

# Do the Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament Point to Jesus or to Someone Else?—Part 2

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

(edited for publication)

**Dr. John Ankerberg:** We're talking with world-famous Dr. Pinchas Lapidé, an Orthodox Jewish theologian, who is one of only four Jewish scholars of the New Testament in the world today. And also we have Dr. Walter Kaiser, Dean of Trinity Seminary and Professor of Semitic Languages there. Dr. Kaiser is representing Orthodox Christianity, and Dr. Lapidé is representing Orthodox Judaism.

Dr. Kaiser, we ended last time with a question that Dr. Lapidé brought up concerning the statement that was given to Jesus from Peter, when Peter made his "Messianic interpretation," if you want, apply to the fact that He ought to conquer, He ought to not go in and go to Jerusalem and suffer and die on the cross. Jesus turned around after He had just, in your own words said, "Peter, before when you said I am the Messiah, I am the Christ, you go to the head of the class." Now he needs to go to the back of the class when he says this other statement. Document that. Is there anything in Scripture that leads you to suggest that Jesus was right in saying that, or was Peter actually right and Jesus was wrong?

**Dr. Walter Kaiser:** Well, at that point I think Peter is expressing the general *hoi polloi* concern within the community, whether it be Jewish or non-Jewish at that point. How can you have one person suffer, and how can you have that same person come as a king? If he suffers and dies, that's it. It's all over, unless you know of some way of getting him back again. And if he comes back, then is he going to be a king? And even if he is a king, will he bring peace? And if he brings peace, will this enter and bring us into the grand hope that all of the peoples of the world have ever had?

**Ankerberg:** Okay, for the people that didn't hear last week, though, and before Dr. Lapidé gets in here, the thing is, that you've got to admit that the Jews had a lot of verses that supported their idea of exactly what Peter was saying. They were looking for the Messiah to come and conquer. Okay? Give us the verse that shows the other side that, if you want, should be the balance there, from your position.

**Kaiser:** The word "Messiah" doesn't occur that frequently within the biblical text, and especially as it applies to our topic. We may be talking about a very, very limited number, maybe less than 40 examples, and out of those 40, perhaps only nine or ten apply to our particular topic here.

But Daniel 9, I think, in the famous 70-Week Prophecies, which is a very complicated prophecy, but this much is clear. There is a discussion of *Mashiach*, of Messiah, "The Anointed One,"

and the Messiah will be “cut off.” That’s clear. He will be cut off. So, the connection of a Messiah being cut off is found here.

But yet there are so many other passages where He comes triumphant: [e.g.,] Zechariah 14—He touches down on the Mount of Olives and the mountain splits, north and south, and He sets up a rule of everlasting peace.

Now, how do you make these two fit together? And my answer, which I think is the Christian answer, and it is *Jeshua’s* claim—Jesus’ claim—that they are put together in one Person. For He died, but He rose again, as Dr. Lapidé has so brilliantly documented that you do have the resurrection, and it did take place. It is factual, and I am indebted to my good brother for the brilliant piece of work that he did on documenting the fact that Jesus died and indeed He did come back. He was resurrected.

**Ankerberg:** And did it historically.

Dr. Lapidé, in your response to Dr. Kaiser, let me come your direction and say, I asked him, “Was Peter wrong?” Obviously there are a lot of verses that show the Messiah will come and conquer. At the same time, does the Jewish community recognize its own verses in the Old Testament that show that the Messiah will also come and suffer?

**Dr. Pinchas Lapidé:** I’m afraid it’s a little bit more complicated.

**Ankerberg:** Okay.

**Lapidé:** At the time of Jesus, as far as documentation in Judaism can prove it, we have 14 different distinguishable Messianic expectations, which are all children of the fervent Messianic hope of Israel and the pluralism which has been in-built in my creed.

Take pluralism on one leg and the fervent hope on the other and what do you get? Fourteen different expectations. The two prevalent ones are the reigning, winning, victorious Messiah, who chases the Romans out—whose yoke hangs heavily on Israel’s neck—and then establishes in Jerusalem the Kingdom of God; and a suffering Messiah, who is almost the antithesis, has been prevalent also in many circles of contemporary Judaism in the first century.

Peter, who is called “the Rock-man”—and the name implies the mentality of a guy who, well, a “go-getter,” I would say today in America—He couldn’t possibly fall in love with the idea of a suffering Messiah, therefore he wanted none of it to happen to his beloved Master, Jesus. But I have a suspicion, after reading through the Gospels for 30 years, that Jesus’ self-understanding, for the \$64,000 question of all theology, was, at least in the last two weeks in His life, a combination of the suffering servant of God, who has to go *through* death in order to come back as Daniel’s Son of Man on the clouds of heaven to bring the Kingdom of Heaven.

That alone explains to me the tormenting puzzle of the headlong flight of the Apostles at Golgotha. What’s the matter with them? He chose them each. They must have been perfect, fine people, stout in belief if not Nobel Prize winners, at least, in intelligence. But certainly stout in belief. But why did they flee when their Master died in a most cruel manner, after He had pre-announced His suffering three times to them? Were they deaf? No they were not.

The only explanation for their flight, to me, is that they imagined the course of events to be a quick, two-act drama. His Passion, His crucifixion, His death and immediately followed by His return upon the clouds of heaven. Good Friday passes, Saturday drags on. They scan the heavens, they look into their heart, despair grows, and then the flight begins as an almost abandonment of all the Messianic hope Jesus had instilled in them in three years.

That’s the way I think it happened. Otherwise, it doesn’t make sense that these 12 Apostles

flee like frightened chickens.

**Kaiser:** I think that's a possible scenario. Yet, on the other hand, I really think that even as they are gathered in the Upper Room some days later on, the events of Easter Sunday morning have already taken place. These individuals are normal people, they're regular. We don't have super-plastic saints here. We have normal people, with all of the fears and intimidations.

And I think the great hope was that...I don't see where it really ever did figure with the suffering and the dying part. This wasn't true when the mother of James and the other disciple came up and said, "Can my two boys be up high up in the government here when they set it up. I'd like them to be treasurer and secretary. Can they really get in on this?"

And the concept all the time was the Kingdom of God. "Bring your rule in! Bring your reign in! None of this "cross" talk, none of this suffering." They never connected. The whole theology of the tabernacle and the temple has now been lost now that we've gone into the Exile. We've forgotten atonement theology and we're talking about only kingly theology.

And because of that disparity, the Disciples are only thinking "kingly" theology. They are not thinking at all about the suffering mode of it. And when Jesus appears, they still can't believe it. They think it's a ghost. And when the women tell them, they say, "Oh, that can't be right!" They are totally unprepared for it.

But this is not to say that there were no people in Israel like that. Why, even when Anna was there in Luke 2, and Simeon, they bring Jesus in, just as a baby only a few days old, and Simeon will take him up and say that famous, "*Nune Dimittis*"—"Now lettest thy servant depart in peace," he said, "Because my eyes have seen your salvation." He was among those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel.

There was a cadre, a "*sheerith*," a remnant. God always has had a remnant. You can't go by the majority—How many are raising your hands? If you ask, "How many were for this in Israel?," it's an abysmal thing. The Gallup Poll would have all been on one side. But there was a remnant here, a few, Simeon and Anna and the others, who were waiting for the consolation of Israel.

But in the election of God, He took that which was simple to confound the wise, as the New Testament way of saying it. He took that where people who didn't have skills or ordinarily were not those who would catch on the fastest within Israel. I'm sure that there were brighter and more adept people. But in order to magnify the grace of God, He took that which was weak in order to make it strong.

**Ankerberg:** All right, I'm going to ask both of you, Dr. Lapidé, first of all, for you to respond to what we have been taking about. But then I want you also to give me more evidence from the Hebrew Scriptures concerning the Messiah and does it apply to Jesus or not. All right?

**Lapidé:** Well, to put it bluntly, over 33 Old Testament prophecies usually mentioned by Evangelical people which "prove," so to say, that Jesus was *the* Messiah, are, to say the least, ambivalent. They are not, God forbid, lies or falsehoods. They could very well point to Jesus, but they could also point to others. There is no one prophecy in the entire Old Testament which indubitably and beyond any shadow of a doubt say[s], "This Jesus and no other one is the Messiah of Israel." That's the first point.

The second point is that you, as an American, Dr. Kaiser, living in this free, blessed country which hasn't known wars, no torment, no tyranny in human recollection, you probably have difficulty envisaging the psychological situation of the Twelve Apostles and Jesus living under the brutal yoke of a Roman Empire which didn't care a bit what happened to them. All they wanted was to exact maximum of taxes and keep peace under *their* terms. Under such condi-

tions, to expect the Messiah *only* to suffer, without getting rid of the Roman yoke, as the expectation had been for several generations before Jesus, is a tall order which only a very few Jews—some did—were able to fill.

So, the suffering Messiah—which has a long history in Jewish thought, beginning from Isaiah 53, half a millennium before Jesus—was prevalent in smaller circles, while the reigning and winning Messiah was the hope of the masses, to put it bluntly.

But there is a point in Acts 1 when The Resurrected appears to His Disciples, there is only one single question they put to Him: “Will you *at this very time* establish the Kingdom for Israel?” A question which in its wording is undoubtedly political, certainly royal and kingly, and leaves no space for speculation about any thing spiritual or unbodily.

And if Jesus answers, according to Acts Chapter 1, “Yours is not to know, nor does the Son know, but only the Father in His own sovereignty, when the Kingdom will be established.” He does not say “No” to their monarchic, political expectation. He only says, “Nobody knows. Even I, Jesus, do not know.”

He doesn’t say, “You stupid hillbillies! What do you expect—a political kingdom?” He doesn’t say that. He says clearly, “Yes,” by not gainsaying their political hope, only as to the time, He, Jesus—and that makes Him to me an extremely appealing person—“I don’t know myself,” says Jesus. “Only my Father in heaven does.” So their political hopes of a ruling Messiah couldn’t have been totally amiss. Jesus must have shared them to some extent.

**Kaiser:** Yes. And that’s my point. I think we’re in total agreement there, and that’s where I think the Evangelicals are the friends of the Jewish understanding and cause. Because I find no difficulty with that explanation.

As a matter of fact, that’s exactly why I said that the community was only concerned about, “Get that Roman eagle out of town!” and “We’ve got to get out of these galley ships—why should we be rowing away? Why must we be paying the price of the heavy taxes...carrying the pack to the next mile-marker? This is unfair! It’s just unconscionable! We’ve got to get out from under this heavy yoke.”

And Jesus does not rebuke them and say, “That’s wrong! You’ve misunderstood it totally.” They have an aspect, but they have missed, I think, *a parallel* and that is *still* the discussion in the Jewish-Evangelical dialogue to this day. That’s precisely the point that is under discussion. It’s different from the Jewish-Christian dialogue on all other fronts.

We shift the basis for it here, because our basis is that there’s a priestly aspect to the Messiah as well as the kingly aspect. And it is the priestly part of the dialogue that the Evangelical wants to pick up. “He died for our sin. There must be a trespass offering”—the “*asham*” of Isaiah 53. Who is this Servant that comes and gives His life as a trespass offering? And that is not usually discussed in the whole spread.

But one other thing, if I can get another thing in here, and that is the whole “plurality” concept. You have mentioned this several times. And while I recognize that the meaning spread can be very, very wide, yet it seems to me that just as in our conversation, ultimately, if there is to be any kind of communication or “common-cation,” common coinage between us, somehow we’re going to have to come back to the meaning of the author.

If I’m going to understand you properly, I could put sixty different constructions on what you have said. But I won’t be fair to you as a human, much less as a person in the theological community, unless I hear you and try to appreciate adequately what you are intending to say. I can’t maybe *comprehend* in everything, but I should be able to apprehend it and be able to get some

close correspondence to what you have said.

So, I think that's our job with the writers of Scripture. And I don't like the distinction made between Greek thought and Hebrew thought, as if Hebrew thought was just paratactic and you have, "Vuv, Vuv, Vuv..., and, and, and," and you're just putting "truth, truth, truth," and they're out there like a cafeteria. Just because you do not have, as in Greek thought, a thesis and you have opposed to that in a dialectic, out of which comes a synthesis or some other type of movement where you have a logical construction, does not mean that within the Hebrew thinking they were not after truth or that they didn't have a singular truth.

As a matter of fact, that's the distinction drawn between the false prophet and the true prophet. One gets his word from God—[e.g.,] Jeremiah, in his discussion. The other one is shooting from the hip, and is saying what appears to him. And therefore I do think that we do have something by which we can monitor what is adequate and what is inadequate as far as approximating the understandings, even on the topic of Messiah.

**Ankerberg:** Can I cut in right here? Let me cut to the outline of your book. In the book, we're talking about Hebrew thought, what I liked about the book was that you [Dr. Lapidé] took the Hebrew Scriptures and you said that the Hebrew promises themselves given, starting in Genesis 3:15...it narrows it down. It's coming to be one who is a man—a He-person—to the woman. The seed will come. And then it goes to Abraham, to his line, and it keeps narrowing down as you go through Abraham, David and then things are added on as you get into Isaiah and Zechariah and so on down the line. Okay?

So that it seems to me, Dr. Lapidé, that if you take this progression, that it doesn't just apply to everybody, as far as I see the Hebrew Scriptures. Would you agree? That the Messiah just can't be anybody that is Jewish?

**Lapidé:** Certainly not. But He *has* to be a Jew.

**Ankerberg:** Okay. He's got to be a Jew, but then there are qualification....

**Lapidé:** In other words, if the message of the One God who cares for mankind would have been brought into the entire Occident by a Greek philosopher or a Roman priest, I would have great difficulties understanding Jesus as a chosen tool of God. But since this message came to the Occident by means of a devout, pious Jew named Jesus, I cannot help but consider the Church and all its developments, with all the mistakes the Church has committed and it goes on committing—By golly! A very fallible institution just like my synagogue....

**Ankerberg:** Let me push both of you, though, and I'll do something that's really tricky. I'll give you 45 seconds each. If there are, in your estimation, in the Messianic Scriptures qualifications, what are the qualifications that apply to somebody called the Messiah that is coming?

**Lapidé:** Yeah. In Jewish understanding, only the results of his coming count and not where he was born, nor his name, nor whatever he may have suffered. If he brings about a world without strife, war, and atomic insanity, he will be the Messiah. If he fails to do that, he cannot claim Messiahship.

**Ankerberg:** So the words of Scripture itself in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew Scriptures concerning the person himself...you're just looking at the result. What do you do with the qualifications for the person himself?

**Lapidé:** You Christians are a typical "Who" religion, always centralizing your attention on the "who it is." We Jews are interested in the "What."

**Ankerberg:** I'm interested in what the Scriptures said.

**Lapide:** You believe in the Redeemer; I put first “Redemption.” You believe in the King; to me the “Kingdom” is far more important. The “who” and the “what” is what mainly divides us. It’s a matter of mentality and not philosophy nor theology.

**Ankerberg:** Friends can be friends and we can disagree, and that’s why I’m going to push you on *your* verses. Not the ones the Christians wrote, but your verses are the ones that give us that data. Are you saying that that data in your Scriptures does not matter?

**Lapide:** Oh yes, they matter very much. But they are all pointless without an address and number and a phone number to it. It doesn’t say “Jesus Christ, Nazareth, Highway 61, telephone so and so.” No point in my Scripture says that.

**Ankerberg:** I sure appreciate this conversation. Dr. Kaiser, I’ll give you the 45 seconds.

**Kaiser:** I like the “what” part of it too as well. I think it’s not only “who” but it is “what.” And the great part of the “what” is not only peace, and I like that and I’m looking forward to that. And not only Israel, and I think that’s important and significant and you don’t drop that out of Scripture. That’s at the heart.

But I do think it is “what,” too, in terms of redemption. He died for my sin. I do need the sin question taken care of if I’m going to have peace. I can’t have a whitewash job and just sort of say, “That’s that! Let’s start all over again,” and by some magic.... No. Everything in the Tabernacle and everything in the Temple looked forward to a substitute who was to come. I do need that substitute or someone who is going to pay it because we’re in hock. We’re in worse debt than what the United States is, and we’ve got a debt. And this is even a greater one.