

STUDY EIGHT

The Person of Christ—3

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S PERSON (CONTINUED)

The Messiah

If we study contemporary Judaism, we see the concept of Messiah has many elements. One thing is common both to the synoptic view of Messiah and also contemporary Judaism—Messiah is to usher in the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. The Jews viewed it as a politico-religious kingdom. Both agreed that his action was to be that of God Himself and that Messiah was clearly God's special person. If the phrase 'Son of man' is a pseudonym for 'Messiah', then it may be concluded that Jesus used 'Messiah' sparingly because of the explosive political situation. However, he did use the title 'Messiah' and allowed others to use it (e.g. Mark 9:41; 8:29; 14:61). It is interesting to note that in these contexts he himself used the phrase 'Son of man', which may signify a synonym.

Looking at the word, 'Messiah', or 'Christ', simply means 'anointed one'—and these were prophets, priests, and kings (cf. 1 Sam. 9:16; 24:6; Exod. 28:41; 1 Kings 19:16; Isa. 45:1; 61:1). The concept of the King as God's

chosen one for the Davidic (Messianic) kingdom may be traced in 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 89:3f.; Psalm 45 (cf. Heb.

1:8–9); Jeremiah 30:8f., and most clearly in Psalms 2 and

72. Ezekiel 37:21ff. speaks of the Davidic (future) kingdom. The nature of the King as seen in Zechariah 9:9 is significant in the light of its application to Jesus. We can see that the strongest prophetic verse is that Messiah will be King.

When we come to the synoptic Gospels we find Jesus quite clearly accepting the designation of Messiah—for example, Mark 8:27f. (and parallels), and 14:61f. (and parallels). There is no doubt about his answer to Peter, but to the High Priest, whilst he answers in the affirmative, yet he rather receives the title as Son of man. However the concept of being the Son of God, as at his baptism, also ensures the concept of Messiah. He is ‘Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matt. 16:16), or ‘Christ, the Son of the Blessed’. At the same time, Pilate understands this phrase as ‘the King of the Jews’ (Matt. 27:11). Jesus’ triumphal entry is hailed variously as ‘the kingdom of our father David’ (Mark 11:10), and ‘the King who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Luke 19:38). Son of David, King of the Jews, Messiah, and Son of God are virtually synonymous. The affirmation of demonic forces as to his being Messiah is not denied (see Luke 4:34, 41), although the phrase they most used was ‘Son of God’. Following his resurrection, Jesus points very clearly to his being the Christ (see Luke 24:26, 46). The mockery at the time of the cross is clear evidence that he was generally believed to have made the claim of being Messiah (Luke 22:67; 23:2, 35, 39).

John’s Gospel has clear enough statements concerning the Messiah. John the Baptist denies that he himself is

Messiah. It is debated by many whether Jesus is Messiah or not. The woman of Samaria (John 4) speaks of Messiah and Jesus claims calmly that he is Messiah (4:25f.). Already in John 1 (cf. vv. 41, 45, 49, 51) the terms ‘Messiah’, ‘the Son of God’ and ‘the King of Israel’ are virtually synonymous. In 6:69 he is ‘the Holy One of God’. In chapter 7 the debate rages as to whether or not he is the Messiah. In 9:22 to confess him as Christ is punishable by excommunication. Whilst Jesus seems evasive in 11:24f., yet his answer is clear—he is the Messiah. In 11:27 Martha believes Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God.

The book of Acts is clear in its statements. It is Jesus who is the Christ (Acts 2:31, 36). If Christ at his baptism, in accordance with the attestation of God, is the King of Psalm 2:6, then he is also the Servant of Isaiah 42:1, 2 (cf. Acts 4:30). It is in this One that God delights. So much so that Peter says Jesus does not fear death (Acts 2:25–28), and God raises him up and seats him at His right hand (Acts 2:29–36), but as Lord and Christ. This is the great Pentecostal pronouncement.

The knowledge that he is Christ convicts thousands and they repent. In 3:18 the rationale of the Messiah as the One who suffers is given and this is repeated by Paul in 17:3. Already (9:20) Paul has argued that Jesus is the Son of God. The application of Psalm 2 to the crucifixion, in Acts 4, is significant especially as here the ‘Anointed’ is referred to as Jesus. This is undoubtedly the pattern of apostolic preaching (see 18:5, 28; 24:24; 26:23). When Philip goes down to Samaria he preaches Christ and in the same breath the kingdom of God. The same Christology as in the Gospels comes through in the Acts, namely that Jesus is a *man*, he is Son of man, he is the Anointed One (Acts 10:38), but his death and resurrection make him

Lord and Christ. He now rules and reigns and his kingdom is coming with power.

The Epistles are too profuse in their material to cover, as the name 'Christ' is now almost always used. He is sometimes 'Jesus', but generally 'Jesus Christ', 'Christ Jesus', 'Jesus the Lord', 'Christ Jesus the Lord', the 'Lord Jesus Christ', or simply 'Christ'. By this time the thought or word 'Christ' has greatly developed. None of the Old Testament nuances are lost, but rather are matured. The church is the body of Messiah. All are members of Messiah because they are baptised in one Spirit into the body. Being baptised into Messiah brings all the 'benefits' of his death, burial, resurrection and ascension. Only in Christ is one a new creation. In fact, all the life of the church and personally of the believers is in, with, by and through Christ. One cannot be saved without confession of Christ as Lord. Now we speak of Christ as the One in whom all things are to be gathered together. He rules over all. There is to come the day of Christ. Whilst undoubtedly the mystery of Christ is to be told to those outside the church, there is no lack of understanding within. However much this Messiah has been known 'after the flesh' (2 Cor. 5:16, AV), from now on he is only known 'through the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:9f.; 12:3).

Thus Christ is known in a clear soteriology, both in deliverance from the powers of darkness, sins and in judgement. Coming in the last day he will execute vengeance (judgement).

In the Revelation of John the actual mentions of Christ are few, but by this time there is a fullbodied Christology. In this book (see 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6) Christ will subdue the kingdoms (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24) until they are his and God's (see Rev. 11:15; cf. 19:15f.). However, the Messiah

is a number of other things also, such as the Lamb, Alpha and Omega, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and so forth. His power and authority are over the whole universe. Indeed he directs history by virtue of his sacrifice (the ‘Lamb as though it had been slain’, see Rev. 5:1–7).

We might then *conclude* that the New Testament commences in the Gospels with a partly-veiled Messiah, but that the events of the cross, resurrection and ascension seal the fact of Messiahship; that the Acts describe the practical outworking of the same, and that a developed concept of Christ is found in the Epistles and the Revelation.

This, however, is greatly simplified, perhaps oversimplified. Whereas we have treated fully the doctrine of the Son of man in the Old Testament and New Testament, yet in fact the concept of Messiah is in the Old Testament, and nothing in the New Testament has validity except it accords with the Old Testament. Thus we see the concept in the Epistles accords with the Old Testament. In Acts 3:18, Peter claims that Messiah must suffer, and this he had probably received from Jesus (see Luke 24:25, 26, 44–47). Paul in Acts 17:3 (cf. 17:11) makes it clear that Messiah had to suffer. This is a rationale concerning the high concept of a conquering Messiah and yet one who suffers. The fact is that he (Jesus who suffers) is proclaimed Messiah (Acts 9:20–22; 18:5; 26:23). There are other passages which demand attention, such as 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, in which ‘*Christ* died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures* . . . was raised . . . *in accordance with the scriptures*’. In this the *cross* (death) and the *resurrection* are claimed to be ‘in accordance with the scriptures’. Resurrection then, used so profusely in Scripture, is the proof of his being Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:15; Rom. 8:34a;

1 Thess. 4:14; Rom. 14:9). Undoubtedly Isaiah 53 in general, and verses 5 and 10 in particular, could be the basis of these 'Christ' passages. Whilst other passages are not directly traceable, yet the use of Psalm 16:8–11 by Peter at Pentecost is linked with the resurrection; Psalm 2 (Acts

4:25f.) with the cross and with the resurrection (Acts

13:33f.). The Epistles and the Revelation abound with further uses of Psalm 2 and 110, whilst Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah 31:31–34 are also used. The reigning in glory by the Seed of David (Rom. 1:3) fills out the Old Testament concept of Messiah. Again, we cannot avoid the clear link with the concept of Lord, Son of God and King. This Messiah, having rejected Satan's way, establishes his ministry as the Christ by the way of death and resurrection, and is seated at the right hand of God.