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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE VII.

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT; OR, THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE MESSIANIC IDEA.

BY THE REVEREND HENRY T. SKILL, D.D.

WE believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. What warrant have we for this belief, and how did we get it? In our day we seek root ideas, and trace them through their various stages of growth. We are interested in the origin and development of an art, a language, a science, a people. We do not except our Bible or our religion from this investigation; counting that what is worthy to remain will remain, and that which is false will fall away of itself. Our Redeemer is the central figure in the New Testament: is he also central in the Old Testament teaching? We desire to find the beginning and to trace the development of the Messianic idea. By what method shall we interpret the passages which are looked upon as Messianic in the Old Testament?

Three methods of interpretation have been proposed, and are in use: (1) to examine them in the light thrown upon them by the New Testament writers; (2) to find their contents irrespective of the New Testament or their relation to it; (3) to trace from the beginning the gradual development of the Messianic idea. One investigator uses one method; another, another; hence the confusion which often arises in the mind of the reader. The fact is, that, in any perfectly fair treatment of the subject, all three methods must be used. The botanist must take into consideration, root, stalk, and flower, if he is to understand a

plant; not root, or stalk, or flower alone. The seeker after the truth about the Messianic idea must consider the basic ideas, the development, and the crowning flower. It is certain, that, if Jesus Christ had not come, the Old Testament conceptions of the Messiah would have always seemed obscure and imperfect, as they do to-day, to one who persistently ignores his advent, in the person of Christ, in the study of the subject. One who seeks an absolutely perfect Messianic conception in the Old Testament is doomed to disappointment; the root and stalk are there, but not the perfect flower. In this short chapter on a great subject, all three methods of interpretation will be used without special indication, for there is only space to show a line of thought, and outline an argument. We treat this article in four parts: The Messianic Idea, The Origin, The Development, and The Presentation.

THE MESSIANIC IDEA.

God through Christ redeeming the World to himself. But this full flower of the thought of the ages is now something different from what it was when Christ came to this earth, and took upon himself the form of humanity; the Jews were looking for a great king who would make them a mighty nation. Again, it differs somewhat from that of Isaiah and the still earlier conceptions. There are those who make much of the differences in the setting forth of the Messianic idea, and declare it to be an ideal without any real significance or looking toward a real king or kingdom, an ideal into which we have read a great reality. A mechanical theory of inspiration or revelation at once precludes any answer to the argument of the one who points to these different presentations, and declares that, each being a perfect picture, there is no consistent or true Messianic idea in the Old Testament. If, however, we believe in a progressive revelation, we are relieved of the ne-

cessity of holding that each presentation of the Messianic idea is perfect; for it has in it something a former one did not have, and it lacks something that another one, yet to come, will contain.

The old oak tree differs in form and shape from the acorn, and both differ from the little oak slip just out of the earth; yet each is an oak. The worm and the butterfly differ materially, but the butterfly is only a developed worm. The first rude pencil sketch of the portrait of a man differs materially from the finished painting, so life-like in all its details. By some such illustrations we come to see how the Messianic idea is treated in the Bible.

If we have a constantly enlarging conception of the Messianic idea, and that it is revealed more and more clearly, we are relieved of placing so much stress upon particular texts, and are not troubled when we are told that some of these texts will not now bear the weight of Messianic meaning formerly ascribed to them. We make a decided gain in the larger thought that the Messianic idea rests not wholly upon isolated passages, but had an early beginning, and was working in and through the development of the Israelitish people; hence our study deepens and broadens.

"The term Messianic is used in a wider and narrower sense: in the wider sense, it relates to the consummation and perfection of the Kingdom of God; in the narrower sense, it relates to a personage who is a commanding figure in this perfect condition of the Kingdom of God."

THE ORIGIN.

In investigating the origin of the Messianic idea, it is natural to turn at once to the prophets, where we have this King and Kingdom so graphically portrayed. Did this idea have its origin with them, and are they competent witnesses to set it forth in right terms? We will consider the second question first. It will depend very much

upon how we look upon the prophets, whether we get any further than the prophets. Who were the prophets? Simply men of great wisdom, piety, and political sagacity, who played upon the hopes and fears of their people, and held before them great ideas which were only brilliant ideals? If we take this view as the only one of the prophets, we go one way, and our investigation ends here. If, however, they were also men with messages from God, speaking that which God had given them, they stand upon a different plane. We listen to them, not only as great men imbued with a passionate love for righteousness and their country, but also as men whom God has specially commissioned. The attitude of a writer upon the Messianic idea towards the supernatural must always be taken into consideration. A writer who is biased against the supernatural, or does not believe in it, cannot be fair; for the prophets deal with the supernatural as well as the natural. The prophets declare that they speak, not in their own name, but in that of God; they profess that they are obliged to say things, and do things, that they would not do or say of themselves. Jeremiah found it hard to announce the coming doom to his beloved city. Jonah ran away to escape giving his message. The prophecies bear certain relations to each other: their teleological significance must be taken into consideration, if we are to have a true view of them in regard to this important question. If we read them carefully, we notice the prominence which they give to certain ideas about a king and kingdom; they are ever before them. They draw ideal pictures of times of peace, universal power and prosperity. Israel in her dark days is cheered by these predictions; the little nation rises and falls, and rises again, while the great nations round about her fall to rise no more. The ideal King and Kingdom, however, are not realized in Israel. She does not attain to universal or everlasting dominion: there is no great Israel-

itish king before whom all the nations bow. Yet the great picture is in process of creation, and is being carefully wrought out; it is asserted that the promise of the picture will be realized. We only begin to see now how that wonderful Kingdom and King are coming into their own; how the kingdoms of the earth are becoming the kingdoms of that descendant of the Royal house of David.

But did these great conceptions originate with the prophets or in their times? They take them up, they amplify them, but we do not find them original with them. To find the beginning we must go behind the prophets. But where?

In the story given to us in Genesis (i. 26-27) we have an ideal representation of man and his destiny, his proper relation to God and the world: he is a friend of God, and having the beginning of dominion over the earth and every created thing. But man turns from God, refuses to be led by him, and everything is changed, the harmony is broken. Man is at enmity with his Maker, with nature, with his better self; his path is strewn with difficulties. We call the break, sin. It is always the same story (outside of Genesis) in every man's life who breaks with his Maker. First chapter: peace, harmony, self-respect, righteousness; third chapter: passion, hate, estrangement from God and man, a path beset by difficulties. The second chapter is, as one has said, always disobedience of some righteous law of God or sin. Take the modern man, first chapter: good position, happy home, respect of all men, an upright man; third chapter: an outcast, home broken up, dismissed in disgrace from his position; the second chapter is always some sin.

God might have left man alone and without help, to reap the consequences of his break with him; but we read on, and we come to the offer of Divine help out of evil, a hope of victory over sin, and redemption from it. It is through

the seed of the woman (the woman first sinned) that the redemption or Redeemer is to come; it is heel against head (Gen. iii. 14-15), the least vulnerable part against the most vulnerable part. Thus before the time of Moses we have here the root of the Messianic idea.

The conflict with evil broadens out from man to family, from family to tribe, from tribe to nation; it becomes world-wide. There is then need of a Redeemer, not only for the individual, but for the family, the tribe and the nation, the whole world. We note some of the first steps in the progress of the Messianic idea in the hope given to Noah (Gen. v. 29) and Shem (Gen. ix. 25-27); the promises given to Abraham (Gen. xii. 1-3; xiii. 14-17; xxvii. 27-29), and the hope of a Conquering Ruler (Gen. xlix. 1, 8-12). We now come to the unfolding of this great idea.

THE DEVELOPMENT.

The Messianic idea develops from a simple idea to a complex organism: so complex that it is difficult to understand it in all its relations. But this marks the difference between a Divine and a human advent.

In a recent book we are told that three wonderful ideas run through the Hexateuch: that God is a Being confessedly all-powerful, but distinctly ethical and spiritual; that, as the righteous ruler of the universe, he desires to redeem the world from sin unto union with himself; and that Israel has been chosen as his human instrumentality. These are truths recognized by all the Old Testament writers and the standpoints from which the history of Israel was developed. This nation is set apart by God as one through whom a Redeemer and a redemption were to come.

We can trace the development of the Messianic idea.

1. *In the Time of Moses.*—The Israelitish nation bearing the Messianic Idea must be holy (Ex. xix. 3-6), for a great destiny is before the people (Num. xxiv. 17-19),¹ and

a royal inheritance (Deut. xxxii. 6-10). It must be in fear of God (Deut. xvii. 14-20), and in constant touch with him through the Prophetic (Deut. xviii. 15-19) and Priestly (Num. xxv. 13-18) orders.

2. *In the Time of the Kingdom.*—Here still the insistence is upon righteousness, for return to God must be through an effort after righteousness (1 Sam. ii. 1-10). This kingdom of righteousness shall have an everlasting priesthood and king (1 Sam. ii. 35-36; 2 Sam. vii. 11-16; xxiii. 1-7). It is in certain of the Psalms that the Messianic Idea in its glory stands out very clearly. The splendid ideals here set forth fit no earthly king, but do represent the power of the Messiah. In Psalm cx. we have the Royal King and Priest; in Psalm ii. the all-conquering King; in Psalm xlv. the Everlasting King; in Psalm lxxii. the King having universal Dominion; and in Psalm xxiv. the King of Glory.

3. *In the Time of the Earlier Prophets.*—We have Jehovah's love for Israel, through whom he would begin to redeem the world, made known through Hosea (ii. 19-23; xi. 8-9; xiv. 1-8) and Isaiah (iv. 2-6). The name, the sign of deliverance, Immanuel, is given in Isaiah (vii. 10-17). The birth of the Deliverer, Messiah, and his wonderful power are shown in Isaiah (ix. 2-7). The place of birth is declared by the prophet Micah (v. 2-5). The reign and kingdom of the Messianic Deliverer is graphically portrayed in Isaiah (xxv. 6-8; xxviii. 14-18; xxxiii. 14-24). The restoration of Israel and the perfection of the Messianic kingdom are glowingly pictured in Micah (iv. 1-5), Jeremiah (xxxii. 1-9, 31-34; xxxiii. 17-22), Zephaniah (iii. 11-13).

4. *In the Time of the Exile and Restoration.*—The exile to a distant land of the chosen nation, which, according to all human thought, should have dampened and put out the bright hope of the Messiah and Messianic Kingdom, only served to make it glow more brightly.

The Prophets Ezekiel (xi. 14-20; xxxiv. 11-15, 23-31; xxxvii. 21-28) and Isaiah (xlix. 22-23; lv. 1-5) declare that the nation shall be restored to greater prosperity than before the captivity; that the mighty powers of the earth shall assist in the restoration; that the covenant with Jehovah shall be renewed, and the glorious Messianic promises shall be fulfilled.

A new element is introduced into the conception of the Messiah,—that of servant and suffering servant. The prophetic, priestly, and kingly characters have been described, and now that phase of Christ's life with which we are so familiar is brought to the front: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes are we healed" (Isa. liii. 3-5). We find this idea carried out in the Twenty-second Psalm, and still further elucidated with the mission of the "servant" in Isaiah (xlii. 1-4; xlix. 1-6; lii. 13-liii. 12; lxvi. 1-3). It is the element of suffering that the Jews seemed to forget when the Messiah actually came. The deliverance of the suffering servant is shown in Psalm xvi. 5-11 and xci. Before the Messiah, Malachi declares that his Messenger shall appear, and announce his coming (Mal. iii. 1-6; iv. 1-6), and Daniel predicts that his kingdom shall be an everlasting one (vii. 9-18). The prophets vie with each other in foretelling the greatness, majesty, and glory of the Messianic Kingdom when it shall come in the fullness of its power (Hag. ii. 6-9; Isa. lx.; Joel ii. 28-29; Ps. xcvi.; Zech. iii. 6-10; vi. 9-15).

Thus we have briefly sketched the progress of the Mes-

sianic idea, and quoted some of the passages. The history of the Israelitish nation differs from all other nations in that the people had a peculiar mission, and it is to be judged, not according to the achievements in arts, science, wealth, commerce, or conquests, but as it approaches to, or departs from, the standard of a Holy People, through whom great good was to come to all mankind. God would redeem Israel first, and then all nations through Israel. God cannot work his holy will through an unholy people; hence, in the development of this great conception, this nation is frequently chastised and humbled, to bring it up to the standard, while other nations are left to their doom of everlasting destruction.

The mighty world-empires had been founded upon fraud, cruelty, lust, war, rapine; the kings had been hard and bloody men, but here was a little kingdom with new ideals of peace, righteousness, holiness, purity, and truth. Could these new ideals stand before the old, or would they be compelled to give way? It is the same question to-day. Can men do business and be followers of the Golden Rule? Can a man bear sway over his fellow-men, and not resort to violence or fraud even in mild forms? The contentions of the prophets were that righteousness was the only thing which would conquer in the end. Kings, princes, judges, rulers, are exhorted to trust in God, and look forward to a coming King and Kingdom, where right would always prevail. Meanwhile a great conflict was in progress, and the principles of truth were being tried to their utmost. This Israelitish people in carrying this thought of the Messianic reign was to look to God; at first it had no king. Jehovah ruled through chosen men,—Moses, Joshua, the Judges. When a king was given, God selected him. When the king refused to act as God would have him, he was rejected, as Saul was cast off. We note how this conception runs through the life of this nation until they were pre-

pared for the thought that the nation and the individuals in it owed allegiance immediately to God. But no Israelitish king approached the high ideal of ruling as God would have him rule. He was continually wanting his own way; hence the rejection of king after king, and the forward look to the perfect King and Kingdom, in which the ideal would be realized, not only for Israel, but for the whole world. There was the need of the Messianic King coming who should realize these ideals; not partially, but wholly, and as a person. Hence the prophets speak of him in no vague terms; they confidently make known his birth, his priestly and prophetic offices, his mission of suffering, his kingly power and prerogatives. Ewald says on this point: "There must come some one who would perfectly satisfy all the demands of true religion, so as to become the center from which all its forces should operate. Unless there first comes some one who shall transfigure this religion into its purest form, it will never be perfected, and its kingdom will never come. But he will and must come, for otherwise the religion which demands him would be false. He is the first true king of the community of the true God; and, as nothing can be conceived as supplanting him, he will reign forever in irresistible power."

THE PRESENTATION.

The wide variety and often minute detail with which the Messianic idea is presented affords ample testimony to its virility and power with the chosen people. While it is essentially the same with all its Old Testament exponents, yet it differs in form and in the way in which it is presented. Take the prophets; they lived and spoke under different circumstances and at different times; the problems were varied. Nahum in proclaiming the destruction of Nineveh had an agreeable task as a Jew; while Jere-

miah wept over his mission to announce the capture and sack of his beloved city of Jerusalem.

But we deal here with the God of the whole world, ruling in righteousness, and holding evenly the scales of justice. There is a forward look to a King and Kingdom under whom and in which all nations shall be gathered; where righteousness and peace shall not be partial but universal. The golden age is not in the past, but in the future, not only for Israel, but for all nations. In the Old Testament narrative we see that Israel is being specially trained to realize this ideal. The effort is to hold the heart of this nation true to Jehovah, while the ideal is being worked out. Now the prominent feature of the Messianic Kingdom is set forth as great earthly prosperity,—when the fields yield their increase and food is plenty, men buy and build and sell and get again; then it is spiritual prosperity; turning to God, the knowledge of Jehovah is made known throughout the land. Now the temple and its ritual and sacrifices are exalted; then attention is called to the uselessness of temple and altar and sacrifice. Now the supreme blessing is to Israel alone; then it is to all nations. Now the Messianic King carries all before him; all nations come under his rule; then he is despised and rejected of men. Now he sits in David's place, leading Israel to victory; then he is the suffering servant in ignominy and defeat.

The underlying conception, however, of the Messianic King and Kingdom never changes in its essential features, but Israel and the circumstances surrounding it do change. Israel grows proud and arrogant in her material prosperity; a prophet arises who rebukes her, and demands a return to righteousness as the chief glory of a nation. Again, Israel has long been humbled in the dust; she is repentant; a prophet proclaims an era of material success. The chosen nation substitutes an elaborate Temple

ritual, with costly sacrifices and offerings, for real religion; a prophet denounces the sacrilege, and declares that God will receive no such substitutes. Again, the temple is neglected, the altar thrown down, men have gone astray; the prophet urges a return to God, the rebuilding of the temple, and the necessity even for outward forms of worship.

Is it surprising that the Jews were sometimes at a loss rightly to interpret all these different representations of the kingdom of the Messiah, and that they marvelled at the presentations of the Messiah himself, who was now set forth a universal King, ruling all nations, and then as a suffering servant, despised and rejected of men? Can we blame them altogether for passing over and eliminating the elements of the picture which they did not wish to see, and exalting those which they did want to see? Men even now read out of the Bible that which they do not want to see, and read in that which they desire.

Looking back from our vantage-ground, we perceive that all the presentations were true: that Christ is the Royal Messiah, the one before whom literally kings and nations bow; that his Kingdom is progressive and everlasting; yet he was despised and rejected of men, his hands and feet were pierced, he was the suffering servant giving his life a ransom for many. The great priest, prophet, and king is realized in Christ; living, suffering, dying for man, Christ can alone lift him out of his sin. The Divine redemption is accomplished in Christ. Man sees God in Christ. Christ called the witness of the prophets; and, as we read their record, we marvel at the accuracy with which they described him and his work.

"The history of Israel culminates in Jesus Christ. This is true in the sense not merely that he is the last and greatest figure of Israel's history, but also that all the history was making toward him, preparing for him, revealing elements, ideas, and forces which united and came to their fullness in him."