

Transcript/Notes

The Real Jewish Messiah Debate: Rabbi Blumenthal vs Dr. Michael Brown

Why is this topic so popular? Why does it draw so much attention?

One of the most famous themes of the Jewish Bible is the hope and the promise that a day will yet come when all of mankind will live together in peace and harmony. Isaiah describes this utopian era at the end of the age; "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift sword against nation and they will learn war no more" (Isaiah 2:4). These words give expression to mankind's deep yearning for peace and harmony. (see also Deuteronomy 4:30, 30:1-10, 32:43, Jeremiah 3:14-18, 16:14,15,19, 23:3-6, 30:3,7-11,16-25, 31:1-39, 32:37-44, 33:6-26, 46:27,28, 50:4,5,19,20, Ezekiel 11:17-20, 20:40-44, 28:25-26, 34:9-16,22-31, 36:6-15,22-38, 37:1-28, 38:1-48:35, Isaiah 1:26,27, 2:2-4, 4:2-6, 10:33-12:6, 24:21-25:9, 30:26, 34:1-35, 40:1-11, 41:10-20, 43:5-10, 44:1-5 49:8-26, 51:11,22-52:12, 54:1-55:5, 56:7, 60:1-63:9, 65:17-25, 66:10-24, Hosea 2:1-3,16-25, Joel 3:1-5, 4:1-21, Amos 9:11-15, Obadiah 1:17-21, Micah 4:1-7, 5:1-13, 7:8-20, Zephaniah 3:9-20, Zechariah 2:9, 8:2-8, 14:3-21, Malachi 3:4,16-24, Psalm 51:20,21, 69:36,37, 98:1-3, 102:14-23, 126:1-6, Daniel 2:44, 7:18,22,27, 12:2,3,).

The prophets associated a person, a king, that will rule in this utopian era of peace and this man came to be known as the Messiah. There are several passages in the Scriptures which make this connection clear. One example is Isaiah 11 which speaks of a king ruling in an age when the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. The man Messiah came to represent the ultimate hope of mankind. (See also Jeremiah 23:3-6; 30:9,21; 33:14-16; Ezekiel 34:23,24; 37:22-28; Isaiah 55:3,4; Hosea 3:5; Micah 5:1-3. In Obadiah 1:21 and Micah 5:4 we get an indication that there will be several leaders in the Messianic age and the Talmud identifies these leaders, but the general focus has always been on the one Davidic king.)

So what do we know about the Messiah?

What does the Bible, the Jewish Bible – what Christians call: "The Old Testament," teach us about the Messiah? What information about the Messiah did the Author of the Bible make clear to us? What is it about the Messiah that the Author of the Bible wants us to know, that we shouldn't walk away from His book without knowing this clearly and unequivocally? What does God want us to know about the Messiah?

There are several teachings that the Bible tells us about the Messiah but I want to focus on two qualities of the Messiah that emerge from these passages. These two qualities are so obvious that no student of the Bible ever disputed that these are indeed qualities of the Messiah. The Messiah will sit on the throne of David and he will be a king of the Jews. Although the Messianic era will bring blessing and peace to all mankind, and the Messiah will rule all the nations, but the prophets make it abundantly clear that first and foremost, he will be a king of the Jewish people. (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17-19; Isaiah 11:1-12:6; 55:3,4; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 30:9,21; 33:14-16; Ezekiel 34:23-31; 37:15-28; Hosea 3:5; Micah 5:1-3;).

So these are two qualities that the Author of the Bible made clear to us about the Messiah. God doesn't let you walk away from the Bible without knowing these two facts about the Messiah. That he will be a king of Israel and that he will sit on the throne of David. Let us pause to absorb the full weight of these simple truths.

If someone tells you that you were chosen to be the king of a nation you might think of the honor, the fame, the wealth and all of the advantages that come with royalty. But if you are a responsible, moral and ethical person you realize that this is not about you, it is about the nation. Being a king of a nation, any nation, is not just a title of honor, it is a responsibility. It is the responsibility of the leader of every nation to lead and to guide his nation to its destiny and the king of Israel, the Messiah, is no different. It is the responsibility of the Messiah to lead Israel to its destiny.

And as one who sits on the throne of David, the Messiah is not a man who operates in a vacuum, rather the Messiah is a man who continues that which David began. The Messiah is a fulfillment of God's promise to David. God promised that David's throne will stand forever. The Messiah must be an extension of David's legacy. He will lead Israel to its destiny by following the path of his ancestor, David. (2Samuel 7:13,16; 1Kings 2:4,45; 9:5; Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 33:17-22; Psalm 89:4,5,37,38; 132:11,12; 1Chronicles 17:12,14; 22:10; 2Chronicles 7:18).

If we understand the destiny of Israel and if we understand the path of David, then we will understand the foundational teaching of the Bible about the Messiah.

Israel's destiny begins with a promise to Abraham. In the book of Genesis we read how God promises Abraham that He will become a great nation and that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through His children. (Genesis 12:2,3; 17:4-8; 18:18,19; 22:18; 26:4,5).

In the book of Exodus we begin to see how God fulfills His promise to Abraham. God takes the Jewish people out of Egypt with signs and wonders and He plants His truth in their midst through the Sinai revelation and through His prophet Moses. God establishes His presence in the midst of Israel through the construction of the tabernacle. It is through these events that God formed and created a nation for Himself. This is the great nation that God promised to Abraham (Exodus 15:16; Deuteronomy 4:33,34; 14:2; 26:19; 33:29; 27:9; 2Samuel 7:23,24; 1Chronicles 17:21,22).

Ideally, Israel obeys God, they build a Temple for God and the blessing of their relationship with God flows out to all the nations of the earth. The nations of the earth see Israel standing in obedience to God, they see how Israel experiences a relationship with God and they come to know the Creator of heaven and earth. Because this is the blessing for the nations, the greatest blessing that mankind can experience is a relationship with God. Israel experienced a taste of this ideal in the days of Solomon, Hezekiah and some of the righteous kings of the line of David. God also promised that this ideal will reach its fullness in the Messianic era (See Isaiah 56:7 and 60:3).

But for much of Israel's history we did not live up to this ideal. We sinned, we disobeyed God and we did not experience blessing. Instead we experienced exile, suffering and curse. But even in our exiled state we still play a part in God's plan to bring blessing to all the nations.

God promised that even in our exile He will preserve His truth in our midst (Exodus 31:12-17; Deuteronomy 31:21; Isaiah 59:21; Psalm 78:5). This does not mean that we are righteous or perfect. But this does mean that God will ensure that there will always be Jews, who identify as Jews, who are loyal to the message that he planted in our midst at Sinai. In our dispersion, the nations of the world learn of our message. Some of them are still inspired by our message to submit to God despite our suffering and despite our disobedience. The beauty of our message still reaches many people. They hear how God is close to all who call to Him in sincerity. They learn how God desires justice, mercy and morality. And they learn to experience the joy of God's love in every breath of life.

But many people reject our message. They see our suffering and they read our suffering as a sign that our message is not the message of God. They ridicule us and taunt us by saying; "where is your God?" (Joel 2:17; Micah 7:7-10; Psalm 42:4,11; 79:10; 115:2). But ultimately God will redeem us from our exile and He will do so in a way that all the ends of the earth clearly recognize that God intervened on our behalf. The arm of the Lord will manifest itself on behalf of Israel to the eyes of all the nations (Isaiah 52:10; Joel 4:16,17; Micah 7:7:15,16; Psalm 98:1-9; 102:16-23).

And we know the "arm of the Lord," it is no mystery. In Isaiah chapter 51 the prophet directly addresses the arm of the Lord and identifies it as the one who brought Israel through the sea on dry land (Isaiah 51:9,10). The arm of the Lord is the manifestation of God's might on behalf of Israel, crushing her enemies and doing wonders on Israel's behalf. Not the personal enemies of Israel, but rather the ones who stand in the way of Israel's message.

At that point in time all the nations of the world will recognize that our message is indeed the true message of God and that we had been carrying God's truth all along. The Messianic era will open with a vindication of the people of Israel. Not a vindication of our behavior, but a vindication of our message. Because even in our state of exile we are still God's witnesses, we still stand for His message and His truth (Isaiah 41:8; 43:10,12; 44:8; Jeremiah 10:15).

Again, this is a vindication of our message, not of our behavior. In fact the prophet Ezekiel (39:23) tells us that in that time when God's might is revealed, the nations will know that it was because of Israel's sin that they were exiled. What had these nations been thinking? The nations had believed that Israel was suffering because she had been carrying a corrupt message. And when God's might is revealed they will learn that Israel's message had been correct all along, it was their behavior that was lacking.

What does all of this have to do with David? Where does the Messiah fit in and how does this connect to the throne of David?

In order to answer this question we need to ask another question. Who is David and what does Scripture tell us about him?

There are many ways to describe David's career, to encapsulate the accomplishments of his life but let us see how the Bible describes David's life. Toward the end of the book of 2Samuel (23:1) David is described as the man who was raised to be the anointed one of the God of Jacob and the sweet singer of Israel (perhaps a more accurate translation of the Hebrew would be; "the one who gave pleasantness to the songs of Israel.") David executes his duty as Israel's king through his songs, the book of Psalms.

Again, the responsibility of a king is to lead his nation to its destiny. How did David do this through his songs?

In David's own day he exerted himself to build the Temple. Although David did not build the Temple himself, he still prepared the materials for the Temple, he received the prophecy about the architectural details of the Temple and David found the place upon which the Temple was built. But the Temple is not merely a building built on a geographical location. It is a building built with love for God and obedience to God, and David inspired that love and obedience in the heart of Israel through his Psalms.

But David's role as king of Israel did not end with David's death. David's role as king of Israel extends to this very day. Throughout Israel's long exile it is in the songs of David that Israel finds inspiration and hope. It is through the songs of David that we maintain our loyalty to God's message. The Psalms of David inspire us to keep sight of our destiny, to hold on to God's truth and to hope for God's salvation. And the Psalms of David actually give voice, expression and articulation to our message.

David experienced a colorful life. He suffered humility and shame, and he enjoyed honor and fame. He felt guilt and he experienced forgiveness. He struggled, as we all do, and experienced both failure and success. David's life covers the full gamut of the human experience and in each situation David gives expression to a heart that trusts in God. In sin and in righteousness, in joy and pain, in humility and in honor in victory and in defeat. And in each of these situations we have expression of a heart that yearns for God. These songs lead us in each situation that we find ourselves, they guide us and they direct our hearts to God and to God alone.

David is the king after God's heart. He is the man that God chose to lead us years ago and he still leads us to our destiny today.

When the Messiah comes he will not come with a different message. The Messiah will not oppose the message of Israel, he will confirm it. The Messiah, like David before him will teach that God is close to everyone who calls out to God with sincerity. He will sing about the perfection of God's holy law. He will speak of the blessing of obedience to God's law. He will sing of the joy that is inherent in recognizing God's love in every detail of existence. The Messiah will stand as a continuum of the message and the leadership of his ancestor David. Like his ancestor before him, the Messiah will inspire

Israel to obedience and love of God. And like his ancestor before him, the Messiah will see to it that a Temple is built for God in Jerusalem.

In the footsteps of David, the Messiah will do all of the above without diverting attention to himself. The Messiah will set the example of a heart that yearns for God as did David before him. And the heart of the Messiah will draw the hearts of Israel and the hearts of all mankind to love and to obey God.

And when the Messiah continues the work of his ancestor, David the nations of the world will experience the blessing that God promised to the world through the children of Abraham. For that blessing does not come to the nations through the Messiah alone. That blessing flows to the nations through the people of Israel, through the Temple in Jerusalem and through the Messiah who sits on David's throne.

So to recap; what does the Bible teach us about the Messiah? That he will be king of Israel and that he will sit on the throne of David. This means that he will lead Israel to its destiny, to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth, and he will do so as a continuation of David's legacy. In short we can say that the Messiah will pick up the tune where his ancestor David left off.