

Do The Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament Point to Jesus or to Someone Else?—Part 5

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

Dr. John Ankerberg: We're talking about: "Do the Old Testament prophecies point to Jesus or Somebody Else?"

We have two scholars as our guests tonight. Dr. Pinchas Lapide, an Orthodox Jewish theologian who is one of only four Jewish scholars in the world who teaches the New Testament from a Jewish perspective.

And Dr. Walter Kaiser is here. [He was, at the time of this interview,] the Dean of Trinity Seminary in Deerfield, Illinois, and Professor and Chairman of the Department of Semitic Languages and Old Testament.

Dr. Kaiser, would you set the base, from the Hebrew Scriptures themselves, of where is it that they talk about the Messiah; and why is it that you believe they are talking about Jesus and nobody else?

Dr. Walter Kaiser: The Hebrew Scriptures, I believe, are concerned about the Messiah and the great plan of the Messiah from Genesis 3:15, Genesis 12, the great promise to Abraham, and 2 Samuel 7, the great promise to David. And then, with that, there is added the wonderful prophecy in Isaiah 53, where the Servant of the Lord seems to me to have the Messianic role and comes to give His life a ransom, not only for the nation Israel, but indeed for all the nations upon the face of the earth. It is the question of, "How can I get rid of my sin?" And I think this is the text that helps us. And then Daniel 7 says that *same* one who is the Son of Man comes on clouds of heaven and comes as ruler and reigner. So, I take it that this is the great theme of the Scriptures from the beginning to the end.

And when Jesus walks into the scene, He is the One who says, "Indeed, these are they that spoke about *me*," and points to Himself as the One who is the fulfiller. He, a matter of fact, criticized the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus: "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that Moses and the Prophets and the writings have said about me. And beginning with Moses and with the Prophets and the Psalms, He began to show them all things concerning Himself." Our Lord thought that the Disciples could and ought and should have known if they had been reading the text the way that He wanted them to read it.

Ankerberg: Okay. Dr. Lapide?

Dr. Pinchas Lapide: Well, I fully agree with you, my friend Kaiser, that just about all the Prophets are very much concerned with the coming Messiah, how he should come and what he should do—or better, "suffer"—in order to usher in the Kingdom of God. But I have not found a single one of the Hebrew prophecies which indubitably and beyond any shadow of a doubt point

to Jesus and no one else. I do not say that *none* of them point to Jesus. The similarities are sometimes striking. But certitude there is none, because there is no nation under the sun more fervent in its Messianic hope than the Jews. And if all the prophecies were unanimous, clear and unmistakably, we would have all been baptized a long time ago. So, unclarity or ambiguity becloud all the Hebrew prophecies with the possibility of a Yeshuanic interpretation included.

But let me put another point, which is far more important. What, after all, is revelation? How does Isaiah know, or Jeremiah, or Amos, that God has spoken to him? The Jewish understanding of the rabbis is that revelation is not the pouring out of a divine content into an empty human vessel, but it is a meeting of the divine and the human in which the human also has to play an active role. In other words, we'll have to say goodbye to the medieval notion that the Holy Spirit dictated word for word to Luke, Matthew and John, or told Jeremiah and Isaiah word for word what they had to say. That is an unnecessary, I would say, belittling of the role of the Prophets and the Evangelists....

Ankerberg: Let me ask you then, how do you see the Old Testament being written and what authority does it have for you? Define that for us.

Lapide: The entire Old Testament and the New Testament were inspired; they were not dictated. In other words, the Evangelists and the Prophets were inspired from above, but the way to couch it into words and what choice of words they should use was their personal initiative.

Ankerberg: To what effect?

Lapide: To the effect that the notion they had, be it in a voice, an audition or a vision—some of the Prophets don't tell us how they got to know it—told them a certain thought which ripened within their soul until it burst forth into language which was language of their own choosing so that the Holy Spirit did not dictate. Because if the Holy Spirit dictated Luke, Matthew and Mark, I must tell you that, as a professor of old languages, He would have not passed the exams in Greek.

Ankerberg: Okay. Dr. Kaiser, how do you hold the Scriptures?

Kaiser: Oh, I like what he is saying there, in part, because I don't think there is any dictation at all. Oh, the Ten Commandments; now, there is something there—the finger of God. God doesn't have a finger, but that certainly is very direct.

Lapide: Correct.

Kaiser: And when the handwriting came on the wall, however, that was, that was certainly quite direct.

Lapide: Correct.

Kaiser: “*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*” is quite direct.

But my point is that you say there is “*no one passage*.” Rather than trying to move on that basis, I would say the argument is the *cumulative* effect of passage after passage in which you say, there [are] striking similarities. It is that “striking” part of it.

[For example,] Micah 5:1, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah”—the old name there for David's place—“though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet from you shall go forth....” Now, I would think that all Israel that was believing would say, “*There*; outside of Jerusalem, look there. It's got to be from there.” I don't see how we can debate that. We wouldn't say that it would be some other city; it has to be here. We've got to look at Ephratah. Even uses the older name for the site. And then we start piling up the evidence.

But now to your third point, and that is the medieval concept. I don't like the medieval concept and I wouldn't want to get anyone, the Jewish community or the Church, back into that. I think we ought to be through with that, if we ever were in it.

But what about Deuteronomy 18 and Deuteronomy 13, the test for a prophet? I learn my test from the Hebrew Prophets: he had to be a Jew; he had to speak in the name of the Lord; he had to perform signs and wonders; his message had to agree with what was given previously; and he also had to predict the near as well as the distant future. Now, those are tests, and they are tests for truth in which the prophet himself is throwing down the gauntlet—"Here, I want you to judge me."

Don't say that there are 600,000 interpretations. There are not 600,000 gods, there is only One. So you can't have 600,000 gods' "voices." Remember what we were speaking of in an earlier program? There has to be One God, and this One God is communicating Himself. And Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 18 throws down the gauntlet: "Test it! Test it! Because there are charlatans who are going to come and they are going to give their interpretation or they are going to claim this or claim that. But by these five tests, you will know." And that sounds to me as if these are tests for Truth, and as if there is a dividing line. Not truth with small "t"—truths—but Truth with a capital "T." And not from our standpoint in which we are going to go murder everyone who doesn't hold to it. Now, there is graciousness in holding Truth, but still from God's point of view, if God is One, then Truth ultimately has to be One, too.

Lapide: If I follow through your train of thought to its ultimate consequence, considering that in this blessed democratic country of America there you have 4,000 different cults and ways of worshiping God, and one has the Truth, then 3,999 are benighted, ill-led or misled sheep in the flock of God. I refuse to believe that.

Ankerberg: Let me jump in right there. When people have asked me that question, I come back and say this, "If God is loving, would He give us 4,000 ways that all contradict when we have a mind, or would He, if He is loving, give us one way and clearly define it so we can see it?"

Lapide: I have a suspicion that God Almighty has given all of us—Christians, Jews, and I would not omit the Muslims—a rough outline of what God wants us to do. He certainly hasn't given us a portrait of Himself. We don't know what God is and what He looks like, but what we ought to do. And in all three religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—agree on the fundamentals. They would say, "Love your neighbor, because that's the only way to love God."

Ankerberg: Would you say you have any content that comes from God Himself about Himself?

Lapide: Yes.

Ankerberg: Okay.

Lapide: And it could be put down probably on ten lines. And we don't need Holy Scripture of 500 pages which are nothing but the detailing and spelling out of the central message.

Ankerberg: Okay, I appreciate that. What makes you think that the ten lines that you've got are from God?

Lapide: Well, I'll tell you; one hundred and fifty generations of my ancestors have lived by it, have died for it, and have dedicated their lives to the stout belief in them. And that my little self considers ample to live by, and to walk in their footsteps.

Ankerberg: So it's the majority of people that have held to that view and suffered for it ver-

sus the fact that you think that God Himself said it to you and wants you to hold it?

Lapide: Yes, I would say a Truth for which people were prepared to die joyously in martyrdom, which exceeds all reason and logic, is a hallowed truth and can only come from God.

Ankerberg: Okay, if I could push that just a little further. When we do a program on Buddhism and we count up the millions of people that have suffered and believe in Buddhism, their “Truth” is different. But because there’s so many of them, is it true?

Lapide: If you talk about Buddhism, let me tell you how the Buddhists see it. They say, “Four blind men were sent out to see an elephant and explore it. And one came back and said an elephant is a trunk and nothing else. The other one said, ‘You’re a liar. An elephant is a tiny piece of tail with a huge piece of flesh attached to it.’ The third one said, ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about!’ The [fourth] one said, ‘It’s a long trunk with two little holes at the end.’” All four men gave a totally different description of the elephant, all four were right, but each one got a part of it. It seems that religions are like it.

Ankerberg: What I’m saying, though, is if the Buddhists say there is no God and you say there is one, we’ve got a completely different thing there. Do we count up the truth factor by the number of people that hold to that?

Lapide: No, the Buddhists have an absolute being which is above and beyond everything. They don’t want to call it “god” for reasons which, frankly speaking, escape me. But what they actually mean is what we describe with the three letters G-O-D.

Ankerberg: Okay. Dr. Kaiser, if I can turn to you. Is that the basis that you are reading the Hebrew Scriptures—that because so many people have held to that view or hold to a particular view, that’s why we hold it—or is there some other reason?

Kaiser: No, I think that we are discussing, “Is there a norm in the whole question of Truth?” Is there an elephant? I mean, granted that we’ve got people grabbing different parts all the time. There is an elephant standing right there.

And while we’re all talking about religion, is God in His heavens and is there a Being with Whom we must reckon? That’s a terribly serious question, I mean, to have lived all of life and then finally to have said, “I was going to get around to that question, and I hope that it was, you know, sort of on the averages.” But to find out that indeed it was not would be a tragedy. It would be the most momentous tragedy in all of life.

So, where shall I go? And I must, if God Himself does not reveal Himself, then surely I’m not going to put my trust in all of these kinds of things—Christianity included. Christianity can be a deadly thing, too. It has all of the human problems that any other religion has, so I don’t want to claim that the religion escapes critiquing.

What I need, though, is a word from on High. Has God spoken, and has He appeared? Has He shown up, and is there any place where I can see Him? And I say, “Yes. Watch Israel, and watch the promise coming through the promised line in Israel. And then, watch the city Bethlehem. Watch for an announcer, a John the Baptist, a messenger who is coming ahead of Him.” And sure enough, Malachi was right. Isaiah was right. And watch for a betrayer. Watch for a man who sells him for 30 pieces of silver. The detail gets striking. It’s striking! More than that, it’s thunderous after a while.

The evidence mounts up to such a degree that there is a moral obligation then. How can I walk away from this pile of evidence which comes, not from the bosom of the Church, but comes from the nation whom God has chosen, Israel? And we must hear it.

Ankerberg: Right in that area, Dr. Lapidé, there was something that you said concerning that evidence that it could apply to *any* Jew. Let me ask you this. Could the Messiah be someone that was not born at Bethlehem?

Lapidé: Definitely.

Ankerberg: In light of Micah 5?

Lapidé: Yes. Micah 5 does not call the Messiah by His name. “You Bethlehem in Judah are the smallest of the cities, but out of you shall come the ruler,” it says. The “Ruler” is by no means necessarily the Messiah, just as in Isaiah 53 the “Suffering Servant” is by no means necessarily the Messiah.

Kaiser: But this ruler has a little bit of antiquity. You may not be able to prove and understand the problem there—“Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [eternity]”. This is a little different from our rulers. Most of them come and we see them go. This one, you’ve got to say there is something a little different about this “*mashal*.” He’s come from some way back.

Lapidé: Quite correct.

Kaiser: I think that’s what opens up the possibility there.

Lapidé: I’m sure that [Micah] was athrob with good Jewish Messianic yearning, but he didn’t put “Jesus” as a label on his prophecy.

Kaiser: You mean that the name *Yeshua* doesn’t occur there.

Lapidé: Exactly.

Kaiser: Yeah, that’s true. But that’s where I think that there is the element of moral obligation.

Lapidé: Yeah.

Kaiser: That’s where the historian, that’s where the person, the layperson’s obligation is to “Test and prove these things”—Is this what the Prophets are looking for? Give me my checklist. Now, go down the checklist of *Yeshua*, and does it fit, or does it not? That’s a pragmatic test for truth. It’s a coherence test. It’s a correspondence test for truth.

Lapidé: Let me tell you what the pragmatic test would be for Judaism. The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. Jesus of Nazareth, with all this grandeur, with the selflessness, with being a paragon of virtue, and I wouldn’t quibble at all about that, has *not* brought the kingdom of heaven, has *not* abolished war from this world, and has *not* ushered in the days which we Jews call the Days of the Messiah or the Redemption. That He *hoped* to do so is beyond doubt. That He failed to realize it is unfortunately dubitable as well.

The solution is not “yes” or “no.” But I can visualize the drama of redemption in two acts. The Suffering Messiah who died on the cross for selflessness and atonement, an indispensable element in the Messiahship; and His second coming and return, when the glory, the kingdom, the peace, warlessness and love will reign supreme. We have the first act behind us. We are all waiting for the second act. Jews and Christians alike.

Kaiser: I think that’s the answer, too. “Keep tuned.” Keep tuned in, because we’ve had Act #1. Wait till you see Act #2. And I can give you some hints as to where the wrap-up comes. The Prophets have got their neck out on the line. They located geographically, they can tell you who the components are: Joel 3 says “all the nations”—that includes everyone on the face of the earth—have decided “this thing’s got to go” and they gang up once again on Israel. The biblical text says, “God Himself steps in.” That is the grand finale and that is the moment in which every bit of the yearning that you express here comes to full fruition.

Ankerberg: But, meantime, Dr. Lapidé, you have written a book, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, and you have stated that Jesus, according to history, from the evidence of history itself, the probability, the intellectual conclusion off of the probability of history—because there are no certain aspects of history. You can't put history back and go back and repeat it. You have to take the accounts, the eyewitnesses. And when you take the eyewitness accounts—and you add up the evidence, you have said, “Jesus turns out to be the Messiah for the Gentiles.” And “He was approved of God via the Resurrection.” That's what it says to you.

Lapidé: Yes.

Ankerberg: Did God, in His approving of Jesus, did He want the Jewish people to know anything besides what you have stated?

Lapidé: The way I look at it, and I take history very seriously because Judaism and Christianity are historical religions, and take the developments on earth very seriously....

Kaiser: That's true.

Lapidé: It seems to me that it took two things in order to spread the Gospel of the loving God among Gentility. It took a small Jewish “Yes” to Jesus in the form of primitive Christianity of the Apostles and the 530 Jews and Jewesses who saw Him resurrected. And it also took a great Jewish “No” to Jesus in order to make Saul the Pharisee into Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. Because had a great number of Jews, let us say 40%, said “Yes” to Jesus the way Paul preached Him indefatigably, Christianity would probably have remained what it was during the first 15 years of its career—a Jewish sect within its native Judaism. And the Gentiles would have remained pagans and idol worshippers. Thanks to the small “Yes” within Judaism to Jesus, there was Paul, the Apostles, Peter and the primitive community. Thanks to the “No,” Paul became the Gentile Apostle, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and you have gotten to be Christian. But for the Jewish “No,” Mr. Kaiser, you might still be worshiping Votan or Indian gods back in Chicago instead of praising the Lord with “Hallelujah” in Hebrew and finishing your prayers “Amen” with Hebrew, too.

Kaiser: That's the grace of God, and it's a wonderful thing that anyone ever comes to know Him. I don't think that this is a matter that is earned or it is something in which you say, “I had to have it.” It's in the providence of God, I think, that any have heard or even the Good News ever came through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I'm deeply grateful.

Ankerberg: Dr. Kaiser, let me just jump in here off of what Dr. Lapidé was saying. I want to follow up exactly. You brought in Paul. But Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth—to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” But I hear you excluding the Jew: it's for everybody but the Jew.

Lapidé: Paul *started* his career as a Jewish preacher whose only audience were Jews, and that's why he said it. Eventually—and I have a suspicion this was Divine Providence—the Jews irked him by saying “No” to his message. But Paul in the beginning didn't understand that that was God's working and not the obtuseness of the Jews. And then Paul one day in Acts 13 said, “I have preached to you, my dear fellows and brethren. I am fed up with your negative response. Now, I and Barnabas shall go to the Gentiles.” That's when God's plan of salvation moved into its next act.

Kaiser: Where did he say he was fed up? I hear him in Romans 10—Romans, you know, is quite late. This is not the beginning of Paul's ministry. This is coming more toward the middle—in Romans 10 he says, “Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer for Israel, for my brethren, is that they might be saved.” He doesn't want them to become “Gentile.” That's not the point. It's not

that kind of conversionist thing. He wants them to understand and come to what the Prophets have been talking about. The Prophets who all the time were saying, “*Shuwb*—turn, turn!” He’s trying to give them a “*shuwb*” in the right direction. He wants them to come back to the living God.

Lapide: You know, Kaiser, I believe that the entire Gentile mission of Paul was only a round-about way to convince his brethren, the Jews. His ultimate aim was not the conversion of the Gentiles—that was God’s plan.

Kaiser: Yes.

Lapide: That Paul wanted ultimately to impress his brethren, and since he couldn’t do it directly, he figured he would convert all the Gentiles and then the Jews, as he says in Romans 11, would ultimately emulate the Gentiles. So, the Gentiles, who would show their Christian love of their neighbor in such convincing, almost infectious manner, would infect the Jews. I’m sorry to say that 18 centuries of Christian love towards the Jews have failed to produce that effect, because that Christian love he suggested to the Gentile Christians to show towards their Jewish brethren has failed to materialize almost totally.

Kaiser: Fortunately, not altogether. But you are too correct, and for that you are owed an apology. And I would be the first to say that the Christian community has a lot to eat on that one, and that must be said very, very clearly. But you are exactly correct on Romans 11. He said, “I want to provoke my people to jealousy,” and I agree with you wholeheartedly on that point.

Ankerberg: Okay. The point that I do not intellectually understand, Dr. Lapide, and I need your help. Here I hear you saying that Jesus is the Messiah, He has been approved by God for the Gentiles, and He has been approved by the resurrection, all right? And I hear Jesus’ words saying, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” I hear Paul reiterating that and saying, “The gospel is for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” All right? I don’t hear Jesus or Paul or the Disciples *excluding* the Jewish brethren—that Jesus is for them the One they’ve been waiting for. Even though it might be a two-act play, the thing is that it’s important, the first act.

Lapide: Well, if you look at the Christian primitive community in Jerusalem after Easter Sunday and the Ascension, and those are the most trustworthy witnesses we have, Paul tells us that they concluded every divine service with the word “*mara na tha*”—“Oh, Lord, do come back!” In other words, to them—and nobody knew Jesus better and His intentions better than they—to them the mission Jesus wanted to accomplish was far from finished. Why all this prayer for His return if He was the Messiah already? For them He was the Messiah in potential, the One who had given an earnest money of ultimately becoming the Messiah. But they never say in the entire New Testament...and that’s strange. “*Parousia*,” the hope of all the Christians, doesn’t mean “return.” It means in Greek simply “arrival.” And the first Christians in Jerusalem after Easter prayed, “Oh, Lord, come.” They didn’t say, “Come back.” The only explanation for this strange point I have is that they didn’t want Him to come back the way they had met Him before—as the son of a carpenter and an itinerant rabbi, a God-obsessed person who was able to transmit His faith by mere erudition. They wanted Him back as the Son of man on the clouds of Heaven, as the real Messiah who would reign and rule and usher in the Kingdom. That’s why they never prayed for His return, and the only word in the New Testament is “Oh, do come,” because they wanted Him in a new transfiguration.

Ankerberg: Dr. Kaiser?

Kaiser: Not quite, I would say. I like you but I think that one is missing the point. Because I

think in John 6 they wanted to make Him king. There at the feeding of the 5,000, they said, “This is it. If we have someone here that can multiply bread like this, what could He do with weapons? We’ve got the supply line problem licked! Let’s take Rome on right now.” But Jesus would not. Now, why is it that He moves out of what could have been the most wonderful moment for the introduction of the Messianic Kingdom right then and there? Because He had to take care of the suffering part. He had to take care of the sin problem. He had to go to the cross first. And then the longing still of the community is “*Maranatha*—Even so come!” And they want Him to come. It’s true, they don’t use the words, “Come back,” because this had been the heart of the Messianic Jewish expectation. It is when righteousness comes, when justice comes, when the living God Himself is the only fair Person whom this earth has ever seen to rule and to reign. So it still remains the cry of the Church even after He had come, had taken care of the sin problem, then the question is, “So when will you come back? Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Even so, come quickly.”

Lapide: I agree.