

Do The Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament Point to Jesus or to Someone Else?— Part 3

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

Dr. John Ankerberg: We're talking about the Old Testament. Do the Hebrews Scriptures and the Messianic prophecies that are there, point to Jesus Christ or somebody else?

My guests are Dr. Pinchas Lapide, who is one of the only four Jewish scholars in the world who is a scholar of the New Testament; and Dr. Walter Kaiser, Dean of Trinity Seminary and also Professor of Semitic Languages and Old Testament there.

Gentlemen, I want to get down to passages in the Old Testament—the key ones, if you want, from the Christian point of view. And Dr. Lapide, I want you to comment on some of these.

Where this comes up is that at Christmastime, the little kids stand up and they will quote their pieces, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son and she will call his name Immanuel...”, and other verses.

Now, the thing is, we ought to stop quoting those if they don't apply to Jesus, and if they do, let's say it. If they don't let's say that, too. What is the evidence on that?

I want to start from Jesus Himself, because it has to go back to the Old Testament according to Him. After the resurrection, He is walking on the road to Emmaus with two men and He says to them, “Oh foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?” Apparently He expected them to know. “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” So He thought the Scriptures applied to Him.

Now, that's quite a statement on Jesus' part. Let's find out if it is true or false. Dr. Kaiser, if you would, set the case in Isaiah. And then, Dr. Lapide, I want you to give us what the Jewish community feels about these verses, and again, I want you to give me the real facts, okay?

Dr. Kaiser?

Dr. Walter Kaiser: Well, as best I can, Isaiah 7 through the whole of Chapter 12, I think, belongs together. It's the so-called “Book of Immanuel.” And while Christians focus on 7:14—“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son”—the important thing is that it is a **son** that is to be born.

Let me focus on the heart of it in Chapter 9, for that quotation is only a heading and therefore it implies everything that follows later on. In Isaiah 9:6 here you have a son that is to be born and what is this son's name? The son's name is “Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God—*EI Gibbor*—Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” This is some Son! We've never had one like this that is called in these terms.

Now, we can try to soften down the phrase, “Almighty God”—*El Gibbor*, but it’s a pretty good Hebrew expression there, and it is one, I think, that is promising to us that God does have a Son. This is an amazing thing, especially in light of the *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is *echod*—is one.” It doesn’t say *yachiyd*—and it doesn’t say that the Lord our God is *absolute* one, unity—but it says He is *composite* unity.

And I read in the biblical text to my surprise that while God is one—and I don’t believe in two Gods, or three gods; there’s only One—and yet, to my amazement, the text, the Hebrew text, not the “Christian text”, so-called, I really think that it still is a real problem here. Proverbs 30:4 in which you have God Himself speaking and it says, “And what is His Son’s name?” And I want to say, “Beg your pardon? God has a Son?” But sure enough, the text is talking about that.

Or, in Psalm 2, lo and behold, here again I have the nations are in turmoil and they are all stirred up and there is a regular earthquake here; the Aramaic word, probably like *ra-ash*, in tumult—they are trembling. And what is the problem? They are agitated against the Lord and against His Anointed, His *Mashiach*. And they say, “Let’s break *their* bands. Let’s cast *their* court.” And I’m surprised! I can’t believe it! There’s a *plural* there. What’s that plural doing there? It almost looks like some Christian got at the thing and worked on it. But there it is. And I say, “What can I do. It is in the text, and if I’m going to be faithful to the text....”

I went to Brandeis University. My education is Brandeis University in New England and my teachers taught me, “Always respect the text.” You stick with the text, first of all, in any of the humanities. Listen to what the text has to say, whether it’s Herodotus, or Xenophon, or Homer. And we read in the Egyptian hieroglyphics, we read in the Akkadian documents of Babylon and of Assyria—you stay with the text until you get evidence that is contrary to it.

So I listen to the text and here I hear in Isaiah 9 that God has a Son and that His name is “Wonderful Counselor.” Really, the word “Wonderful” there is “Miraculous”—Miracle Worker. The very word used back when Abraham was asked, “Is anything too *pele*—too wonderful—for God?” Too miraculous for God? Too difficult for Him? Here, the One who is beyond all difficulty—that’s His name—Miraculous Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father.

I am stunned by the verses—*stunned!* Just bowled over! Here you have the Lord Himself talking about His Son, and yet, in a strict, monotheistic context in which God is *echod*—He is *One*: composite unity—not *yachiyd*, like Abraham had in Genesis 18, “an only son” where it’s talking about absolute unity.

Ankerberg: Okay. The tough thing here is, because we want to lay down evidence, it makes it tough for the next guy talking to come back on all those verses. But Dr. Lapidé, respond to what Dr. Kaiser said, if you’d like.

Dr. Pinchas Lapidé: Well, I couldn’t agree more with my friend, Dr. Kaiser, that we both should stick to the text. And I prefer Hebrew.

And I must tell my friend, Dr. Kaiser, having read the New Testament in Greek for 30 years, I must confess that for a Jew who loves Greek and knows Hebrew as his mother tongue, the reading is sweet torture, line for line. It is torture because the Greek is bad—sometimes preposterously bad. And it is sweet torture because it cries out for retranslation into the Hebrew it originally was decades before the Greeks got hold of it.

Why should I read Jesus in Greek if He never preached Greek, nor probably knew Greek? I want to read Him in His mother tongue and that’s Hebrew. And if I retranslate Him, all kinds of different meanings suddenly crop up.

You talked about the “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14 who is becoming pregnant and giving birth to a

child. I'm terribly sorry, but that virgin is a "young woman" in Hebrew, and the Hebrews were well aware of the difference between a "virgin" and a "young woman". I must drag gynecology into it, but she was not a "virgin" in the original text of Isaiah. What later happened to her, I do not know.

The second thing; you quoted Luke 24, and The Resurrected on the way to Emmaus explaining to the Disciples that, "Had not the Messiah all this to suffer..."; and He began from Moses and the Prophets and explained it all. The only problem is that Luke leaves us in doubt as to where the passages are. He just says He gives us all the proofs, but I'm still waiting for them. He just makes a bald statement of fact without quoting chapter or verse. I fully agree He did it—God forbid that I should imply that this is a lie; but Luke left them out.

And now, as to the son, I could not agree more that Jesus of Nazareth was **a** son of God; but, in His mother tongue. In other words, Jesus was a "son of God" like He Himself said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." And on the next page of the same Sermon on the Mount He says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may become sons of your Heavenly Father." And to make it three, Paul says in Romans 8:14, "All those who are led by the Spirit of God belong to the sons of God." In this Hebrew sense of the word, Jesus was undoubtedly a "son of God." If it's Greek or English, the meanings are totally different.

Ankerberg: Boy, I'll tell you, Dr. Lapide, I'm so glad that you're here and you've brought that up, because that let's us get down to the language.

Dr. Kaiser, do we actually have solid evidence in Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; Behold, a virgin will be with child and will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel." Going into Chapter 9 and then on through into other parts of Isaiah, was this a sign or wasn't it a sign? And if it was, give me the background on the *words* here, because we're into your area. What do the words really say?

Kaiser: Well, I really think that indeed is what we are led to expect in this tremendous crisis. Remember, the kingdom of Judah had come to a real crisis point. If the two men from the north triumph, everything is definitely off, the whole doctrine of the Messiah is cancelled, and these could be the two Grinches that steal Christmas and Easter. So we really do have a problem here and it's important that we find out.

It's got to be sign. The text says this is, it's your word for "miracle"—*owth*—like the Greek *semeion*. So it's got to be a miracle.

And then we get down to the word study. Now, the Jewish-Christian community has been debating this for years: "But look, *almah* doesn't mean the same as the Greek *parthenos* and that this is a virgin!" I must tell you that here we must not take our modern problem and retroject that back to that day. A young woman, even if you translate it "young woman," was thought to be a virgin in those days and you have ways in which indeed you can make that distinction very clearly.

But I would argue on the second point as well, and let me proceed into that because the whole question of whether we are part of the sons or whether it involves Israel or all who believe—the verses that Dr. Lapide has just quoted. He's exactly right. And I may surprise him on this point, but here's where the Christian community has lost part of the argument.

You see, when "the Seed" was discussed, it is deliberately a collective singular. It is not plural, it is not singular. You don't speak of deers—five "deers." You could say, "One deer" or "five deer" because it's a collective singular. Now, the fortunate point is, in English and in Greek

and in Hebrew, we are talking about the word “seed,” a very important collective singular. That same aspect [applies] to the word “son” or “sons.” As a matter of fact, beginning with Exodus 4:22, there Israel is “my son,” “my firstborn.”

The word takes on technical meaning, and it is a very, very important word, because it not only implies all who believe within Israel are part of that seed or the firstborn, but it also goes on until it yields up, par excellence, the best representative and the focal point of that whole line. So it is almost as if you have a succession of individuals, and then, finally, it comes out in the Messiah Himself. The term is deliberately in the single meaning of the author, it is a corporate solidarity. It involves the *many* who believe, and yet the *One*, ultimately. It’s not an easy concept for Westerners to grasp. Those who come from the East and the Orient understand this much better. But we must get our thinking back into the Oriental form of reference.

Ankerberg: Dr. Lapidé, go ahead.

Lapidé: Now, take Isaiah and his wrong “virgin,” because the real one is...all you’ve got to do is leave Tennessee with a lightning speed and retranslate or transplant yourselves into Judea 27 centuries ago. If you are able to make the mental jump, then come with me.

Isaiah stands with his king (the chapter of Isaiah says the precise location, but we won’t waste time on that) in Jerusalem, the very spot. The king is trembling with fright because two of the pagan kings in the north are about to trample Judea to pieces, to smithereens. Isaiah has the message from God to encourage his king that he will prevail, and those two pagan kings will not cut his kingdom to smithereens. And he says to him—and that’s the famous words you people sometimes forget—he says, “Look!, Lo!, *hinneh—that young woman...*” And the scene I see in front of me—and I’ve lived with Isaiah half a century now. I can slip into his skin, almost—“Look,” he says to the king among other arguments, “See that young woman over there,” who was visibly pregnant (to my mind), “When she will give birth,” which is a matter of six months, or four months, or five months. He probably could work it out by the size of her belly....

Kaiser: This is all in the text?

Lapidé: “When she will give birth, they will call him,” and then comes the list of names, which in Oriental poetry—and for God’s sake don’t dissect or vivisection poetry into dry, anatomical, theological shop-talk, because you lose all of it. It’s like cutting the butterfly to pieces to find out what makes it beautiful. If you cut him to pieces, all you get is chemical formulas, but the beauty is gone—So you have to get the poetry back into Isaiah. He says, “When that child will be born [in other words, in six months time or less] all Jerusalem will be jubilant with victory. Your victory over the two pagan kings.” And as it was the custom in Judea, children born close to or at a historical event, got names which that historical event was supposed to express, symbolically, of the name-giving. And then he says—he didn’t have to explain to them; it was obvious for everyone in Jerusalem—“When that child is born, they will call him the Victorious, the Peace Giver, the Omnipotent God...”, which is all Oriental poetry, for God’s sake, and not bald, factual, American talk. That will happen, and it so happened that by this kind of talk he encouraged his king, which was the purpose of the entire Isaiah speech.

Ankerberg: Okay. Dr. Kaiser?

Kaiser: Yeah. I wouldn’t want to cut any of your butterflies apart, but I would want to keep the butterfly, though. I wouldn’t want to blow the whole thing away. And I must not say, “It’s poetry,” and, “Ah, I feel warm. Let her go.” It still is trying to, even through the medium of poetry, communicate. I mean, the writer is not stuttering. He is saying something.

And he goes on to say, “...and of the increase of his government and peace there will be no

end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. And the zeal of the Lord of Hosts, the Lord Almighty, will accomplish this."

Now, that rings a bell with me. That sounds like the 2 Samuel 7 passage. And he is linking here; there is networking that is going on. He is not speaking in a vacuum. He is speaking out of the context of Genesis 3, and Genesis 12 and 2 Samuel 7. So there is a butterfly here, a most beautiful butterfly. And it is the butterfly of the Messiah, and that He Himself is a man, but yet is true God.

Ankerberg: What is the hint that you get from the text itself that would say that the son that was to be born there was a sign there, but it was not necessarily *all* that was being talked about in Scripture?

Kaiser: Because of Isaiah. If we take Isaiah's total work, it is that He is both to suffer and then He is to have a reign and rule and peace and justice and righteousness that will have no end.

Ankerberg: Dr. Lapidé?

Lapidé: I agree with our friend, of course, because the rabbis do just what Kaiser did. They read into the text. And my sages are past masters at the art of reading into the text certain connotations; long before you Evangelicals started business. In other words, they have read out of the Hebrew Bible 456—he's quite right with the number—Messianic prophecies where it takes a very fine magnifying glass to have the text yield this very meaning, but my rabbis were all sick with an illness I would call "Messianitis", a chronic inflammation of the Jewish glands of hope.

Kaiser: Sounds serious!

Lapidé: Yeah. It's incurable, the disease. We still have it. And thank God for that!

Ankerberg: Did it come out of that text, though?

Lapidé: What's that?

Ankerberg: Did the Jewish rabbis get that information out of that text? Were they right or wrong?

Lapidé: I don't think it's that easy. Between right and wrong in Jewish thinking, there's 27 possibilities in between. I'm sorry, but things are not that simple.

Ankerberg: Do you see that they had a right in giving all of the Targums¹ and the Midrash² to us because of that verse?

Lapidé: Oh, yes.

Ankerberg: Okay.

Lapidé: Because as Kaiser rightly says, "If you read it with a deep longing for Messianic redemption in his heart, your mind is far from objective." And you can read out of that text just what Kaiser said, and his longing for the Messiah—Christologically as his is, and Messianically future as that of the rabbis was—of course, blurs his scientific view. And that's good, though! I'm glad he did. Because God forbid we should read the Bible unemotionally!

Ankerberg: Good. We're going to pick this up next week, but a final comment.

Kaiser: The most amazing thing is that if I read it in—and I don't like reading in. Oh, I dislike eisegesis! I think we should take it out of the text. Exegesis only! And I think that I've only done that.—But yet, Dr. Lapidé, if there are 27 different interpretations, how did you get the one by

which you knew that I didn't get it from what Isaiah said? You must have snuck somehow into the truth, and you were able to find out that I didn't have it. And therefore there must be one meaning. Somehow, you did get it, and that is my point. There is somehow a single meaning to the text.

Lapide: My dear Kaiser. The rabbi...the rabbis have found the Solomonic solution. They say the Prophets of Israel, in whom they firmly believed, of course, were speaking at one and the same time on three different levels. They were speaking (1) to their own contemporaries, and that's the king of Judah to whom Isaiah speaks. At the same time, (2) they lend expression to an eternal truth. And thirdly, at the same time, (3) they open an inkling for the Messianic time to come, sometimes, without even knowing it. The rabbis say the Prophets didn't know sometimes that they spoke of the Messiah because they only meant Ahab, the king of Judah. But the words got put into their mouth; [they] had a triple meaning, which does not exclude at all your Messianic exegesis.

Ankerberg: Dr. Kaiser?

Kaiser: This whole question comes up in the New Testament in 1 Peter 1, and it is a question, "Did the Prophets write better than they knew?" Now, my Evangelical cohorts say, "Oh, yes!" I think they would have liked what Dr. Lapide just said. But I protest there at that point, and I say that the Prophets knew, says the text, that they were writing about Messiah. They knew about His sufferings, they knew about His glory, they knew the order. It was the glory that should follow the sufferings.

They knew about us, too: "To whom it was revealed that not only unto themselves, but unto us" were they saying these things. Well, then why does the text say in 1 Peter 1 that the Prophets were inquiring and searching diligently? They are scratching their heads. What are they scratching their heads about? And the text there, "*eis tina ei poion kairon*"—"until what, or what manner of time" was in them. It is the *temporal* question which the Prophets did not know. But if they had revelation, if it was revealed, [Gr.] *apokalupto*, [Heb.] *galah*, if there was a making naked, a bare deposit of truth, then indeed this is what they spoke.

And what they spoke was **not** what they were bending over in a mechanical way to say, "I wonder what it is saying," and they didn't know. In other words, if the Spirit whispered to them "propitiation." And they said, "How do you spell it?", that would be sort of mechanical, you see? But they are writing what they know, and this is part of the revelation.

Notes:

¹ Any of several Aramaic explanatory translations or paraphrasings of the Hebrew Scriptures. (American Heritage Dictionary)

² Any of a group of Jewish commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures compiled between A.D. 400 and 1200 and based on exegesis, parable, and haggadic legend. (American Heritage Dictionary)