

THE JEWS' MESSIAH

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The synonymous terms Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek), meaning "anointed one," found their ultimate, specific realization in Jesus, though the term had been variously applied in a general sense to others such as priests (Lev. 4:3), kings (I Sam. 24:6; II Sam. 19:21), and even the Gentile Cyrus (Isa. 45:1). That ultimate, specific realization is likely alluded to in Daniel 9:25-26 and applied by inspiration over two hundred times in the New Testament. Andrew confidently told Peter, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ" (Jn. 1:41). Matthew, writing to Jews, began his Gospel account, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). John, writing his Gospel account to all, explained his use of a few events from Jesus' life thus: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;" (20:31). Peter charged, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The Hebrews writer told His Jewish audience, "Consider the Apostle [one sent-DFC] and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;" (Heb. 3:1). The reason that these New Testament writers constantly contended that Jesus was the Messiah is likely primarily due to one factor: The Jews were expecting the Messiah to come. Even the Samaritan woman acknowledged that fact, saying, "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ:" (Jn. 4:25). Three questions naturally follow: first, did the Jews accept Jesus as the Messiah? Second, if not, then what were they looking for in a Messiah? Third, why did they not see Jesus as the Messiah?

The simple answer to the first question is "No." The Jews, generally, did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah--in fact, to this day some Jews are yet anticipating the coming of that one, while others have given up on the idea that one will come and view their heritage secularly and politically rather than spiritually. In the mid-second century A.D., Trypho the Jew wrote, "We all expect that Christ will be a man of men. We believe that Elijah, when he comes, will anoint him" (Ante-Nicene Fathers, I.219). Tertullian, half a century later, wrote, "To this day, in short, it is Christ that they are looking for, not Jesus. And they interpret Elijah to be Christ, rather than Jesus" (Ante-Nicene Fathers, III.334).

The second question is answered by the third century writer Hippolytus, who wrote,

And they allege that this one will be king over them--a warlike and powerful individual. After having done battle with the nations, he will restore Jerusalem the royal city for them. And into this city he will collect together their entire race and bring it back once more into ancient customs. (Ante-Nicene Fathers, V.138)

That this expectation was in place in the time of the Lord is evident from Acts 1:6 which records the disciples asking Jesus, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The kingship of the one to come was a constant Old Testament theme (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:16; Eze. 37:24,25; Joel 3:16,20).

If Jesus were a king,--He was (Rev. 17:41), then why did the Jews not recognize Him? There are perhaps two primary reasons: first, the Jews misunderstood the nature of the King; and, second, the Jews misunderstood the nature of the kingdom. The Jews expected a proud, powerful, awe-inspiring figure who would through his very presence command respect, forgetting that Zechariah wrote, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding

upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zec. 9:9; cf Luke 19:30-35). Similarly, the Jews expected a kingdom rivaling Rome in physical, military supremacy, being unaware of the trial of Jesus before Pilate:

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? ... Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:33; 36)