from “individual complaint psalms” over a long historical period. These psalms were first used in cultic settings before 587 BC (325) and then gradually became the stock of individual prayers (119 ff.). Some, or even much, of the original thought and lyric forms come from the monarchial period; however, by circa 500-200 BC, the genre declined (329). Cf. Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Dating of the Psalms,” Bibliotheca Sacra 104 (1947): 426–440.

experiencing death by means of translation or immortality. The lexical evidence does not support this stance; further, David, the most plausible author, knew that he would die (2 Sam 7:12).

More likely is the approach employed by Philip S. Johnston, one that does not read implausible denials of immortality into the text. He argues that the psalmist had either experienced or believed that he would experience preservation from premature death inflicted by an imminent crisis. This is why the psalmist is not shaken, dwells securely, and will not be abandoned to Sheol, or see corruption.\(^6\)\(^1\) \textit{Yahweh} will see him through the imminent crisis and open up a way that leads to a continued enjoyment of life.\(^6\)\(^3\) Craigie takes a similar approach while making the germane observation that if this interpretation reflects the “initial meaning of the psalm,” the concluding section “should not be interpreted either messianically or in terms of individual eschatology.”\(^6\)\(^4\) Important to this interpretation of the psalm is that the identity of the \textit{prophetic protagonist} \(ךֵּלֶדֶךָ\) (ḥāṣidēkā) would necessarily be contemporary to the psalmist at the time of original authorship. A direct prophecy of the Messiah would be excluded. This solution is not only possible, but also reasonable. However, it does not answer all the questions raised by these verses, nor does it deal with the entire scope of the available data, especially if the “holy one” is not a contemporary of the author.

A fourth key issue for determining the interpretation of the text is based on how the noun \(שַׁחַת\) (šāḥat) is best understood. Psalm 16:10 is the only OT verse in which the ESV translates the term as “corruption.” The overwhelming majority of its occurrences carry the meaning of \textit{pit}.

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Part of the controversy involves the possibility that two Hebrew roots with two distinct meanings are at play within the Hebrew language. R. Laird Harris succinctly captures this discussion and its apparently irresolvable difficulties: “Quite possibly we are dealing here with two homonymous [sic] nouns, one from שָׁוָה ‘sink down’ (not really ‘dig’) and the other from שָׁחַת ‘go to ruin.’” VanGemeren argues convincingly that the masculine form of שָׁחַת is found in Job 17:14 and Psalm 16:10, and that both mean corruption. In Job 17:14 the term personifies the masculine pronoun father as contrasted with the feminine term רֶמֶש (worm) personifying mother.

VanGemeren states,

We may confidently infer, therefore, that שָׁחַת, personified as ‘father,’ is the masc. form, ‘decay/corruption’. Moreover, it can be established that the masc. form, ‘corruption,’ not the fem. form, ‘pit,’ is in view in Ps 16:10 by the vb. to see (לִׁרְּאֹות). ‘To see’ expresses the ideas of ‘experiencing,’ ‘enduring,’ ‘proving,’ and the like, and takes for its object a nom. indicative of state of the soul or of the body.

If the pit as Sheol was in view, Waltke claims, the psalmist would have employed a verb of motion rather than experience.

The distinction between the two possible roots is weighty: one meaning corruption associated with death and decay, and the other associated with the pit (as associated with Sheol). This distinction may, however, be overstated. Conceptually, the pit and corruption intersect, thereby reducing any substantive difference to delaying the logical conclusion by one chronological step. Regardless of whether “the pit” is in synonymous parallelism with

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617 Cf. Goldingay, Psalms 1–41.
“Sheol” meaning corruption, the reader’s attention should be drawn to the physical aspect (although the entire being of the prophetic protagonist is addressed during the course of the psalm including his unending relationship with Yahweh). Physical corruption is a patent derivative of any discussion of souls existing in “the pit” or synonymously “Sheol.” Likewise, physical corruption is just as certainly a conceptual and integral aspect of “the pit” as synthetically related to “Sheol” via the grave. The expressed faith of the prophetic protagonist consists of confidence that he will not be abandoned—whether to the corruption of the grave or to the corruption of the pit as Sheol. Preservation is the unavoidable idea of the psalmist: preservation of the whole being, including the flesh.

Evidence supporting this preservation supposition emerges from the Encyclopedia of Judaism. Forcing the dichotomy of thought between פְּנֵי as either the corruption of the grave (literally a tomb or hole in which a body is buried) or the pit of Sheol is apparently unnecessary. Speaking from a Jewish perspective, Neusner reminds that Sheol, in and of itself, is considered to be a place “of maggots and decay (Job 17:13–16).” David J. A. Clines also recognizes the putrescent nature of the connotations associated with פְּנֵי. He describes the condition of Job, whose expectation is descent into the pit as entering a new “macabre community” associated with death worms and corruption.

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A further distinction is evident, according to Robert A. Morey. He argues that the OT usually designates the grave by the word קבר (qeber). Sheol and קבר (qeber) are “never used in Hebrew poetic parallelism as equivalents.”622 Consider the images conjured in the human mind by the range of meanings possible in the Hebrew term; add to this the knowledge that no soul goes to the pit apart from a state of death involving physical corruption. Given this reality completely separating the meaning of צח from the corruption of the grave appears imbalanced and reductionist. Insufficient lexical support exists to enforce rigid limitations on the meaning of צח to either that of physical corruption or the pit; both inferences are interconnected.

Attempting to blunt the force of the observation that the psalmist may be speaking of life after death by late dating Psalm 16 or denying Davidic authorship actually reinforces this possibility rather than refuting it. During the post-exilic era significant changes occurred in the way the Jewish people viewed death and Sheol. These changes included the development of a firm belief in (1) separate fates for the righteous and the unrighteous, and (2) the physical resurrection of the dead.623 These changes did not arise ex nihilo and likely had a long period of development. They may have included ideas carried over from the monarchial period, but they were fully formed during the intertestamental period. Consequently, the later the psalm is dated, the more probable that it refers to resurrection.

Other OT evidence supporting resurrection as the original intent surfaces in the Septuagint. The Septuagint translation of Psalm 15 (English 16) is undoubtedly pre-Christian.624 The fact that the translation of Psalm 15 is pre-Christian is evidenced by its abundant use in the

622 Robert A. Morey, Death and the Afterlife (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984), 76.


NT and by the presence of portions of Psalm 15 in the scrolls of Qumran.\footnote{For example, 4Q85 Psalms c: Frg. 1: \textit{Nahal Hever Psalms}: Col. 7 (Frg. 4)} This important fact vanquishes arguments that the controversial term \(\text{διαφθοράν}\) appears because of Christian eisegetis and a Christological agenda. The Greek translators interpreted the Hebrew term in question as meaning corruption of the body.\footnote{The third issue needing clarification is the identity of the \(\text{חסיד}\) (\(\text{ḥāsid}\)) and perhaps the identity of the \textit{prophetic protagonist} of the entire psalm. Although the term does not carry connotations either of divinity or of absolute moral perfection it is difficult to read either the Hebrew term or the Greek term \(\text{ὁσιος}\) and accept this as a banal reference to the psalmist. This is possible, of course. The general meaning of the term conveys the idea of a person who accepts and fulfills obligations relating to his and the covenant people’s relationship to God. The terms are used of God, the Israelites, groups within the nation of Israel, and individuals. Zodhiates, \textit{The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament}, s.v. \text{ὁσιος}. There is also according to Zodhiates, a group of \(\text{ὁσιοι τοῦ θεοῦ}\) in Pss 8:23; 13:10; 14:3, 10. In 4:23 \(φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον οἱ, 4:25 \text{οἱ ἀγαπώντες θεόν}, \) appear as likely synonyms and \(\text{οἱ ἀμαρτωλοί, παράνομοι}\) as antonyms in 14:6.} Their choice of \(\text{διαφθοράν}\) to translate \(\text{ष्ठ}\) demonstrates their conviction that bodily corruption is in view.

The OT evidence supports the notion that the import of Psalm 16 contains an expectant declaration that the \textit{prophetic protagonist’s} whole being will be preserved in a life-giving relationship with \textit{Yahweh} outside “the pit” (despite his unavoidable physical death)—forever (v. 11). The allusions contained in the language of verse 11 point to something more than temporary escape from a threat: rather they point to something proximate to eternal security and life despite death.\footnote{Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, \textit{Commentary on the Old Testament} (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 142.} Rolles, Plumber, and Briggs describe the emotive state of the psalmist as possessing a “calm view of death and the expectation of the presence of God and blessedness after death.” They argue the text “imp[ies] an advancement beyond Is. 57:1–2; but prior to the emergence of the doctrine of the resurrection of the righteous Is. 26:19.”\footnote{Briggs and Briggs, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms}, 118.} How can the life of the entire

\footnote{For example, 4Q85 Psalms c: Frg. 1: \textit{Nahal Hever Psalms}: Col. 7 (Frg. 4)}
person beyond death be expressed without employing something conceptually similar to resurrection?

These data, complete with the implication of resurrection, indicate the possibility that the prophetic protagonist is not a contemporary of the author, but a future “holy one” who will experience preservation of his whole being without the corruption associated with death forever.

Intertestamental Evidence

The intertestamental evidence that may be applied to help understand Psalm 16 is scarce. However, Roland E. Murphy does specifically address the issue of the šahat as employed in the Qumran Literature. Murphy argues that the people of Qumran associated šahat with corruption. He cites 1QS 9:16; 9:22; and 10:19 as examples in which the term means “moral corruption rather than pit or grave.”629 In 9:17 and 10:20 the terms ’nšy h’wl or ’w lh respectively runs parallel with other words with the same implications. Murphy also cites the Damascus Documenta (CD) 6:15; 13:14) adding that CD 15:7–8 is of the most evidential value because it specifically addresses an individual who “turns from his corrupt way.”630 Conversely, Murphy, as noted by Trull, also cites several texts in which the noun form seems to be a synonym for Sheol (1QH 3:19; 8:28–29; 3:18; 1QS 11:13).631 Thus, the evidence from Qumran, like that of the OT, is inconclusive. Once again, the evidence indicates the Jewish conceptual overlap between the images of corruption in Sheol/the pit and the grave.


630 Ibid.

The work of John C. Poirier is significant for the study of Psalm 16. Poirier advances the possibility that the Jewish scholars translating the Septuagint correctly understood the psalmist to mean that the holy one would not see corruption (διαφθοράν), and thereby tacitly forecasting a resurrection. Extending the work of Douglas Hill Poirier argues, from a small pool of extra-biblical and biblical texts for the wide-spread Jewish belief that corruption of the body did not begin until approximately seventy-two hours (three days) after death. He contends that this belief may be the key to connecting an OT text with Paul’s nebulous reference to Jesus being raised after three days “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:4). Both Peter and Paul make reference to Jesus’ flesh not seeing corruption (Acts 2:31; 13:35). The three-day tradition Poirier describes may stand behind these NT claims.

The third day in Jewish thought, according to Poirier, would be the maximum amount of time before corruption of the body would ensue. Support for this thesis of arises from the work of R. Mach. Mach documents the Jewish belief that the soul and body are separated at death, yet a loose connection remains between them. This connection has been understood in three distinct ways. First, the soul „Drei Tage lang umschwebt die Seele den Körper im dem Glauben, sie werde in ihn Zurückkehren Können.” Second, „Die Seele Trauert um den Menschen sieben Tage lang.” Third, „Die Verbindung dauert bis zur vollständigen Verwesung der Leiche, d. i. Zwölf Monate lang.” David Allison provides several additional historical records indicating the importance of the three-day period in ancient Jewish thought, in reference to a deceased person and his or her soul. The angels attending the body of Abraham continue their work until the third

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day. The Testament of Job (5–7) indicates that Job was not placed into his tomb until after three days. The Apocalypse of Zephaniah 4:7 describes an angelic escort for the ungodly in terms of “servants of all creation” who fly around for three days with the souls of the dead before leaving them in the place of eternal punishment. 634

Extra-Biblical Evidence

Other material from the NT era and the era just subsequent include those Richard Bauckham analyzes. He documents no less than twelve Jewish texts related to the martyrdom of Enoch and Elijah, all of which consistently demonstrate the belief that they would remain dead less than four days. 635

Another important text is Genesis Rabbah 100.7. Section X states, “Up to the third day the soul keeps returning to the body, thinking that it will go back in. When it sees that the features of the face have crumbled, it goes its way and leaves the body. This is in line with this verse: ‘But his flesh grieves for him, and his soul mourns over him (Job 14:22).’” 636

Other historical evidence lending support to the idea that the psalmist may have possessed a nascent theology of resurrection surfaces in 1 Enoch 22–27 (antedating 200 BC),

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634 Dale C. Allison, Jr., The Testament of Abraham, Commentaries on Jewish Literature (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 401. Cf. y. Moed Qat. 3.5, 82b and Leviticus. Rabbah, 18.1. 4 Baruch 9:12–14, reads as follows: “And behold, there came a voice saying, ‘Do not bury one still living, for his soul is coming into his body again.’ And because they heard the voice, they did not bury him but remained in a circle around his tabernacle for three days, saying, ‘At what hour is he going to rise?’ And after three days, his soul came into his body and he lifted up his voice in the midst of (them) all and said, ‘Glorify God with one voice! All (of you) glorify God, and the Son of God who awakens us, Jesus Christ the light of all the aeons, the inextinguishable lamp, the life of faith!’”

635 Richard J. Bauckham, The Jewish World Around the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 5, 17. Only one text, the Syriac (Clementine) version of the Apocalypse of Peter extends the length to four days. A closely related NT example is of the two unknown witnesses of Revelation 11 who are widely thought to be Enoch and Elijah lying in the street dead for three and a half days before being caught up to heaven.

4Q521, and 2 Maccabees 14. In addition, 1 Enoch 51:1 and 61:5 indicate a well-developed theology of a general resurrection. When this belief came into full-flower is not certain. However, as N.T. Wright explains, several indications can be identified in Genesis and other early OT books that some hope for continuing existence and fellowship with Yahweh was a part of the Jewish belief system. Benedictions two and three in the Shemoneh Esreh also depict Yahweh as a raiser of the dead. Although finalized during or just after the first century, the first three benedictions in particular likely contain material handed down from early post-exilic sources.

In addition, and anticipating the NT section (below) the fact that Lazarus had been dead four days and was exhibiting the obvious signs of corruption is perhaps by design (John 11:17). If the thesis of Poirier is correct, one of the reasons for the despair exhibited by both Mary and Martha was the passing of more than three days. In their minds, this may have made resuscitation of Lazarus impossible.

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637 James H. Charlesworth, C. D. Elledge, J. L. Crenshaw, H. Boer, and W. W. Willis, Jr., Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2006), 12–15. Charlesworth also notes that the author of 1 Enoch 92–105 portrays a time of judgment for the righteous and the wicked, including eschatological rewards that may be understood as after a resurrection (1 Enoch 104:13).

638 N. T. Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis, MN: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 86. Wright acknowledges that many scholars believe the history of the Israelites in relation to the resurrection divides into three broad stages: “absence of hope beyond death; hope for blissful life after death; hope for new bodily life after ‘life after death’” (86).

New Testament Evidence

Evidence from Acts 2

The text of Acts 2 is crucial for understanding the overall New Testament witness concerning the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his status as the Davidic/Messianic King. One of key texts offered as evidence for this affirmation is Psalm 16:10. As Trull observes “if resurrection was intended by David, then Peter’s argument in Acts 2 regarding resurrection did not rely on mistranslations, later fuller senses, or escalation of meaning.” The author of Psalm 16 would be speaking directly of the Messiah. Given the paradigmatic significance of the book of Acts and Chapter 2 in particular for the theology of the NT it is essential (1) to understand how and why Peter arrived at his conclusion, and (2) to determine if Psalm 16:10 is a direct prophecy of the Messiah.

Peter’s argument in Acts 2:24–31 for the resurrection of Jesus follows a five-point outline drawn entirely from the LXX. Robert J. Kepple condenses these points as follows:

God raised up Jesus, (2) having loosed the bonds of death (a necessary prerequisite); (3) this was done because death was not able to hold Jesus; (4) but how does Peter know this? Because David had foretold it! The prophecy of David (Ps 16:8-11), Peter argues, could not possibly refer to David himself since he obviously had seen corruption and remained in Hades (you can still see his tomb!); (5) therefore, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah.

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Peter contends that David comprehended, based on the Davidic Covenant and Psalm 16:10, 110, and 132:11, that one of his descendants would rule Israel and be raised from the dead (John 13:22; Luke 1:32–33; Acts 13:23). This declaration is dramatically more significant than merely asserting that David possessed knowledge of his descendant’s royal messianic status. By uttering the phrase Δαυὶδ γὰρ λέγει εἰς αὐτόν, Peter unambiguously identifies Jesus as the particular descendant of David, the prophesied as ruler, and the one raised from the dead. In 2:25–32 Peter corroborates his claim by demonstrating why the prophecy could not speak of David. The presence of David’s tomb and a body provide convincing rationale for eliminating him from consideration and for arguing that Jesus is the only possible referent in Psalm 16:10.643

Trull proffers five points as evidence for the latter argument, as transmitted by Peter:

First, Peter referred to the presence of David’s tomb as proof that David could not have been speaking of his own physical resurrection. Second, David could speak of the future Messiah because David was a prophet. Third, David could speak of the Messiah because the Davidic Covenant involved a messianic hope. Fourth, David had prophetic insight into the future appearance of the Messiah. Fifth, Peter asserted that David spoke of the Messiah’s resurrection in Psalm 16, specifically verse 10b.644

643 Most of the same points could be made of any historical person. Peter specifically attributes authorship to David; however, if any other person wrote Psalm 16, they too died and their body suffered corruption.

644 Trull, “Views on Peter’s Use of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–32,” 439. Trull explains these five points by demonstrating that David’s tomb and a monument erected by Herod the Great were likely well-known landmarks in Jerusalem. In addition, Peter’s argument attempts to establish that David had prophetic gifts and prophesied (προφητεύω) of the greater king (Psalm 110) from his own descendants (Psalm 132:11), and that God gave him special insights and instruction (Psalm 16:7). Further, that David was considered to have prophetic gifts by the Jewish people is confirmed from Qumran (11QPs* 27:2–11); by Josephus (Ant. 6:166); and both the OT and NT documents. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “David, ‘Being therefore a Prophet’ (Acts 2:30),” The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 34, no. 3 (1972): 332–339, http://catholicbiblical.org/publications/cbq (Publisher's URL: http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000730694&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Fitzmyer is more cautious and does not argue for a date certain to establish when David was widely held to be a prophet. However, he affirms that in Qumran or earlier the references to David in Psalm 18:51, 2 Sam 22:51 and 23:1 may have begun to be understood as indicating that he was a prophet (338). “
Peter’s use of Psalm 16:10 as applied to the resurrection of Jesus is a clear affirmation of Jesus’ status. Even so, Luke’s method of recording Peter’s words goes further. Conzelmann detects that “Luke means ‘leave in Hades,’ that is, in death” when interpreting the problematic meaning of Psalm 16:10. This insight is consistent with the concept of not being abandoned, as it appears in the OT data. Conzelmann seems intent to represent Luke as not affirming a pre-existing Jewish “journey to Hades” motif. Luke, however, must be referring to more than death followed by resurrection. The Jewish audience present on the Day of Pentecost already believed in the resurrection of the dead (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). Luke via Peter is arguing for something completely unique to human experience, death and subsequent resurrection—before corruption. Bock captures the weight of the NT evidence and perspective of the apostolic


646 Ibid. Conzelmann may be referring to legends such as those depicted in Homer’s Odyssey, Plato’s Republic, or 1 Enoch 17–19.

647 Germane support for the thesis that Luke via Peter is actually attempting to demonstrate that Jesus directly fulfills the prophecy of Psalm 16:10 and that he is in some sense divine are found in his citations of other OT texts (Joel 2:28–32 in Acts 2:17–2,1 as does Paul in Romans 10:13). The concept of calling on the name of the Lord (κυρίου) connects the three texts, with the added feature of the appearance of this connection in reference to Joel 2:32, where the LORD is Yahweh. This language appearing in Acts 2 and an early creedal formula adopted by Paul confirms that the nascent church overtly declared the divinity of Jesus.

Even more convincing is the quotation of Psalm 110:1 in Acts 2:34–35. It is a part of the earliest Christian teaching; it is present in both Mark 12:36 (likely the earliest gospel) and 1 Corinthians 15:25. Dunn believes Psalm 110:1 plays a key role “across the board” whether by explicit quotation or allusion because it provided the clearest answers to the questions about what the resurrection declared about Jesus. Not only does Dunn tie Psalm 110 into the tradition of Mark 14:62, a very-well attested text, but its pervasive presence throughout the New Testament demonstrates its key role (e.g., Mark 12:36 pp.; 14:62 pp.; Acts 2:34–35; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3). Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making, 218–219.

G. E. Ladd understands the import of Peter’s citation of Psalm 110:1 when affirming that “the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God means nothing less than his enthronement as messianic King” and “because of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter transfers the messianic Davidic throne from Jerusalem to God’s right hand in heaven.” George E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 373.

Dunn exclaims, “How could the first believers have come to such a conclusion without Ps.110:1?!?” Dunn, Beginning from Jerusalem: Christianity in the Making, 219.

It seems they could not have, and they would never have understood Psalm 110:1 without Psalm 16:10.
community by avowing, “a clearer presentation of a direct prophecy fulfilled could not exist.… David prophesied ultimately concerning both of the immediate resurrection and the bodily resurrection of his seed, Christ.”648 Bock’s conclusion is a strong affirmation of the suggestion that evidence from Acts 2 indicates a single plausible interpretation of Psalm 16:10.

Evidence from Acts 13

Acts 13:26–36 consists of a complex unit of OT quotes and references employed by Paul to support his contention that the resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant promises. Paul cites Psalm 16:10 in this speech and several elements therein are similar to those used by Peter in Acts 2. Particularly important are those elements dealing with the mortality of David. Paul, however, goes well beyond David’s mortality to emphasize the everlasting nature of the Davidic Covenant and the physical immortality of its king. He appears to intentionally prioritize Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 55:3 before treating Psalm 16:10. The order of the OT texts may provide a logical sequence to justify his conclusion. The force of Paul’s argument suggests that he believed Jesus was not only the uniquely begotten Son, but was also eternal, never to see corruption. No temporally bound man could fulfill or enjoy eternal promises or everlasting dominion such as was given to David (2 Sam 7:13, 16).649 The loyal or sure mercies of David (חסדי דוד הנאמנים) in Isaiah 55:3 are an “everlasting covenant” (ברית עולם), apparently the same

648 Bock, Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern, 180.

covenant described in 2 Samuel 7:8–16. Evald Lövestam’s analysis of the relationship between Acts 13:34 and the relevant OT texts notes that from very early (2 Sam 23:5), the promise made to David is viewed as both a covenant and a divine decree. Both ideas stress the eternal character and irrevocability of the promise (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:13–16; Ps 89:30; Sir 47:11; 1 Macc 2:57; Pss 17, 4; Luke 1:32 ff.). Both are based on God’s faithfulness. Logically these elements in the Davidic covenant can be realized only through a Messiah who is risen, who would never see corruption, and who is thus the inheritor of a permanent and universal dominion. The resurrection thus guarantees that the loyal or sure mercies of David (Isa 55:3) are not partially, but completely fulfilled. Conzelmann adds support for Lövestam’s exegesis by maintaining that he understands τὰ πιστά in Acts 13:34 as the equivalent of “sure,” with the connotation of “‘imperishable’—thus the word cannot refer to David.”

Summary

At a minimum this section confirms the psalmist’s belief that the prophetic protagonist’s existence in the realm of the dead would not be permanent. First, the lexical evidence convincingly supports this assertion. Second, the entire effort to somehow dissect the term and segment its meaning and implications is fruitless. Regardless of whether the psalmist’s intent is to portray the term as synonymous with Sheol, or it exists in a synthetic relationship that means corruption, the reader’s attention should be drawn to the physical aspect of the prophetic

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651 Ibid., 73.

protagonist. Nevertheless, both the material and immaterial aspects of the person are included in relation to Yahweh.

Conceptually, the unavoidable idea of preservation of the whole being inherently arises from the text. This understanding does not allow for the meaning of pit to be reduced to grave (literally a tomb or hole in which a body is buried). However, it is impossible to discuss the pit/Sheol without the attendant image of death, involving a dead body and a burial. As confirmed by the lexical evidence the most viable interpretation is that the prophetic protagonist will not be permanently left in Sheol. This is not the same as having no contact with Sheol. The critical assessment of the text by several major commentators reflects an expectant declaration that the prophetic protagonist’s whole being will be preserved in a life-giving relationship with Yahweh. This special relationship seems to indicate something more than temporary escape from a threat: something proximate to eternal security and life despite death. However, this conclusion is not unassailable.

If David wrote the Psalm, it may be possible to speak of anachronism in relation to resurrection, but only remotely so. If critical dating and scholarship are correct, the existence of a developing doctrine of the resurrection and blessed state of the righteous become certain.

The evidence from Qumran is inconclusive: although informative, it offers little to establish facts concerning Psalm 16. Other sources of intertestamental and extra-biblical evidence do establish the existence of a social-cultural belief that the soul of the dead remained near for approximately seventy-two hours after death; during this period a resuscitation or resurrection was thought possible. After this three-day period had expired, however, the person was dead beyond all hope. This belief may have played a significant role in the thoughts of the Jewish nation as its theology developed.
The entire effort related to Psalm 16 ultimately hinges on authorship and referent (the identity of the “holy one”). Was the author David, a post-exilic prophet, or another unknown person? Did this author write of the “holy one” as his hope or the hope of a contemporary—or the Messiah? The NT unambiguously attributed Psalm 16 to David. It teaches that verse 10 is a direct prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was the particular son of David promised by the Davidic Covenant. He was the only person who, according to Acts, was able to fulfill an eternal covenant with eternal promises. According to the NT, neither David nor any other human could be the referent; all are dead, buried, and subject to corruption. If the NT evidence is allowed to settle the issue, David wrote of the Messiah.

Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Gathered from the Study of Psalm 16:9–10

1. The lexical evidence from the OT and Qumran allow for the probability that תַּחַש in Psalm 16:10 is best translated as “corruption.”

2. The lexical evidence does not betray a significant change in the interpretive trajectory when וּבשׁ (security or confidence) is translated as ἐλπίς (hope or expectation).

3. The lexical evidence allows for the possibility that Psalm 16 is a direct prophecy of a human resurrection before decay.

4. A widely-held belief existed among the Jewish people that the soul remained near a dead body for approximately three days.

Historical-Evidential Facts Gathered from the Study of Psalm 16:9–10

1. Psalm 16 speaks of the preservation of an individual from the corruption associated with death.

2. This individual depicted in Psalm 16 believes he will be preserved based on his relationship with Yahweh.
3. The earliest available Jewish documents (LXX) support the interpretation of Psalm 16:10 as messianic prophecy.

4. The NT documents uniformly interpret Psalm 16:10 as a direct messianic prophecy.

Psalm 22:1–31, Emphasizing Verse 16

Literary and Textual Analysis

Old Testament Evidence

Psalm 22 is a controversial piece of literature. Little consensus exists regarding the import of these 31 verses. For example, Payne argues that the “Messiah speaks forth the entire composition.” In direct opposition to Payne, Mowinckel states, “if they may be applied to Christ at all it is by typological interpretation and not because they are directly messianic prophecies.” Mowinckel further contends that Psalm 22 is not “prophecy but prayer.” Fitzmyer takes note of the NT use of the Psalm despite the absence of the term מָשִּׁיחַ (māšîaḥ), and questions whether its use is appropriate. Compounding the exegetical difficulties is the infamous textual problem of verse 16, and the impossibility of certitude when ascribing a date, authorship, or sitz-im-Leben to the Psalm. Suggested periods range from the era of King David to that of the Maccabees. The title attributes it to David; however, as Keith Campbell points out,

653 Payne, Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, 266.

654 Mowinckel, He that Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism, 12.

655 Fitzmyer, The One Who Is to Come, 46–47.

the originality of psalm titles is sometimes disputed. The only thing most scholars agree upon is that Psalm 22 describes the suffering and subsequent victory of an individual supplicant.

Three reasons emerge as the basis for the continued Christian messianic interpretation: (1) the absence of a known pre-Christian individual to whom this psalm might be appropriately applied, (2) the NT use of the psalm, and (3) the historically well-documented suffering of Jesus. Adding weight to this Christian interpretation is its consistency with Jesus’ prophesied, yet future (i.e., eschatological), victory over his enemies. However, putting Christian interpretations aside for the moment, the interpretive history of Psalm 22 prior to the Christian era is the basis from which this study must proceed.

Evidence about how these verses were historically understood emerges in the LXX. Rick Brannan and Israel Loken observe that the majority of the extant texts read verse 16 as, “Like the lion they are at my hands and my feet.” However, the rendering of the LXX, ὥρυξαν, agrees with other Hebrew manuscripts: “they have pierced my hands and my feet.” Lexically the two Hebrew terms at the center of the controversy are almost identical כ א ר (kāʾārī), a noun meaning “like a lion” and כ או or כרו (kʾrû or kārû) a verb rendered “pierced.” Though the “pierced” reading is in the minority, the oldest evidence available from the LXX, Qumran, the Syriac, the Vulgate, and some other Hebrew manuscripts uses the “pierced” verbal form.

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Mark H. Heinemann, commenting on the term *pierced*, thinks pre-Christian readers would have dismissed the language as an obscure figurative expression or exercise of poetic license by the author. Nevertheless, on the unlikely chance that the other reading is closer to correct, and judging from the continuing lexical debate, not much of Heinemann’s statement is lost, regardless of the correct terminology. The nomenclature probably was enigmatic and, in some ways, it remains so.

Addressing more directly with whether Psalm 22 was originally understood as a messianic text, Lange et al. mention that in the ancient synagogue, a “direct Messianic interpretation” of Psalm 22 existed that excluded David. The source of this claim is not cited, which poses a serious problem from an evidential perspective. In fact, no evidence confirming a messianic interpretation of Psalm 22 from an OT source that clearly pre-dating the LXX exists, although the Dead Sea Scrolls do provide some additional support for the idea. A fair evaluation must also conclude that, given the repeated use of animal imagery (dogs, lions, and oxen in verses 16, 20, 21a, 21b, respectively), a clear representation of crucifixion cannot be established. Even if *pierced* is the correct English term, this still does little evidentially to establish this psalm as messianic prophecy.

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What Is the Correct Translation of Psalm 22:16. The reading of the MT is not incomprehensible and one could make an argument for it even if it may not be the preferred reading.


662 Lange, Schaff, Moll, Briggs, Forsyth, Hammond et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Psalms*, 168. (Emphasis is the Author's)
Psalm 22 is partially preserved in three of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QPs\(^1\), 4QPs\(^w\) and 5/6HevPs). The key terms are missing from the first two manuscripts. The only scroll from Qumran to preserve the controversial key text is the *Nahal Hever* Psalms Col. 11 (Frgs. 8 + 9). Peter W. Flint speaks decisively when stating, “the verse in question—reads ‘they have pierced my hands and my feet,’ thus confirming that the Hebrew text used by the Septuagint translator contained this reading, not the one in the MT.”\(^{663}\) This assertion is probably correct, as confirmed by the present study. The term employed by the *Nahal Hever* Psalm is כארו (kʾrû).

Harvey D. Lange’s analysis of several hymns of thanksgiving (*Hodayot*) from Qumran lead away from a messianic interpretation. Several of the phrases and words of Psalm 22 arise again in the work of a psalmist of Qumran. Lange argues that this particular psalmist knew the Scriptures, used them in his personal prayer life, and identified with the sufferer of Psalm 22. The sufferer in Qumran found the language of Psalm 22 appropriate to his own suffering. He speaks of forsakenness, his tongue cleaving to his mouth, being poured out like water, having bones out of joint, strength being dried up like a potsherd, and a heart melted like wax.\(^{664}\) This personal appropriation, in combination with the absence of any indication that the psalmist of Qumran considered the text as predictive of his or messianic suffering, would argue against a directly predictive original intent. Another indicator militating against a predictive messianic

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interpretation according to Lange, is that several elements present in the *Hodayot* are absent from Psalm 22. These include:

1. The sinfulness of man (1 QH IV, 27, 29–30, 33–35; 1 QH XII, 18 to 20; 1 QH XIII, 13–17; 1 QH XVIII, 18–30).
3. Apocalyptic salvation involving condemnation of the wicked and rescue for the chosen (1 QH IV, 20–22; 1 QH VI, 29–33).
4. Specific identification of threatening enemies (1 QH V, 23–25), and new emphases in the expressions of praise (1QH II, 13–15; 1 QH IV, 27–28; 1 QH XVIII, 6–12).\(^665\)

The combined weight of these observations indicates that the psalmist of Qumran was likely familiar with Psalm 22, and freely used and appropriated the language in it. This evidence also indicates that this psalmist was not directly verbally dependent on the psalm and was not bound to a messianic interpretation. Lange concludes that this is the same method that allowed Jesus to appropriate Psalm 22 to describe his own torment during his passion. Thus, Jesus identified with Psalm 22, but Psalm 22 did not specifically identify Jesus.

Richard D. Patterson observes that some literature outside of Qumran during the intertestamental period also demonstrates a knowledge of the Psalter (e.g., Jubilees, 3 Maccabees, Pseudo-Philo, and the intertestamental portion of the Sibylline Oracles). However, neither the pseudepigraphical works nor the Apocrypha (e.g., Judith and Ecclesiasticus) give extensive attention to Psalm 22.\(^666\)

\(^{665}\) Ibid., 612–613.

\(^{666}\) Patterson, “Psalm 22: From Trial to Triumph,” 227. Patterson notes a possible allusion to Psalm 22:7 in Ecclesiasticus and the description of a man’s enemies.
Early Church Evidence

In stark contrast to the intertestamental literature, much extra-biblical literature from the early church attests an abiding conviction that Psalm 22 was both prophetic and messianic.

Several of works of St. Augustine, Tertullian, and other writers quote Psalm 22 in this way.\(^{667}\) One of the earliest extra-biblical attestations of the church connecting Psalm 22 with Jesus as Messiah is the citation of verses 6–8 in 1 Clement. The author states,

‘And again he himself says: ‘But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach among men and an object of contempt to the people. All those who saw me mocked me; they ‘spoke with their lips’; they shook their heads, saying, ‘He hoped in the Lord, let him deliver him; let him save him, because he takes pleasure in him’’\(^{668}\)

The Epistle of Barnabas, another early text, contains even more striking examples of the early church’s interpretation:

But he himself desired to suffer in this manner, for it was necessary for him to suffer on a tree. For the one who prophesies says concerning him: ‘Spare my soul from the sword,’\(^{669}\) and “Pierce my flesh with nails, for bands\(^{670}\) of evil men have risen up against me.”(Barn 5:13)\(^{671}\)

What, then, does the prophet again say? ‘A band of evil men have surrounded me, they have swarmed around me like bees around a honeycomb,’\(^{672}\) and ‘for my garments they cast lots.’(Barn 6:6)\(^{673}\)

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\(^{667}\) The Letters of St. Augustine 76:1; 140:16; 199:50. See also, De civ. Dei 17:1, 17:17; De fide 4:7; Tractates on the Gospel of John 86.1–2; Expositions on the Book of Psalms 22:17; Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 5:14; Novation, The Trinity 28:12; Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews 8, 10; Tertullian, Against Marcion 3:19.

\(^{668}\) Holmes, The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, 47.

\(^{669}\) Ps. 22:20 (LXX 21:21).

\(^{670}\) According to Holmes bands, or perhaps synagogues.


\(^{672}\) Ps 22:16 (LXX 21:17); 118 (LXX 117):12.

For the Lord says again: ‘And with what shall I appear before the Lord my God and be glorified? I will confess you in the congregation of my brothers, and I will sing to you in the midst of the congregation of the saints.’ Therefore we are the ones whom he brought into the good land. (Barn 6:16)

In summary ample evidence exists to support the assertion that the early church interpreted Psalm 22 as directly messianic and considered Jesus to be the Messiah. Dissimilarly, sparse evidence exists to support the notion that those familiar with the Scriptures prior to the life and passion of Jesus understood the psalm as messianic prophecy.

New Testament Evidence

There is little doubt that the suffering supplicant in Psalm 22 exhibits characteristics that reflect a desperate physical and emotional state, as well as some striking parallels with what the NT accounts record. Heinemann unnecessarily assumes a typological interpretation, but his observation is still cogent. He reminds interpreters,

Even if one holds to the reading, ‘like a lion my hands and my feet,’ the prefiguring is only weakened in its directness; it is not disposed of entirely. It is important to note that there would still be a strong correspondence between David’s enemies doing something harmful to his hands and feet and the fact that Jesus’ enemies did something harmful to His hands and feet when they crucified Him. The connection and thus the prefiguring remains intact because of the specific and unusual mention of David’s hands and feet.

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675 Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1896), 718. Edersheim accepts a messianic interpretation. He observes that in the Yalkut Shimeoni (a compendium of older and lost works), a comment on Psalm 22:7 (8 in the Hebrew) in relation to Isaiah 40 is applied to the Messiah (the second, or son of Ephraim). According to Edersheim, the Yalkut Shimeoni uses words remarkably similar to those in the Psalm and those used by the NT writers to describe the reaction of people at the cross of Jesus. The same text also gives a messianic interpretation to Psalm 22:15 (16 in the Hebrew).

676 Heinemann, “An Exposition of Psalm 22,” 296, ftnt. 293. The typological stance is unnecessary because historians do not know who the original supplicant may have been or if it is intended to describe a specific historical individual to the exclusion of all others.
The NT authors claimed that Jesus was in just such a state during his crucifixion; as a result they directly cite Psalm 22 on no less than fourteen occasions.⁶⁷⁷ Licona, in a comprehensive study of the resurrection of Jesus, lists eight things present in both Psalm 22 and the accounts of the crucifixion:

(1) the possibly historical statement from Jesus while on the cross, citing Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?” (2) dividing and casting lots for his garments, (3) sneering at the victim, wagging their heads and saying “let God deliver him,” (4) intense thirst or dry mouth, (5) being surrounded by dogs, (6) a band of evil men surrounding him, (7) piercing his hands and feet, and (8) exposed bones.⁶⁷⁸

Even such a detailed investigation of the crucifixion of Jesus cannot make a certain historical connection to the expectation of a future suffering messiah and Psalm 22. Licona, however, finds “no reason to question the historicity of the crurifragium and piercing,” and appears to accept much of the passion accounts as historical. Even so, he chooses to describe the NT account as reflected in Psalm 22 as “history prophesized.”⁶⁷⁹ Sheldon Tostengard leaves the same impression when stating, “the Messiah as future King of Salvation is not directly prefigured in this psalm. However, Jesus’ use of the psalm denotes a substantive connection between the Godforsakenness of our beleaguered psalmist and what happened at Calvary.”⁶⁸⁰


⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 309–311.

such as those reached by Licona and Tostengard make sense and carry the additional benefit of aligning well with the historical data.

Summary

This study did not discover a significant amount of historical evidence directly applicable to Psalm 22. Further, little consensus exists regarding the import of these 31 verses. Even what appears to be the likely confirmation of the “pierced” reading does little to confirm a pre-Christian messianic intent. The *Yalkut Shimeoni* provides support for a messianic reading, but this source alone is not sufficient for making this claim. The undocumented assertion of and early direct messianic interpretation, exclusive of David, as presented by Lange et al. also does little to provide evidential support.

Dissimilarly, the weight of the evidence against a directly messianic intent for the original work is compelling. First, the free personal application of the text by the psalmist of Qumran, with no messianic implication must be considered. Second, the paucity of clearly identifiable references attributable to Psalm 22 in the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha must be considered. None of those references thus far identified in the current study are both pre-Christian and messianic.\(^{681}\)

The opposite is true for extra-biblical literature from the Christian era. Much literature attests the messianic interpretation of Psalm 22. This literature spans the period from the late first century until the present day.

The NT authors claim in multiple texts and sources that Jesus was the fulfillment of Psalm 22, citing the text on no less than fourteen occasions.\(^{682}\) Even the statement placed on the

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\(^{681}\) For example, *Odes of Solomon* 28, 31:9

\(^{682}\) Patterson, “Psalm 22: From Trial to Triumph,” 228.
lips of Jesus from Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) may be historical. If this statement is historical, it is another strong affirmation of Jesus personal identification with Psalm 22.

Despite these differing lines of evidence and argumentation, no certain historical connection to the expectation of a future suffering messiah and Psalm 22 is demonstrable. The crucifixion of Jesus is certain and many of the details of the passion account are accepted by scholars. However, the ground is firmer for understanding the NT accounts in relation to Psalm 22 as “history prophesized,” rather than prophecy realized. For certain, Psalm 22 describes the suffering and subsequent victory of an individual supplicant, and the NT authors correlated those images with the passion of Jesus. As appealing as this may be to the Christian reader, that does little to establish original messianic intent.

Plausible Historical-Evidential Conclusions Gathered from the Study of Psalm 22:1–31

1. The text of verse 16 likely should read “pierced.”
2. Several items plausibly connected to crucifixion are present in the psalm.
3. Little pre-Christian support exists for a messianic interpretation.
4. Jesus probably identified with the supplicant in Psalm 22.

Historical-Evidential Facts Gathered from the Study of Psalm 22:1–31

1. The text records the pleas of an individual supplicant.
2. Much Christian literature attributes the fulfillment of the psalm to the passion of Jesus.

3. All four of the NT evangelists correlate Jesus’ suffering with the supplicant of Psalm 22.

Summary of Chapters 3–7

Chapters 3 to 7 contain the argumentation and available evidence generated by analyzing the five groups of biblical texts chosen for this study. Modern interpretations of these texts often contain assertions that they are prophesies concerning the Jewish Messiah, which the NT authors equate with Jesus of Nazareth. A wide range of early, first-century, and post-apostolic historical and literary sources were examined in an attempt to verify or refute these claims. The results emerging from the data suggest that some assertions of both original messianic content and an original messianic referent are well-supported, while other assertions are either ambiguous or unsupported.

Chapter 8 presents the collated results of the study and briefly treat the available evidence. In addition to the final formulation of the minimal-fact statements, the criteria for justified historical descriptions will be applied to the results.
PART III CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 8

The Results of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to collate and summarize the findings of this study. The investigation sought to establish if critically acceptable historical-evidential reasons exist for believing that Jesus Christ is the direct fulfillment of the specific OT messianic texts examined in the study. The methodology proceeded in three interrelated steps. First, the work was narrowly focused on specific allegedly predictive OT messianic texts and their alleged NT fulfillment texts. Second, exegetical analysis of relevant biblical and historical data isolated relevant evidence. Some of this evidence met the minimal-facts criteria. Third, the conclusions gleaned from the evidence were applied to, and weighed against, any plausible competing hypotheses proposed by other scholars.

This investigation envisioned the existence of three possible outcomes for each prophecy examined: (1) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient historical evidence establishes the claim as probable, (2) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable, and (3) sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.
Results of the Study

The First Group of Biblical Texts

The first group of texts investigated the claim that the terminus ad quem for the coming of the Messiah must occur before Israel loses its status as self-governing (Gen 49:10) and before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (Ps 118; Hag 2:7, 9; Mal 3:1).

Genesis 49:10

Genesis 49:10 yielded no evidence able to validate an affirmative minimal-facts statement. The information gathered does not meet the minimal-facts criteria. Any claim to have established a terminus ad quem for the advent of the Messiah based on this passage is unsupported. Outcome category three best fits the evidence: “sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.”

A second datum did emerge, however. Regardless of when the pericope known as The Testament of Jacob was written, the author intended to denote the perpetual ascendancy and rulership of the tribe of Judah within Israel.

Another plausible conclusion emerging from the study is that either from its original context or gradually, Jewish interpreters endued the passage with messianic import. This messianic interpretation included the prophetic eschatological expectation of a Davidic king and his permanent rule over the kingdom.

684 Each time an outcome category is established below, refer to Chapter 1 under Statement of the Problem.
Psalm 118

Psalm 118 also did not generate the evidence required to attach to the second temple period a *terminus ad quem* for the advent of the Messiah. The rebuilt temple is surely the one that existed when the psalm was authored; accordingly, it is probable that some messianic and eschatological meaning was originally intended. Similarly, little doubt exists that Jesus intentionally invoked the processional images related to Psalm 118 when entering the temple during his Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1–17; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–48; John 12:12–15).

One of the significant difficulties encountered during the exegetical process is the incidental nature of the temple to the meaning of the psalm. The temple serves only in a supportive role: it is not the essential element or focal point of the psalm. Therefore, its existence or destruction cannot bear the weight needed to establish a single specific historical fulfillment. Outcome category three best fits the evidence: “sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.”

Haggai 2:1–9

The investigation of Haggai 2:1–9 also failed to produce a *terminus ad quem* for the advent of the Messiah. The nomenclature, particularly the terms “glory” and “house” are ambiguous. As a result any assertion of direct fulfillment remains indemonstrable. Haggai does not indicate that any other structure (“house”) except the original and rebuilt temples are in view during his speech. This limits the time for fulfillment to the period before AD 70. However, in light of the probability that the term “glory” includes theophanic phenomena, possible historical fulfillments may not be limited to a single event. Fulfillment could include aspects of the finished temple of Herod the Great and the Day of Pentecost or other less well-attested events.
The second temple, when fully adorned by Herod, possessed great material splendor. Further, if the events of the day of Pentecost occurred in the temple precincts, the events described in Acts 2, did have theophanic portents, possibly fulfilling the prophet’s expectation.

In the final analysis the question about whether a *terminus ad quem* for the advent of the Messiah exists based on evidence associated with three of the four passages in the first group of texts must be answered negatively. Genesis 49:10, Psalm 118, and Haggai 2:1–9 are best placed in the third possible outcome category: “sufficient evidence refutes the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.” There is considerable circumstantial evidence of fulfillment that may be properly applied by another hermeneutical method, but direct fulfillment cannot be demonstrated (see Recommendations for Further Research below).

*Malachi 3:1*

Malachi 3:1 is the only text among the first group that exegetically produces the possibility of a *terminus ad quem* for the advent of the Messiah. The rebuilt temple is a central feature in the book of Malachi; this prophet never indicates or even implies that any other temple is in view. Sufficient evidence indicates the following:

1. Malachi 3:1 depicts *Yahweh* as coming into his temple for judgment.
2. The only temple Malachi envisions is the one standing during his lifetime.
3. As a logical consequence, it is possible that the *terminus ad quem* for *Yahweh’s* coming into his temple (and the sending of both the forerunner and the messenger of the covenant/Lord) was at or before the destruction of the second Jewish temple.
Outcome category two best fits the available historical evidence: “Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable.”

It may also be plausibly asserted that JTB is the best known candidate if the messenger (forerunner) foretold in Malachi is human. This conclusion is based on the fact that some Jews of Malachi’s period (Mal 4:5), and some later Jews and Christians, believed that Elijah would appear before the prophesied judgment of Yahweh. JTB is specifically identified as such in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 11:14; 17:10–13; Mark 9:11–13; Luke 1:17) and implied to be a forerunner in John 1:22–23. A straight-forward reading of Malachi 3:1 distinguishes between the messenger, the messenger of the covenant/Lord, and Yahweh: these appear to be three distinct individuals. The research demonstrated that the messenger of the covenant and the messenger of the Lord are most likely the same individual. The historical person of Jesus is the only viable candidate for fulfilling the prophecy. No other historical person exhibits both a forerunner, a covenant message, and multiple independent witnesses claiming his deity a fortiori no other person living before AD 70. These are the claims of the best witnesses, as captured in the NT gospels and the writings of Paul, all of which evidence that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, judge of Israel, and essentially equal with Yahweh.

The Second Group of Biblical Texts

The second group of texts probed the claim that the Messiah would spring from the lineage of King David and, correspondingly, that Jesus is a descendant of King David (2 Sam 7:13; Isa 11:1–2; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23–24; Hos 3:4–5; Matt 1:1–17; Luke 2:4, 3:23f; Rom 1:3.
2 Samuel 7:13

The evidence for affirming both the expectation that the Messiah would be a davidid and the physical descent of Jesus from the historical King David is substantial. The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:1–17) acts as the paradigmatic promise for this expectation; verses 13 and 16 specifically require the offspring to be established forever. It is possible that verses 13 and 16 did not originally refer to a single individual. However, the incongruity of this prophecy with history and the Davidic household is most readily resolved by the NT author’s referencing the incarnation and the resurrected immortality of Jesus.685

The Role of Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5–6, Ezekiel 34:23–24, and Hosea 3:4–5, in Relation to 2 Samuel 7:13

Univocally each of the other texts investigated, as they relate to the 2 Samuel 7:1–17, support the specific idea that the prophesied offspring would be from the ממעיך (body/bowel) of David. The text of Isaiah 11:1 offers a reaffirmation, after the death of King David, that a perpetual dynasty will emerge from house of Jesse. This text is almost universally recognized as reaffirming the promise made previously to David. A paradox in light of the failure of the Davidic kings, and the successive rule of foreign powers over Israel, is that the hope for an archetypical Davidic king seems to have grown more prevalent as time progressed. Jeremiah 23:5 recounts the Davidic promise by employing tree-related terminology: a “righteous branch” is used to describe the coming scion of David. The later prophet Zechariah clearly uses the terms

in relation to the Messiah (Zech 3:8). Ezekiel 34:23–24 places the hope for the reestablishment of the Davidic dynasty on the coming shepherd. Whether Hosea 3:1–5, particularly verses 4–5, are part of the original prophecy or the work of a later redactor changes little. Either way the passage represents a strong affirmation of the Jewish people’s anticipation of a Davidic king. It describes a king whose advent occurs in the distant eschatological future, but who is, nonetheless, a *davidid*.

These OT passages are reaffirmed in the intertestamental literature, the NT, and writings of the early church. These observations endure even if the indictment is conceded that the gospel accounts are the stylized works of the evangelists. Stylization only proves that the early church universally understood Jesus to be the Davidic Messiah.

Outcome category one fits the data: “Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient evidence establishes the claim as historically probable.” With that stated, the evidence falls short of establishing Jesus’ Davidic descent as a *minimal fact*. The facts emerging from the data this study established do, however, lend support to the claim. No first-century evidence stated that Jesus was not a descendant of King David. The absence of such refutation includes works penned by adversary and friend alike. Positive, early affirmations of Jesus as a descendant of King David span all four NT Gospels, the work of Paul, and the *Didache* along with several other later documents. Concrete statements beyond these might be possible if the NT genealogical evidence were ever conclusively unraveled.

Nevertheless, several other plausible affirmations also emerged from the study. The messianic expectation of the Jewish nation was rooted in the Davidic Covenant, and the most

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686 Prophecy that meets the criteria established in Chapter 1 is miraculous. See Chapter 1 *Key Elements* and *Reasons for Including Each Element*.
significant characteristic was a royal/kingly stream of thought. Further, it is likely that the Jews or Jesus’ relatives would have become confrontational about the messianic deception if his Davidic descent were not a fact. In short, Jesus is probably a descendant of King David.

*The Third Group of Biblical Texts*

The third group of texts relates to the geographical locations associated with the birth and early life of the Messiah. Micah 5:2 was examined to substantiate the claim that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea and the parallel claim that Jesus was born in this small village (Matt 2:1–12; Luke 2: 1–7).

Both this group of texts and the outcome of the investigation are mixed and prove difficult to categorize. The facts leave many questions unanswered. Broad support among scholars is indicated for the supposition that Bethlehem of Judea is the place from which Israel’s predicted ruler emerges (Mic 5:2). In addition, the common view among many Jews during the first-century was that the Messiah would have roots in Bethlehem of Judea (John 7:42) as they interpreted Micah 5:2.

The NT evidence indicates that Matthew and Luke reflect independent sources for their birth narratives. Based on the points of discontinuity, collaboration is also ruled out. This finding indirectly adds to the credibility of both accounts. Moreover, the unlikely possibility that both authors created independent fictitious accounts or used two separate, but erroneous, sources is evidentially unsupported. Too many points of continuity in their accounts exist to support such contentions.

This study has demonstrated that the preponderance of the evidence points toward a historical basis for the birth narratives. The best, earliest, and majority of the available evidence
indicates that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. The evidence best fits outcome category one: “Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient evidence establishes the claim as historically probable.” This conclusion, however, does not enjoy the needed consensus of scholarly opinion to be classified as a minimal fact.

The facts emerging from this part of the study demonstrate the underlying continuity in the gospel accounts. First, both NT authors emphasize Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus. Second, his ancestor was David. Third, both NT authors place Jesus’ family in Bethlehem. How long they dwelled there is uncertain, however. Fourth, both accounts place the final home of Jesus in Nazareth of Galilee. In addition, no written source earlier than Celsus denies that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. To dismiss Bethlehem of Judea as the birthplace of Jesus requires that these accounts, the best and earliest historical sources available, be discounted as mistaken or deceptive.

The Fourth Group of Biblical Texts

In the fourth set of passages, Jesus’ miracles were analyzed in relation to the expectations of the messianic age, the Messiah himself, and the predictions of the OT prophets. Jesus’ self-described titular nomens, such as “prophet” (Luke 4:17–19), “son of man,” “son of the Blessed” (Mark 14:61–62), and “son of David” (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9; Mark 10:47), all bear implications for his assertion of a future position “seated at the right hand of God” (Mark 14:62). The best, and perhaps only currently available, verification of whether these titles attributed to Jesus are justifiable, lies in an examination of whether Jesus performed the miracles that the OT prophets allegedly predicted would accompany the messianic age (Isa 29:18; 35:5–6; 61:1–2; Matt 9:35; 11:4–6; Luke 7:22–23).
This section of the work features the presupposition that Jesus was a miracle worker. His miracles are among the best attested aspects of his ministry. The data answering the question of whether the Jewish people expected a miracle-working Messiah is ambiguous, according to current scholarship. However, the data analyzed in this study points toward a more definitive conclusion. Isaiah 29, 35, and 61 contain references to restorative activity best described as miraculous. In addition, the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15–22, with its connotations of exodus and miracles, consistently arose in the literature. Collectively considered, the probability that many within Israel expected miracles in association with the advent of the Messiah is high. Even so, the majority of current scholarship argues for a non-messianic referent for Deuteronomy 18:15–22. A non-messianic referent is possible and the depiction of several OT prophets as participating in activities that might be characterized as a second-Moses motif supports this interpretive opinion. Despite the stance of current scholarship, some later Jewish and Christian exegetes did inculcate the passage with messianic elements. These gradually accruing interpretations are witnessed among the community of Qumran, and in Josephus, the NT authors, and the Talmud.

The text of Isaiah 29 (29:18 in particular) displays ambiguous restorative activity. The text undoubtedly refers, in part, to physical elements (blindness and deafness); however, the obvious ideological affinities with other texts in Deutero-Isaiah in relation to blindness and the poor (35:5–6; 42:7 and 42:16) place emphasis on the spiritual aspects of restoration. The physical aspects assume a subordinate role. Isaiah 29 clearly contains reference to miraculous activity, but no direct messianic link. What is probable is that Isaiah 29 is part of a cadre of texts that point Israel toward eschatological restoration.
Similarly, Isaiah 35:1–5 contain a mixture of literal and metaphorical language. Unlike chapter 29, however, the physical aspect of healing miracles comes to the fore and the spiritual aspect assumes a subordinate role. The miraculous nature of the language of that chapter support the conclusion that it describes circumstances obtained at the institution of the messianic era. The anointed agent of *Yahweh* is clearly the actor.

These OT texts, as they connect with the Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and latter Jewish literature, depict miracles in relation to the Messiah or to the messianic age. Later the NT also clearly depicts the expectation of a particular prophet, with Jesus’ miracles authenticating his identity as this prophet. Jesus appears to have performed his miracles with reference to the implications of the OT and the expectations of a broad range of sectarian and proletariat Jewish groups.

There is little doubt that Jesus believed he was the particular prophet and Messiah, and no doubt that the gospel writers believed Jesus was the particular prophet and Messiah. Outcome category two best fits the available evidence: “Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as historically probable.” Oddly, only two things prevent this conclusion from rising to the first level or even to the level of a *minimal fact*: (1) the somewhat ambiguous nature of the concurrent OT contexts, and (2) an OT identification of the intended referent of Deuteronomy 15:18–22 as directly eschatological. Something more direct evidentially than a chronological or typological raising up of another prophet to succeed Moses.
The Fifth Group of Biblical Texts

Psalm 2:1–12, Emphasizing Verse 7

The data gathered from the various sources treating Psalm 2 conflicts with the perspectives of several critical scholars. These scholars either opt for a typological interpretation, ground the text in the historic Israelite monarchy, or otherwise deny any original messianic intent.

Objectively considered, the prophetic features of Psalm 2 are not identifiable with any certain historical king, or sitz im leben. This study does however, conclude that the singular appearance of “Anointed” in Psalm 2:7 is not sufficient to establish the term as meaning an eschatological Messiah. Even so, without historical or other types of evidence relevant to Hebrew culture, the rare appearance of the term “begotten” in light of Psalm 110, 1QSa, and the other intertestamental literature cannot be arbitrarily truncated to mean adopted. No other near eastern enthronement text provides an adequate parallel from which to form a judgement.

Supplementing these assertions is the fact that the NT data explicitly declare the unique metaphysical relationship of Jesus to the Father, citing Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25–28) in reference to Jesus as the anointed one. For these reasons the conclusion that Psalm 2 is eschatological prophecy, not an account of the enthronement of a historical king is more likely than any other conclusion. This assertion, is both reasonable and consistent with the evidence demonstrating the unlikely connection with a historical king. It does not, however, contain the scope of positive evidence required to meet the criteria for placement into the list of minimal facts. Nonetheless, outcome category two best fits the evidence: “Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as historically probable.”
Psalm 16, Emphasizing Verses 9–10

This study confirms the psalmist’s belief that (1) the prophetic protagonist’s existence in the realm of the dead would not be permanent or (2) the less likely possibility that he believes he will escape an imminent threat. In either case, this prophetic protagonist would escape decay. Plausible lexical conclusions suggest the possibility that נפש in Psalm 16:10 is best translated as “corruption” rather than “pit.” The charge of Christian interpolation or the intrusion of later Jewish ideology related to the resurrection of the righteous was demonstrated as unlikely by showing that the lexical trajectory does not change significantly when נצר (security or confidence) is translated as ἐλπίς (hope or expectation). In addition, the perspective of the psalmist gives reason to suggest that the scope of the language employed exceeds the natural human lifespan of the prophetic protagonist. The earliest and best Jewish documents support a direct messianic interpretation, as do the related NT documents.

This conclusion should instill confidence in the probability that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 16:10. A problem arises, however, in that the authorship and referent of Psalm 16 are not demonstrable unless the exegete employs a canonical reading of the data. If David authored the passage, the probability is high that the referent is Jesus. If the author (whoever he was) did not speak of himself, but of another, the probability is also high that the referent is Jesus. If, on the other hand, the author wrote only of his personal hope without any prophetic intent, Jesus is not the referent. On balance, the preponderance of the evidence points toward outcome category two: “Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable.”
Psalm 22, Emphasizing Verse 16

Although much Christian literature attributes Psalm 22 to the crucifixion of Jesus, the facts established by the study in relation to Psalm 22 are few and general in nature. The text of Psalm 22 records the pleas of an individual supplicant. The NT authors and apparently Jesus himself then identify his sufferings with those of the psalmist. This identification is related by the NT authors no fewer than fourteen times.

The evaluation of Psalm 22 did not identify any original or even intertestamental messianic intent. The textual and interpretive problems, in conjunction with the personal application of Psalm 22 by a psalmist in Qumran, makes dubious any claim to direct fulfillment by Jesus. No clear representation of crucifixion can be established in the text, despite the likelihood that pierced is the correct translation. All indicators point toward a placement in outcome category three: “sufficient evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy.” Licona correctly assigned the phrase “history prophesized,” rather than prophecy realized, as the proper understanding of the text.687

Minimal-Fact Statements as Related to the Statement of the Problem

The statement of the problem cited in Chapter 1 reads: This study will seek to establish if critically acceptable historical-evidential reasons exist for believing that Jesus is the direct fulfillment of the specific OT messianic texts included in the study. As stated earlier, three possible outcomes exist for each prophecy examined in this investigation:(1) Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy and sufficient historical evidence establishes the claim as probable, (2)

Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy, but the available historical evidence is insufficient to establish the claim as probable, and (3) sufficient historical evidence exists to refute the claim that Jesus directly fulfilled the prophecy. He evidence generated by this study was then assigned to one of these three categories.

Due consideration was given to the contextual and historical information related to all the texts examined during the study. Through a process of reflection and inductive reasoning, fifteen historical-evidential minimal facts emerged; the following statements constitute the principle products of this study, as they directly resolve the question posed in the problem statement. Since, direct fulfillment of OT prophecies is specifically eliminated in outcome category three, only historical-evidential minimal facts related to outcome categories one and two are included.

**Historical-Evidential Minimal Facts in Textual Group One**

In this group, only the text of Malachi 3:1 produced a possible direct historic fulfillment of a prophecy by Jesus. This conclusion embodies three minimal facts.

1. Malachi 3:1 depicts Yahweh as coming into his temple for judgment.
2. Malachi provides no indication that he envisions a temple other than the one standing during his lifetime.
3. The historical-evidential data indicate that whether the LORD (hāʾādôn) and the messenger of the covenant are different individuals or the same individual, Jesus is the best identifiable candidate, for the latter role or both roles.
Historical-Evidential Minimal Facts in Textual Group Two

In textual group two, the plausible conclusions (and their supporting data) lead to the identification of three additional minimal facts.

4. 2 Samuel 7:13, 16 contain a prophecy of a perpetual dynasty of the descendants of King David.

5. None of Jesus’ adversaries, friends, or any other first-century evidence challenged his Davidic status.

6. The NT and early extra-biblical sources multiply attest Jesus’ Davidic status.

Historical-Evidential Minimal facts in Textual Group Three

In textual group three the plausible conclusions (and their supporting data) lead to the identification of two additional minimal facts.

7. Micah 5:2 is a prophecy naming Bethlehem of Judea in association with the origins of the eschatological ruler of Israel.

8. The overwhelming majority of evidence indicates that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and was believed, by the NT authors, to be the fulfillment of the prophecy in Micah 5:2.

Historical-Evidential Minimal Facts in Textual Group Four

In textual group four the plausible conclusions (and their supporting data) lead to the identification of one additional minimal fact.

9. The NT records that Jesus performed miracles in accordance with the OT, certain sectarian, and proletariat Jewish messianic expectations.
Historical-Evidential Minimal Facts in Textual Group Five

In textual group five the plausible conclusions (and their supporting data) lead to the identification of six additional *minimal facts*.

10. No certain historical king or occasion can be assigned to Psalm 2.

11. The peculiar Hebrew term יְלִם translated as the English term *begotten* is found in no other near-eastern enthronement narrative and is never applied to a known historical Israelite king.

12. The earliest documents available consistently interpret Psalm 2 from an eschatological messianic perspective.

13. Psalm 16 speaks of the preservation of an individual from the corruption associated with death.

14. The individual in Psalm 16 believes that he will be preserved based on his relationship with Yahweh.

15. The earliest available Jewish documents (LXX) and the NT documents uniformly interpret Psalm 16:10 as a direct messianic prophecy.

*Applying the Criteria for Justifying Historical Descriptions*

The final step in this study is to apply the seven criteria discussed in Chapter 1 for justifying historical descriptions to the *minimal facts* identified above.\(^{688}\) Do these *minimal facts* do justice to the texts? Are they the best explanation of the texts?

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1. The statement, together with other statements already held to be true, must imply yet other statements describing present, observable data. (We will henceforth call the first statement ‘the hypothesis’, and statements describing observable data, ‘observation and statements’.)
The fifteen minimal facts statements generated by this investigation (the “hypothesis,” according to McCullagh) are supported by the present observable data. They also align well when the criteria for justifying historical descriptions are applied.

After AD 70 a future historical fulfillment for Malachi 3:1 became speculative at best. Even those who argue that a future temple will be constructed do not anticipate that (1) the Jewish nation will be dissolved, (2) the city of Jerusalem will be ravaged to the same extent as when Titus razed the it, and (3) the bulk of the remaining population will be deported. In addition, there were those among the first-century and later Jewish and Gentile populations who believed that God was judging the Jewish nation.

One might object that minimal fact three implies that Jesus must be divine or metaphysically unique among humanity. This objection is moot, however. The minimal facts identified above report only the historical evidence they do not pass judgment on metaphysical or

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2. The hypothesis must be of greater explanatory scope than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must imply a greater variety of observation statements.

3. The hypothesis must be of greater explanatory power than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must make the observation statements it implies more probable than any other.

4. The hypothesis must be more plausible than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must be implied to some degree by a greater variety of accepted truths than any other, and be implied more strongly than any other; and its probable negation must be implied by fewer beliefs, and implied less strongly than any other.

5. The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, it must include fewer new suppositions about the past which are not already implied to some extent by existing beliefs.

6. It must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, when conjoined with accepted truths it must imply fewer observations statements and other statements.

7. It must exceed other incompatible hypotheses about the same subject by so much, in characteristics 2–6, that there is little chance of an incompatible hypothesis, after further investigation, soon exceeding it in these respects.

ontological matters. The available historical documentation supports the uniqueness of Jesus, his birth in Bethlehem of Judea, and his Davidic decent.

In every remaining category for justifying historical descriptions, the elucidation offered by these minimal facts meet the seven criteria. These fifteen minimal facts do not require ad hoc speculation, the discarding of currently held beliefs, or the acceptance of novel theories. Historical descriptions are inherently less than certain, yet these minimal facts do not require the historian to abandon any aspect of the currently accepted body of historical knowledge. They are consistent with, and emerge directly from, an objective weighing of the available evidence.

The fifteen minimal facts presented above appear as a meager few when contrasted with the scope of the investigation. This effect is partially due to the strict hermeneutical criteria allowed by the study and the acceptance of many of the insights of historical critical scholarship. However, these fifteen are more than sufficient to establish the probability that the OT, on at least two occasions (2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Micah 5:2), directly prophecies regarding some aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry. On three other occasions (Psalm 2:7; Psalm 16:10; Malachi 3:1), a distinct possibility exists that these texts directly prophesy regarding some aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry. To reject this final conclusion, one must reject the available evidence.

Admittedly the available evidence is limited, partially because of the dearth of primary sources contemporary to the original writings of the OT; this fact contributes significantly to the exegetical difficulties identified throughout this work. The study of the OT would be bolstered substantially if additional extra-biblical primary sources from the pre-Maccabean and pre-exilic periods were available for comparison. Perhaps useful discoveries will be made in the future. Until then, the scholar must work with the available materials.
Recommendations for Future Research

While conducting the research for the current work, several texts discussing the discipline of hermeneutics were consulted. The proper method for interpreting OT prophecy remains an open dialogue among scholars. The current work dealt with direct prophecies of Jesus in his role as Messiah. Other hermeneutical methods identified, but not employed include: Jewish Hermeneutics, Sensus Plenior, Canonical Approach, Typology, and Single Message.690

At this point, it is not certain that any one hermeneutical method will emerge as the most prevalent or the most widely accepted. As a preliminary observation, based on the current study, it seems likely that a given prophecy, located in particular literary and historical context, may require a particular hermeneutical approach to arrive at the proper understanding of the author’s intent.

This prediction should not, however, be understood as an endorsement of an ad hoc methodology designed to arrive at a predetermined conclusion. In light of the diverse contexts providing the OT prophetic material, further research on how OT messianic prophecies are alleged to have obtained fulfillment is warranted. It is possible that each of the methods listed above are appropriate to one or more OT prophetic contexts. Isolating specific prophecies and identifying, applying, and justifying the hermeneutical methodology employed for each prophecy would constitute a significant advancement in the study of messianic prophecy.

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