

Do The Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament Point to Jesus or to Someone Else?—Part 1

Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. Walter Kaiser, Dr. Pinchas Lapide

John Ankerberg: Welcome! We're so glad that you've joined us tonight. We have two distinguished scholars on our program. First, Dr. Pinchas Lapide, who is an Orthodox Jewish theologian and one of only four Jewish scholars of the New Testament in the world today. And along with him is Dr. Walter Kaiser, Dean of Trinity Seminary in Deerfield, Illinois. He is also a Professor of Semitic Languages and of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The topic that we want to discuss: "Do the Hebrew Scriptures—do the Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures—point to Jesus or to somebody else?" Let's get down to it. What is the evidence, one way or the other?

Now, Dr. Kaiser, I want to come to you for the first four minutes, because I find in the Evangelical Christian community many people don't even know what the case is. What the prophecies are. Is there a case there? And we believe the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, that it does say something, but it's got to say something to the people it was written to. I'd like for you to start us off, give us an outline, give us a case that we can start with. Then I'm going to ask, Dr. Lapide, that you respond to what he says. We'll give you both about four minutes of time, and take it from there.

Dr. Walter Kaiser: Well, thank you, John. It's a delight to speak on this because so many Evangelical Christians, I think, don't realize the real case that is there. The Messiah, or the doctrine of the Messiah, is not something that's on the side. It's central, it's what the whole Tenach, the whole Old Testament, is all about. Here is 77 percent—over three-fourths—of the whole of what Christians consider to be their Bible, but they have neglected. And the case, I think, is a marvelous one.

It starts already at the very beginning of the Torah, from the first five books of Moses, and marches all the way through the biblical text. If I were to highlight it, I would say that it begins already with Genesis 3:15, "The seed of the woman." And God there promises in a surprising move to Eve, already in the Garden of Eden, if I understand it, that here there is to come a descendant, a male descendant, the wonder of wonders, from the woman's line and from her race, and that from within this context there would come a crushing blow to evil, so already....

Ankerberg: Let me just read the verse quickly, okay?

Kaiser: Yes. Go ahead.

Ankerberg: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel" Genesis 3:15.

Kaiser: Right. That's the same Bible we both use there. So then we move to Genesis 12—I

think the case to Abraham. God selects one man and tells him that indeed not only the Messiah, but you see, it's a larger case than this. It involves the whole land issue, which is just as abiding and as eternal as is the promise of Messiah.

We're in a context today in which we have seen a marvelous fulfillment, I think, or at least all of the components are on the scene for the fulfillment of Israel being restored to her own land. That was just as eternal as is the promise about the Messiah and the two are linked together. I can't pull one apart and say, "Well, the Messianic, the spiritual, internal salvation is deeper, and that is eternal, but the one about the land is not." They are locked together.

So that becomes the second great moment in history itself. That's when God called Abraham out of the land of Ur, the Chaldees, and then gives him this word. "I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great." And then I take it as a purpose, a result clause, here, "So that you may be a blessing. And I'll bless those that bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. Even all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you." And I take it that the Nephthaliim form there...it is a passage—"You will be blessed." And it comes as a gift that God is going to give. But who are all the peoples? The list of nations just set out in Genesis 10. So, again, from the Jewish heritage, there is a gift that is to be dispersed by the living God for all the nations upon the face of the earth. I would say that's the second great moment.

And the third one is in 2 Samuel 7, when God repeats the same word and enlarges it to David. And there David wants to build a house for God and God said, "No, for reasons I will tell you I don't wish you to do it. But I'll make a house out of you. I'll make a dynasty and a kingdom and a throne out of you. And your son will be my son, and I will be a Father to him and he will be my son."

This is an amazing word, because it blows David's mind. He goes in and sits down in the house of God and he said, "Who am I, and what is my family, that You have done all this for me?" And then David shows his awareness that this is to be for a great while to come. He said, "And not only are you doing this now, but this is for everlasting and that this should be the charter, the "torah t'Adam—this should be the law for all mankind." He can't believe it, nor can the translations.

Most of the translators say the Hebrew is very difficult here. But I have given it to ordinary audiences. I say, "Do you know 'Torah'?" They say, "Law." "And how about 'Adam'?" "Adam—man." That's right. I said, "You're brighter than the scholars." For the text says here, "And this should be the Law for all mankind, for all of humanity." And I think that this is where the next great moment comes. I think with these three moments, we have the case for the Messianic doctrine laid in its basic forms.

Ankerberg: All right. Dr. Lapidé, just take right off here and take the next four minutes, and if you'd like, respond to that, or build your own case.

Dr. Pinchas Lapidé: Well, I cannot full agree with you about the snake because, unfortunately, evil in this world is far from being crushed. If it were, the newspapers wouldn't know what to print, and the TV stations wouldn't know what to transmit because most of it is evil. We live in, unfortunately, an all too palpably unredeemed world, you and I.

But, if you come to Abraham, agreement with you is much easier, because I would go a step further than you. Not only Abraham, who was the first Hebrew, but his son Isaac, and his grandchild Jacob, our three great forefathers, become, before they ever get to be a people, or own a land, or have any pledges for their own progeny, they have the obligation of mediating God's blessings to the entire world.

And the three sayings, for all the three forefathers, tally, with a few small differences we don't have to go into, but universalism is implanted in them before there is such a thing as a Jewish people at all. In other words, Jews cannot be Jews if they limit themselves to their own livelihood, if they narrow their horizon to their own nation. Because we have received the message and the precept of bringing God's blessings to the entire world and that goes from China to Iceland. And as long as we don't fulfill that divine commandment, we are not yet fully-grown Jews.

As to David, I couldn't agree more. The dynasty of David a thousand years before Jesus—and obviously, you have Jesus in the back of your mind—he would be included in that prophecy, which has no time limit. “To thee and thy house and thy son.” Of course, if I take it literally, his son is just the king after him—Solomon. But that's preposterous, because in Hebrew parlance, as we both know, by “son” progeny is meant almost timelessly, and therefore the Nathan Prophecy, as the theologians call it, give this David, who is far from being a paragon of virtues, but God chose him and God is free to choose whom He likes, He will not bow to theological rules. Thank God for that.

Kaiser: That's true.

Lapide: He chose this David, with all his virtues and his vices, to become the bearer of God's blessing and the continuer of the handing out of this blessing through his dynasty—through Jesus, if you like—to mankind. I agree here, and I don't think we have to quibble.

Ankerberg: Okay. Dr. Kaiser, respond back.

Kaiser: Oh, I like that! I think we're working together here. I believe that that's exactly correct. The Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sequence there is a repetition of the same word that was given to Abraham. In fact, they become the first installments on the fulfillment. For when Abraham looks to see all that God is going to do for the ages that lie in the future, that surely he is unaware of in terms of how much distance or what the gap is there, surely when he saw Isaac that was born, there was kind of the “down payment,” the kind of “Whitman's Sampler” on the big box of chocolates that is to come. This was earnest money on what God was going to do in the future. So I do like that.

And if I sense what we are saying here; Yes, the son is a progeny, is a whole series, so we would have to have little loops connecting them as they point toward the grand Messiah that is to come in the future. And when we spell out these, as it were, peaks that are here, I'm kind of embarrassed, because already there are so many texts that we are not touching within the rabbinic writings. Even there, just to show you that this is not a Christian project, by a long shot, we have some 456 passages in the Tenach, in the Old Testament, which are discussed and given a Messianic label. So this is a heritage, as it were, and the Christian community in that sense is a “Johnny-come-lately” to the discussion. It has been in progress for a long time. But still these are some very, very key passages, and I do agree.

Ankerberg: All right. Dr. Lapide, you still believe the Messiah is coming, is that not true?

Lapide: Yes.

Ankerberg: All right. And you, Dr. Kaiser, believe the Messiah has come. But we're using the Scriptures and we're building up to that person. Dr. Lapide just believes that it is not fulfilled in Christ, and you, Dr. Kaiser, believe what?

Kaiser: Jesus Christ is the One who, as a matter of fact, will fit the evidence for all of these expectations.

Ankerberg: Dr. Kaiser, draw the outline for us of, you started with some prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures and you're going toward a point. Who's the point, in your estimation, talking about, and carry on there.

Kaiser: Well, we have such great agreement here, my good friend, Dr. Lapidé is apparently in agreement with me that Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12 and 2 Samuel 7 indeed are very, very important passages for the discussion of the doctrine of the Messiah. But how does that relate to Jeshua, or the Christian claim that Jesus is the One who is the fulfillment of it?

And I think, first of all, that Jeshua, or Jesus, is Jewish, first of all—He is from the line of David. Secondly, He was born in the House of David in Bethlehem, and we're only beginning to start to roll up the claims because there are some, again, 400 passages which give very, very specific details of the person and work and ministry and life of this particular one.

But let's go to perhaps the one that is most sensational of all, and the one, I think, that Dr. Lapidé rather hinted at at the beginning, and that is; If He is indeed the Messiah, if this Jeshua is, as we Christians claim, the Messiah, then why is there not peace in the world today? I think that was one of the issues here. And this brings us to the heart of the issue, that there is the real problem that He must come to suffer first and then He will come back again.

But this raises a very delicate matter in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Can you have one and the same Messiah suffer and also rule and reign? Traditionally, as I understand Jewish scholarship, it has divided that question. There is Mashiach Ben Joseph and Mashiach Ben David, Son of Joseph and Son of David. One to suffer and One to die.

But, just quickly, Zechariah, the prophet that comes almost at the end of whole of the Hebrew Canon of Scriptures—Zechariah 12:10—there you have the Lord speaking and He said, "They will look on *me*"—the "me" very definitely there. It's first person—"They will look on me whom they have pierced." Now, this is an interesting thing. How can the Lord be talking about Himself and identifying Himself with his servant and they will look on Him whom they have pierced and "Israel shall mourn, mourn as for an only son." And yet He is coming in that context with great peace and with great power. Coming with peace and power and yet on the other hand, He is One who has been pierced.

Now, that's difficult to find a Messiah...of all that we've had, and we've had many pretenders. History is filled with Messiahs from Barchochba on, perhaps. But we've got some problems with the previous Messiahs. Not all of them have been pierced. Not any of them, save this one, as far as I know, have been resurrected. And there we come to the heart of the matter.

Ankerberg: Okay, let's have Dr. Lapidé respond.

Lapidé: Well, I accept, first of all, to put it quite bluntly...

Kaiser: Oh, you must!

Lapidé: ...that this Jesus of Nazareth, as a devout, believing Jew, was a chosen tool of God who had to play a central role in the divine plan of salvation, in whose name a worldwide Gentile church was founded. I fully believe that is part of God's plan of salvation. It didn't happen behind the back of God, and it wasn't a mistake, to put it even better, which does not mean at all that I agree with the rest of your words.

Because, to me, he is, to use your fine word, an earnest money for the fulfillment of many, many of the prophetic pledges and promises which are still unfulfilled today. And I do not think that Jesus of Nazareth Himself believed that in him, his person, his work, and his passion, and his resurrection, *all* of God's promises had been fulfilled. I'm quite sure that He thought that in

the Second Coming only, for which you and I wait, to make sure so that what we today speculate will become then certainty, which today it is not yet. In that Second Coming I trust and hope—without knowing—that all these promises for the fulfillment of which we devoutly pray—you in the church and I in the synagogue—that will come true when he comes back.

Ankerberg: Dr. Lapide, can I break in, though, and ask you to comment on the Hebrew Scripture itself. What do you think that it is talking about, who is it talking about? Do you see in the Hebrew Scriptures—because that’s the evidence that both the Christians and the Jews will take a look at and say, “This is what we’ve got to go with.” What does it say if it is not saying that?

Lapide: Well, I’m afraid things are not that simple because the way you ask, it’s a typically Greek question. The Greeks, who have conquered your Church and have Hellenized it from soup to nuts, are the ones who want precise answers, who only know black and white and no gray in between, and who want a “Yes” or a “No,” which is the American way of life, too.

That’s not the way the Bible operates. A saying which was popular in Jesus’ day, and has lost none of its relevance today, says that in every Bible word, there are seventy possibilities of interpretation.

Ankerberg: Let me give you one. Okay? Because you said Jesus was a Jew and he did not leave his Jewish roots. But Jesus said in Luke 24. He said to them, “How foolish you are and how slow of heart that you do not believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?”

Lapide: Correct.

Ankerberg: Now, if Jesus Himself thought that those other Jewish people should realize from the prophets, then somebody had that interpretation going the same direction.

Lapide: Correct. But when you remember in the same New Testament, the famous question of Jesus addressed to the Twelve Apostles, all 13 of them Jews, “Who am I, say the people?” It’s a good Jewish question, addressed to 12 Jews, and very Jewishly, it gets five different answers.

Ankerberg: But then He said, “Who do *you* say that I am?” He asked what did the people think and then He said specifically, “Who do you say....?”

Lapide: But the guy who answers is only one, and I fear, from what I know about the band of Apostles and all the New Testament has to say about them, they were far from unanimous even on the key issues, which is perfectly all right, because pluralism belongs to the foundation pillars of Judaism ever since Abraham. We are not unanimous.

Ankerberg: Dr. Kaiser?

Kaiser: Yes, I’d like to get in on this. This is so good.

I think, though, Peter, when he makes that confession at Caesarea Philippi, he said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jeshua, Jesus, does not say, “Oh, you shouldn’t say that. That’s wrong.” But He comes back and says, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood hasn’t revealed this....”—Good Jewish expression there, too. “You didn’t get this because you were smart. My Father, which is in Heaven—He’s the One who gave you that.” So, He sort of gives Peter’s answer “A-plus,” and then says, “You stole it! It was my Father that helped you with that answer.” So it’s not a human empirical observation, or even Greek, it’s a good Hebrew concept of revelatory. It’s a deposit, it’s a “given” that he got from above.

Lapide: Would you explain to me, Dr. Kaiser, why two lines after calling Peter “blessed” and

implying that that truth he never got out of his own thinking but from God, why does He suddenly call him “Satan” and says, “Behind me! Away from you!” Why is there such a short step from the blessing to the curse?

Kaiser: Yeah, and I think that’s very simple because now He answers on His own, he is not getting help from heaven. He turns around and says, “Don’t go to the cross. Don’t go to the cross. That’s not for you,” and he goes from being at the front of the class all the way to the back of the class. Because now he’s using **his** smarts, his own brain. And our Lord rebukes him rather thoroughly. So it’s just like the great leaders of the Old Testament. They are not paragons of virtue. It is not the men that we’re after. We’re after the revelation, after the truth of God. And it is the **text** that I think is the important thing here.