

**THE MESSIANIC HOPE IN THE NEW
TESTAMENT**

THE MESSIANIC HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY

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TO ERNEST DE WITT BURTON

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INTRODUCTION

THEOLOGICAL reconstruction that shall in any true measure be based upon the New Testament is dependent, not only upon strictly philological exegesis, but also upon that larger historical exegetical process that endeavors to separate the content of a correctly apprehended teaching from the historical form in which it is cast. It is only when this form is resolved that the content stands clear, and it is in the content of biblical teaching alone that men of today can feel more than an antiquarian interest. To make the form co-ordinate with the content is to perpetuate an outgrown method and vocabulary. Theological teachers cannot hope to have modern significance if they force their followers first of all to think as did men of the past and to express truth as did men of the past. Theologians, of all men, should not be anachronistic.

How generally recognized this view has become in practical teaching may be seen in the abandonment of some of the most explicit directions of the New Testament on the ground that they were intended primarily and exclusively for Christians in some city like Corinth. Thus, for instance, few teachers would today assert that women should not speak in meetings, or that there was any divine regulation concerning the length of a Christian's hair. At the same time, these same teachers would assert that the general principles of orderly conduct and modest deportment which found expression in the apostle's directions to Græco-Roman Christians are as applicable to the Christians of today as to those of nineteen hundred years ago. In a much larger way the same statement applies to the Mosaic legislation. The teacher of today must endeavor to main-

tain such of its underlying principles as are not outgrown by a Christian civilization, while distinguishing and rejecting their particular and historical embodiment.

All this, the outcome of the practical considerations of Christian experience, is, however, but one phase of a very inclusive matter, viz., such a treatment of the Scriptures, and especially of the New Testament, as will enable one easily and with reasonable accuracy to distinguish between the truth and its biblical expression. Or, to put the matter a little differently, the presupposition of all theological reconstruction is the existence of criteria which shall enable one to distinguish the concepts and processes which conditioned the biblical writers from the religious experience and truth which admittedly constitute the real substance of what we call revelation.

Such criteria will be found among the thoughts and concepts current in the biblical period. Not that all such thoughts and concepts were consciously used as merely formal. More probably many, if not all, of them were believed to embody as well as to typify realities. There can be no doubt, for instance, that the ancient world actually believed that the earth is flat, and that the sun actually moves across the heavens. Such a cosmology has far-reaching effects in biblical theology, and must be allowed for in every case. There are many passages in both Testaments which a man under the influence of today's cosmic truths must have great difficulty in understanding. Similarly, many religious concepts, which to later ages have seemed very crude and naïve, were regarded as essential truth by the men of the first Christian century. The criterion is, therefore, not the valuation accorded a given concept by those who used it, but the actual existence of that concept. If it be urged that such current concepts may be essentially as well as formally true, the only reply for the historical inter-

preter can be an assent to the possibility. Such concepts may be essential; they may be formal; they may conceivably be both. Yet periods which may care to reproduce the truths embodied in these concepts cannot be content to remain in such uncertainty, and will attempt, at least, to distinguish between the two possible valuations of the current beliefs of the past. The first step in the historical process, however, is not this distinction, which in fact is apologetic rather than historical, but is a formulation and an exact estimate of the place any concept holds in a given system of thought. After such an estimate is gained, one may well decide as to its formal or essential character. By that time the decision should have become reasonably easy. If the concept appears to be wholly *a priori*, in no clear way expressive of facts of experience, but is rather the outgrowth of rhetoric, faith, hope, and other emotions; and if it appears chiefly as interpretative and appreciative of what is obviously experience and personality; and especially if the concept in question be one that obviously is derived from a cosmogony or a theology that does not square with historical and scientific facts and processes; it will not be difficult to give it its true value and significance for the constructive and systematizing processes. But the historical process can never be overlooked. We must discover what a concept actually was, and then discover whether it is present in the documents under consideration.

Among all the concepts that appear in the New Testament none is more frequently met than that of messianism. Nor is there one more obviously local and ethnic.) The hope of a divine deliverance from misery was not a product of classical religion or of Græco-Roman eclecticism. In the form current in the first century of our era it was not even Hebrew. It was Jewish, and, in its most elaborate form, pharisaic. That it should appear in New Testament litera-

ture was inevitable, for it was the medium through which his followers looked at Jesus, the form in which they expressed their appreciation of him, and the warp of all their speculation as to his and their own future. What, then, is its actual place in the teaching of the early church? How far is it formal, how far is it essential, Christianity?

In attempting to answer these inquiries, the method which will be followed will be that of historical exegesis. We shall first of all attempt to discover and formulate the elements of eschatological messianism as it is found in the literature of Judaism; in the second place, we shall examine the New Testament to see how much or how little of this element is to be found on its pages; and, in the third place, we shall attempt to determine the influence of such an element in Christian thought, and as far as possible to discover what would be the result upon historical Christianity if it were removed or, more properly speaking, allowed for.

PART I

THE MESSIANISM OF JUDAISM

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL AND NATIONAL MESSIANISM OF THE PROPHETS

MESSIANISM—or, if only the expression has not assumed the too distinct connotation of an expected personal Messiah, the messianic hope—is that fixed social belief of the Jewish people that Jehovah would deliver Israel and erect it into a glorious empire to which a conquered world would be subject. It sometimes, indeed frequently, involved the hope of a personal king—the Messiah, the Anointed One of God—but such an element is far less essential¹ than is implied by the term itself or its synonym, “the messianic hope.” The central and ever-present element of the “messianic hope” was that of a divinely established deliverance and kingdom. The king was but an accessory, and, as will appear later, might not figure, except by implication, in one’s hope for the nation’s future.² Nor, even with this limitation as to its elements, was messianism any fixed concept. Rather it was ever developing. The child of the prophet’s faith in Jehovah’s care for an oppressed Israel, it soon ceased to share in the peculiar spirit of its parent, and, like nomism, the other great characteristic of Judaism, passed far beyond

¹A personal Messiah is lacking, or at the best very indistinct, for instance, in Joel; Wisdom of Sirach, chap. 33; Isaiah, chaps. 24-7; Daniel; in much of Ethiopic *Enoch*; *Book of Jubilees*; *Assumption of Moses*. Other Jewish literature might be quoted. The list given by BOUSSER, *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, p. 209, possibly overemphasizes the absence of the personal element.

²This discrimination is vital for an understanding of the rôle played by messianism as a socialized concept. The statement of WENDT (*Teaching of Jesus*, Vol. I, p. 69) is true only with this modification: “The expectation of the Messiah was without doubt widely prevalent among the Jews in the time of Jesus, but it was not quite universal and free from doubt.” The remainder of the paragraph in question puts the matter more precisely. So, too (*ibid.*, p. 180), he says truly: “The Messiah was always conceived as the means whereby the kingdom of God was to be set up.”

the limits set by precedent and experience. To understand the original form taken by Christianity, it is necessary to sketch this development and to distinguish between those elements of faith common to all expressions of the hope, and the fancies or teachings peculiar to the various writings in which it has been preserved.

From the time that the first Hebrew dared to speak forth in Jehovah's name and promise his downtrodden fellow-countrymen divine deliverance from all their complaints, the Jewish race mitigated political oppression with ideal utopias. Primitive enough were these hopes in some of their aspects, fit products of a cruel and barbarous age. A conquering Israel, a Davidic king, a suppliant, terrorized, tortured world—these were the dreams which Jehovah was to make real. But, as prophecy advanced in its religious and ethical content, there was associated with this elemental optimism an ever-growing sense of Israel's moral and religious isolation. As a consequence, although barbarity still displayed itself in all forecasts of the future of heathendom, ethical ideals were infused into the hopes for the triumph of Israel. As the Hebrew religion grew moral, so the Hebrew utopias grew religious. Compared with the hopes of New Testament times, it is true, they were lacking in those transcendental elements that are commonly associated with messianism, but they were none the less of the same general nature. That they were full of social content is clear from the Hebrew literature,¹ even if many elements in early literature be attributed to the prophetic spirit of later editors. The historical basis of the messianic ideal was the glorious reign of David and Solomon, and in the pictures of the ideal kings given in the "royal" psalms² there beats the inextin-

¹ For the collection of these sayings see GOODSPEED, *Israel's Messianic Hope* (with good bibliography); DELITZSCH, *Messianic Prophecies*; HÜHN, *Die messianischen Weissagungen*.

² Pss. 2:2-4; 7-10; 45; 72; 110. Cf. GOODSPEED, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 73.

guishable optimism of a nation's faith in a divinely assured future. Early prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, saw in the religious and political crises resulting from the division of the kingdom of Solomon an opportunity to urge higher national ideals upon both the masses and the court. The calamities that threatened Israel, even during the brilliant reign of Jeroboam II., served as texts, not only for the dark forebodings of Amos, but for Hosea's prophecies of prosperity and peace that would come to the remnant of the nation when once it turned from idols and foreign alliances to a forgiving Jehovah.¹ In the disasters and miseries that came to both kingdoms during the days of Tiglath-pileser III., Sargon, and Sennacherib, Isaiah unfolded to Judah a religio-international policy that promised national deliverance and prosperity under a divinely appointed king,² and, as if to guarantee the certainty of the new nation, he set about the preparation of a "remnant" which should be its nucleus.³ Micah also promised an empire to a faithful nation.⁴ That Judah refused to listen to the words of these prophets makes all the more evident the social and political elements in their discourses. In fact, even if one should overlook the elaborate social provisions of Deuteronomy, prophetism, as a whole, was concerned with a regenerate Hebrew nation and a righteous king. That against which it cried out was such matters as the oppression of the poor, the formation of great landed estates, luxury, avarice, international policies, and national bad faith. Yet in denunciation there is the persistent trust in the nation's God. Even after the fading of Isaiah's promised future, Jeremiah, convinced though he was that Judah must certainly fall before the Chaldeans, yet

¹ For instance, Hos. 2:19-23; 14:1-8.

² Isa. 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 9:2-7; 11:1-9; 19:19-25.

³ Isa. 8:16-18.

⁴ Mic. 4:1-5. The relevancy of these passages will depend upon one's acceptance of them as pre-exilic. If they are post-exilic, the appropriate passages in the text should naturally be expunged.

looked beyond the approaching captivity to a restoration of the nation. Jehovah had made a new covenant with his people,¹ and his law was to be planted deep in their hearts as an inward guide. While it is true that the prophet does not describe in detail ideal institutions, it is clear from his denunciation of economic oppression² that just social conditions must have figured largely in his conception of the new covenant and the restored state.

With the exile this religio-political messianic hope, thus far so general and impersonal, passed into a new stage. The misery suffered by the Jews deported to Babylon, and the wonder that Jehovah could permit so great national and individual suffering, resulted in the formation of that pious remnant which Isaiah and Jeremiah had foreseen. Out from the misery there sprang fresh faith in a rapidly approaching divine deliverance. Ezekiel in Babylon planned a new commonwealth centered about a temple rebuilt with extravagant splendor. Religious as the hope of the exile was, and formally non-messianic as the Priestly Code undoubtedly is,³ each was none the less social,⁴ and never more so than when the sorrows of the good men of the nation were distinctly made vicarious⁵ for the nation itself. In no

¹ Jer. 31:31-34; 33:17-22.

³ MONTEFIORE, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 319.

² Jer. 7:1-15.

⁴ Ezek. 11:14-20; 37:21-28.

⁵ Isa. 52:13-53:12. The interpretation of this passage, so generally considered by Christians as applicable to Jesus, in Jewish literature is social; the sufferer is not the Christ, but Israel, either a nation or the pious scribes (Bab. *Siphre*, 48b; Bab. *Berach.*, 5a and 57b; *Sota*, 14a; Jer. *Shekualim*, 48c; *Bereshith Rabba*, 20, 1) in Israel (cf. JUSTIN, *Dial. Trypho.*, 122, 123; ORIGEN, *Ag. Celsus*, I, 55). The reference of *San.*, 98b, according to EDERSHEIM (*Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. II, p. 741), is to the Messiah as the "leprous one of the house of Rabbi." But this is from the second or third century, and represents the opinion of only a school of rabbis. See DALMAN, *Der leidende und der sterbende Messias*, pp. 28 f. Cf. also BUDDE, "The So-called 'Ebed-Yahweh Songs' and the Meaning of the Term 'Servant of Yahweh' in Isaiah, Chaps. 40-55," *Amer. Journal of Theology*, Vol. III, pp. 499 f.; MONTEFIORE, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 278 f.; CHEYNE, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, Vol. II, Essays iii-v; WRIGHT, "Pre-Christian Jewish Interpretation of Isa. lii-liv," *Expositor*, June, 1888; NEUBAUER-DRIVER, *Catena of Jewish Interpretations of Isa. liii*. There is at present a considerable tendency (e. g., Duhm, Sellin) toward an individualistic, or at least non-social, interpretation. The Servant is the typical good man whose sufferings are inexplicable from the point of view of nomism, unless they are vicarious. On the other hand, GIESEBRECHT, *Der Knecht Jahves des Deuteriojesaja*, holds that the Servant is Israel as a nation.

other literature has the problem of national and communal suffering been more nobly faced and answered.

Throughout this period of prophetic optimism there ran a developing social theory that at last was to be incorporated in an actual society. At the outset the prophets had thought of the nation as a whole; Isaiah saw that the "remnant" alone carried with it the future; Jeremiah, though still hoping for the "remnant," saw also the religious and social importance of the individual; Ezekiel, appreciating as perhaps no other Hebrew the value of the individual, began a new process of national reconstruction. No longer looking to the nation, or even the remnant, as the unit, he attempted to bring all godly individuals into the godly remnant, and this, in turn, into a glorious nation under holy priests and a Davidic king. Thus the cycle of ideals was completed. Nothing remained except to bring these ideals of Ezekiel and the pious men of the exile into an actual commonwealth. And that it attempted this is perhaps the greatest significance of the event known as the Return.

When, through the favor of the Persian Cyrus, Judea again took something like its old place in the world, it was with the determination on the part of its reconstructors to found a theocratic state in which a completed Torah was to regulate all matters of social life. But this was simply to embody the formulation of prophetic ideals; and this is only to say that the Return was an attempt to institutionalize prophetic messianism. Such an attempt was, in fact, all but inevitable. The prophets had expected that the divine deliverance would consist in the establishment of a Hebrew nation as untranscendental as Assyria and Egypt, its confederates,¹ and through the agency of no more miraculous intervention than would be involved in any political readjustment like the triumph of Assyria² or of Cyrus.³

¹ Isa. 19:19-25.

² Isa. 10:5.

³ Isa. 44:28; 45:1.

The righteousness that was to characterize this new Israel was that elaborated in the later code, and obviously was thought of as involving all social relations. How else can one estimate the appearance of the Levitical code, the covenant not only to maintain the temple and its worship, but also to avoid mixed marriages, not to trade with "the people of the land" on the sabbath or a holy day, to let the land periodically lie fallow, to observe the sabbatical year, and not to exact payment of certain debts?¹ Throughout the entire course of this early legalism there runs the same idealism in hope and practice.

But we are not limited to such evidence of an attempt to institutionalize messianism. In the prophecies that may reasonably be assigned to this period the significance of the new commonwealth is described in messianic colors. In no other prophets is the certainty of national deliverance and prosperity through Jehovah's presence more emphasized. The one prerequisite is the observance of the Thorah by the individual and the maintenance of the temple by the nation.² Then, too, appeared that hope which was to play so great a rôle in early Christianity, that in those days so soon to dawn Jehovah would send his spirit upon a pious Israel to inspire new prophetic zeal and visions.³ The coronation of Zerubbabel seemed to Haggai and Zechariah the fulfilment of the promise of a prince from the house of David,⁴ and thus one more feature in the messianic kingdom. The Judah of the Return was to be the fulfilment of the prophets' promises. A state was to be founded in which all social life was to be regulated by the divine Thorah.

Of the history of the ineffectual ideal commonwealth

¹ Neh. 10: 29-31. Possibly this is also the thought of the Pharisee who wrote the *Assumption of Moses*. See especially chaps. 3-5.

² Hag. 1: 13; 2: 6-9; Zech. 2: 1-5, 10-13; 8: 1-8, 12, 20-23; and especially Isa. 60: 1-22.

³ Joel 2: 28, 29.

⁴ Hag. 2: 23; Zech. 3: 8; 4: 6-10; see also 6: 11, 12.

which grew out of this hope it is not necessary to speak. Nor indeed are we in a position to trace its career with any certainty. Early Judaism is all but hidden in its own literatureless career. The few facts preserved by Josephus do not enable us to picture satisfactorily any of its phases, and we are forced to be content with conjecture and ingenious reconstructions.¹ If we were to judge of the time only by the "Wisdom" literature which may fairly be ascribed to it, we should be led to believe that the Jewish spirit had become philosophical, without enthusiasm for revealed law, and, with all its moral earnestness, callous as to religious idealism. Yet such a judgment would be one-sided. The transition from a renascent Hebraism to the new Judaism was marked by tendencies quite other than those toward philosophical Hellenism. These obscure years were in truth critical, for in them were developed tendencies that later were to result in the new Jewish world of the New Testament epoch. It was then that the new Hellenizing aristocracy of wealth, later to be known as the Sadducees, was founded in the family of that extraordinary adventurer, Joseph.² Then, too, began that scrupulous devotion to the Torah which was later to give religious history one of its most interesting figures, the Pharisee.

Yet, as regards materials for tracing the development of messianism, these years are sadly deficient. Indeed, it is hard to discover that there was any such hope in a glorious future for Judea as would merit being called messianic. Doubtless, if it were possible to picture the faith that survived among the humble folk that afterward were known as the Pious, it would appear that the idealism which brought about the Return was by no means dead. It is impossible to believe that the outburst of messianic literature that followed the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes would have

¹ For instance, CHEYNE, *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*.

² *Ant.*, xii, 4.

been possible without some widespread religious hope. Certainly, the new Judaism that rose when once the party of the Pharisees had differentiated itself from the Pious and the Sadducees, found ready to its hand all the elements of later messianism. There were (1) the ineradicable belief that Jehovah would re-establish the Jewish nation in indescribable glory, and (2) under a "legitimate" monarch, a son of David; (3) the equally fixed belief that he would judge the world and punish with indescribable sufferings the enemies of his chosen nation, and, though this is less clear, the wicked generally, whether gentiles or Jews. (4) A fourth element, the belief in a resurrection of the dead, indistinctly associated with the establishment of a regenerate Israel, can easily be overemphasized, but was undoubtedly present, at first in a somewhat figurative sense—the resurrection of a defunct state. It was this hope that later was to develop into an entire eschatology.

Such a catalogue of elements subsequently synthesized it would have been impossible to find in any other nation than that of the Jews. The fact that none of them was novel in the last pre-Christian century argues the persistence, so far as Palestine itself is concerned, of the prophetic idealism across these years of almost unbroken literary barrenness. And this idealism was, in the New Testament period, to follow two lines of development. There was, first, the revolutionary messianism of the masses; and, second, the eschatological messianism of the literary classes, notably the Pharisees. Both hopes were implicit in the prophetic messianism of the pre-Maccabean age, but the former, alone following more closely the spirit of earlier prophetism, constituted something like a genuinely religio-social movement. The messianism of the Pharisees, on the other hand, following rather the apocalyptic tendency first really distinct in the Maccabean period, grew scholastically religious and quite without social content.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICO-SOCIAL PROGRAM OF REVOLUTIONARY MESSIANISM

WHILE it is true that under the pressure of political misery both transcendental and revolutionary messianism differentiated themselves simultaneously in Judaism, it was the latter that remained the more conservative. Development is limitless within the region of such speculation as went to constitute the pseudepigraphic literature of apocalyptic, but in social movements hopes are tempered by experience. Further, the thoughts and hopes of the masses are always difficult to trace, but doubly so when, as among the Jews, they are all but unexpressed in literature and must generally be inferred from references in an unfriendly historian like Josephus. None the less, popular messianism deserves more attention than could be accorded it as long as no distinction was made between messianism as a regulative social concept and as a hope for a personal Messiah. It is difficult to show that the latter was universally cherished in the time of Jesus, but the hope for a new Israel, delivered and ruled by God, was always and everywhere in evidence. Throughout the entire period from Judas Maccabæus to the fall of Jerusalem, this hope of a new Israel was never suppressed, and at last became utterly uncontrollable. But revolution was not in the program of the literati or the well-to-do classes. It is, indeed, no unstriking parallelism that might be drawn between the different effects produced by English philosophy upon the literary circles and the masses of France during the eighteenth century, and the two manifestations of messianism among the scribes and the despised

'*am haarets* of Judaism during New Testament times. In both these pre-revolutionary epochs the radicalism of the literary circles, quite content with a policy of *laissez-faire*, was opposed to struggle, while the discontent of the masses, when once it had appropriated the watchwords and philosophy of the literary world, undertook to bring into actual existence a future which the comfortable middle class was quite ready to intrust to providence. Only, unlike the philosophers of France, in Judea the Pharisees had no keen interest even in reform, and the masses had no need to wait for the slow infiltration of ideas which they, as well as the Pharisees, had received as a common inheritance from their past.

It is commonly held that the messianic hope is wanting in 1 Maccabees, and this is true if one looks only for distinct references to an expected messianic king. The only approach to such a hope is to be seen in expectation of the prophet who was to come and solve riddles;¹ but, as is now pretty generally held, this prophet is certainly not the Messiah, but one like those of the old Hebrew days who was expected to appear and give a perplexed people infallible directions for conduct.² None the less, it is not improbable that the author of 1 Maccabees, like the authors of Judith, Tobit, and Baruch, expected a divine deliverance of Israel as well as a punishment of the heathen, and it is very probable that, in the spirit of the approximately contemporary portions of the *Sibylline Oracles*, though regarding David's dynasty as perpetual,³ he saw in the Asmonean house something more than a family of successful adventurers. In fact, he expressly gives them a messianic significance in the general sense of playing a part in the divine program for regenerating Israel, when he

¹ For example, the disposition of the stones of the polluted altar of burnt-sacrifice (1 Macc. 4:46) and the adjustment of the new Asmonean priestly dynasty with the claims of the house of Zadok (1 Macc. 14:41. Cf. also 1 Macc. 9:27).

² Cf. Mark 6:15; 8:28, where the prophet is sharply distinguished from the Christ.

³ 1 Macc. 2:57.

explains the defeat of certain emulators of Judas. They were "not of the seed of the men by whose hand deliverance was given unto Israel."¹ As has already been said, there is certainly nothing improbable in the conjecture that the pre-suppositions lying back of such a comment are near akin to that hope and faith that found expression in the contemporary literature of Daniel and *Enoch*. Doubtless the disappointment over the later Asmoneans felt by the pharisaic author of the *Psalms of Solomon*² was due in no small degree to the striking contrast between hopes cherished by his party in its earlier stages and the actual history of the descendants of John Hyrcanus. In this experience, as may later appear, is one very probable explanation for the subsequent refusal of the Pharisees to place confidence in anything less than superhuman catastrophic messianism. Certainly this is the dominant teaching of 2 Maccabees, itself a sort of pharisaic reply to the realism of 1 Maccabees. God is sure to render judgment upon the oppressors of Israel, and assures eternal life at least to pious Hebrews.³

The reign of Herod I. was not conducive to even apocalyptic messianic hopes, much less to any attempt to establish a new kingdom, whether of man or God, in Judea. We are, indeed, quite without any distinct literary reference to messianism during his reign—a fact that argues, not only repression, but also tolerable content on the part of the literary classes.⁴ Yet, possibly, revolutionary messianism is to be seen in the robber bands which Herod was forced to reduce. Such scanty evidence as exists concerning these men makes it probable that they were akin to nationalists rather than to

¹ 1 Macc. 5:62.

² Cf. Pss. 1:5-9; 2:3, 5, 8; 4:5; 7:2; 8:9-14.

³ 2 Macc. 7:9, 11, 14, 19, 23, 29, 35-37; 12:43, 44. The second of the two letters prefixed to 2 Maccabees has a hope of a re-established nation and cult.

⁴ The plot of the Pharisees described in *Ant.*, xvii, 2:4, can hardly be messianic, since they are said to have promised the kingdom to Pheroras. Josephus's description of this party is doubtless taken from Nicholas of Damascus. It hardly reads like the opinion of one who was himself a Pharisee.

brigands.¹ The conspiracy of the ten men,² and the revolt of the people under the rabbis Judas and Mattathias,³ were also an exhibition of a nationalism which, though not to be very clearly described, certainly had its origin in the religious sensibilities of the masses.⁴

It was with the death of Herod that revolutionary messianism entered upon its uncontrollable career. From that time it is possible to trace its history in a series of more or less successful revolts, a succession of not always abortive popular movements, and the formation of sects. Indeed, the entire course of rebellion, which culminated in the triumph of the Zealots and the war of 66–70 A. D., is best understood as an ever-increasing revolutionary messianism—an attempt on the part of popular leaders to hasten that divine deliverance of their nation which the prophets had foretold, and which every Jew believed was sure to come. The words of Josephus⁵ describing the motive of the rebellion give us the only true point of view: “What most stirred them up to the war was an ambiguous oracle that was found also in their sacred writings, that about that time one from their country should become ruler of the world.” To adopt this point of view is, however, not to say that all revolts were messianic. Several of them, as, for instance, those that followed the death of Herod, were clearly without any such significance.⁶ Nor is the

¹ For example, Hezekiah and his band (JOSEPHUS, *Ant.*, xiv, 9:2), though this case is less probable than the other (*Ant.*, xiv, 15:4, 5). The robbers he restrained in Trachonitis by settling colonists from Idumæa (*Ant.*, xvi, 9:1, 2) were of quite another type.

² *Ant.*, xv, 8:3, 4.

³ *Ant.*, xvii, 6:2–4.

⁴ JOSEPHUS, *Ant.*, xv, 10:4, explains Herod's remission of a third of the taxes as an effort to regain the good-will of an outraged people. Josephus also in this connection notes Herod's use of spies and his forbidding meetings of all sorts except those of the Essenes.

⁵ *War*, vi, 5:4. Cf. TACITUS, *Hist.*, v, 13; SÜETONIUS, *Cæsars*, Vespasian, 4.

⁶ For instance, that of the slave Simon and the shepherd Athrongæus (*War*, ii, 4:2, 3), and various other outbreaks, as those of *War*, ii, 5:1 ff.

revolt of 66-70 to be unreservedly called messianic. Many men, then, like Justus¹ were doubtless nothing more than rebels of a purely political sort. Those disturbances alone are to be considered messianic which are the work of a peculiar religious sect or, in particular, are evidently connected with the great Zealot movement of the middle of the century.

The emergence of this revolutionary messianism as a distinct political factor was at the taxing which succeeded the erection of Judea into a procuratorial province at the banishment of Archelaus in 6 A. D. At that time Judas² of Gamala in Gaulanitis and a Pharisee named Zadduk organized a fourth sect, especially influential among the younger Jews, co-ordinate with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, and encouraged the people to revolt against the new foreign ruler.³ Its character is clearly set forth in the description of Josephus: "Its disciples agree in all other things with the pharisaic notions, but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is their only ruler and lord." The share of this sect, so clearly that of the Zealots, with its "kingdom of God," in the downfall of the Jewish state is emphatically declared by Josephus.⁴ To trace the rise of the Jewish revolt is hardly anything else than to trace the growth of the messianic propaganda. Nor was its spirit wholly confined to Judea. For, though anything like complete information is wanting, it is difficult not to see something akin to Zealot fanaticism in the gathering of armed Samaritans near Gerizim in order to discover the

¹ JOSEPHUS, *Life*, 65.

² A Galilean (*War*, ii, 8:1; *Ant.*, xviii, 1:1, 6). According to GUTHE (art. "Israel," *Ency. Bib.*), he was probably the son of the "robber" Ezekias executed by Herod (*Ant.*, xvii, 10:5; xiv, 9:3 f.).

³ *Ant.*, xviii, 8:1, 6. His sons, like those of Mattathias under Antiochus Epiphanes, apparently continued the movement begun by their father, for they were crucified by Alexander the procurator (*Ant.*, xx, 5:2).

⁴ *Ant.*, xviii, 1:1, 6.

sacred vessels buried in the mountains by Moses.¹ But it was in Judea and Galilee that the leaven worked most effectively. The prophet Theudas, who, in 45 or 46 A. D., induced a great multitude to follow him toward Jordan, which, like another Moses, he promised to divide, evidently appealed to the messianic hopes of the masses. That his career produced no results was due to the promptness of the procurator Fadus.² Under Felix, Judea and Galilee were alive with robbers and impostors, some of whom, like Eleazar, who for twenty years had led a band of outlaws,³ the procurator executed; and some of whom, like the newly appearing Sicarii, he seems to have used to further his own plans.⁴ Along with the Sicarii were men like Theudas urging the masses to follow them into the wilderness, there to see miracles. One of these impostors—if it is fair to use quite so harsh a term—was an Egyptian who promised his followers from the *'am haarets* to stand on the Mount of Olives and cause the walls of Jerusalem to fall.⁵ More significant, however, are the obscure words of Josephus⁶ in which he describes a body of “wicked men, cleaner in their hands, but more wicked in their intentions, who destroyed the peace of the city no less than did these murderers [the Sicarii]. For they were deceivers and deluders of the people, and under pretense of divine illumination were for

¹ *Ant.*, xviii, 4:1. If this should have been by any chance connected also with the work of John and Jesus in the vicinity, it would have been one element in a piece of poetic justice. For it was his dispersion of this gathering that brought Pilate into exile.

² *Ant.*, xx, 5:1; cf. Mark 13:22; Matt. 24:11, 24. The disturbances under Cumanus (*Ant.*, xx, 5:3, 4; *War*, ii, 12:1, 2) were due to religious fanaticism, though hardly to messianic currents.

³ *Ant.*, xx, 8:5; *War*, ii, 13:2, 3.

⁴ These Sicarii were a group of fanatical Zealots, and hence messianists (cf. *Ant.*, xviii, 1:1), who turned to assassination as a means of hurrying in the kingdom of God. Their share in the revolt of 66-70 A. D. was not considerable, but they held Masada, and perished there by their own hands (*War*, ii, 17:6; iv, 7:2, 9:5; vii, 8:1 f., 10:1, 11:1).

⁵ *Ant.*, xx, 8:6; *War*, ii, 13:5; cf. Acts 21:38.

⁶ *War*, ii, 13:4.

innovations and changes." It is not difficult to see in these men a body of fanatics bound upon assisting God¹ to bring in the deliverance for which their nation was passionately hoping.²

Under Felix there began to appear in this seething messianism of the masses elements of social as well as political revolution. Several of the bodies of fanatics who were urging the masses to revolt were also plundering and burning the houses of the well-to-do people and killing their owners.³ How far the "innovating party at Jerusalem," which, according to Josephus,⁴ under Albinus became a combination of "arch-robbers," and their "satellites" is to be identified with these emulators of the early Maccabeans it is impossible to say. The times were breeding anarchy quite as much as revolutionary idealism. Yet one cannot doubt that the messianism of the Zealots included some wild schemes for reorganizing the Jewish state. Peasant utopias are always hard to reconstruct, so completely is one at the mercy of hostile chroniclers and historians; but if one comes to the history of the Zealots from that of the German and English Peasant Wars, and especially from the strikingly analogous movements among the French peasantry and proletarians just before and during the Revolution of 1789, it will be easy to see, back of the violence Josephus delights in char-

¹ They believed that "God would show them signs of liberty" in the desert.

² This hope of the Zealots has also been seen (*c. g.*, SCHÜRER, Vol. III³, p. 219; MATHEWS, *New Testament Times in Palestine*, p. 168) in *Assumption of Moses*, 10:8, which has sometimes been translated, "Thou shalt tread upon the neck and the wing of the eagle," the reference certainly suggesting Rome, and breathing thus the spirit of Zealotism. The translation, however, of the evidently mutilated verse should probably be, "Thou shalt mount up on the neck and the wings of the eagle," *i. e.*, toward heaven, a thought immediately expressed in 10:9, 10. The entire fragment seems to express quietism and the non-resistance of the Chasidim as well as the unwarlike transcendentalism of early pharisaism. See especially 9:4-7, with which compare 1 Macc. 1:53; 2:31-38; 2 Macc. 6:11; 10:6; *Ant.*, xii, 6:2. That the author was a Pharisee is now held by CHARLES, *Assumption of Moses*; CLEMEN, in KAUTZSCH, *Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen*, Vol. II, pp. 314 f. The fragment was probably written during the first quarter of the first Christian century.

³ War, ii, 13:6.

⁴ War, ii, 14:1.

ging upon them, a determined effort on the part of men like John of Gischala and Eleazar to establish a new Jewish state in which there should be not only liberty,¹ but also equality. This purpose it is that explains, at least partially, that cleavage between the wealthy, learned, and official classes and the masses, which characterized the entire revolutionary period. Such cleavage was no new phenomenon, for the 'am haarets had always been despised by the Pharisees and high-priests,² but with the first resistance to the procurator Gessius Florus it became a source of civil war. From the outset the Pharisees and high-priests as a class opposed the revolt. Singularly enough, however, the radical who first proposed that the sacrifices for the emperor cease was Eleazar, the son of the high-priest Ananias, at that time governor of the temple; and, despite the opposition of the class to which he belonged, he was able to carry his plan into action.³ The conservative element in Jerusalem was, indeed, with the greatest difficulty induced to abandon the non-political⁴ attitude of apocalyptic messianism. It undertook the organization of the revolt only as the less of two evils, and doubtless with the purpose of making peace as soon as possible with Rome⁵—a fact that gives special significance to the labors of that enemy of dilettante revolutionists, John of Gischala.⁶ But even such adjustment of the "classes" and "masses" was short-lived. The moment the Zealots and their sympathizers among the masses gained

¹ Cf. *War*, iv, 4:1, 5; 5:5.

² That this contempt should have grown under the later rabbis is very likely due in part to the events of the civil war, 66-70 A. D. For illustration of what this feeling was, see quotations in SCHÜRER, *Jewish People, etc.*, Div. II, ii, 8(b), especially *Demai*, ii, 3. On some more shocking expressions (e. g., "a member of the 'am haarets may be slit up," *Pesachim*, 49b) see some very sensible words in LAZARUS, *Ethics of Judaism*, Vol. I, pp. 258 f.

³ *War*, ii, 17:2.

⁴ *Ant.*, xvii, 11:1, 2.

⁵ JOSEPHUS, *Life*, 7; *War*, ii, 17:4; iv, 5:2. See also *War*, ii, 20:1-3.

⁶ *War*, ii, 21:1, 2; *Life*, 13.

any advantage, their policy of economic as well as political revolution emerged. Thus in the first excitement of the attempt to establish the ideal state they set fire to the public archives,¹ burned all records of indebtedness, and massacred the high-priest Ananias.² This anti-aristocratic spirit developed rapidly after the collapse of the attempt of the *bourgeois* party to organize a successful revolt in Galilee, and, thanks to the enthusiasm of the younger Jews, throughout the fearful days of civil war it grew even more extreme. A band of fanatical Idumean patriots was introduced as the means of establishing a veritable reign of terror, in the midst of which many wealthy men were killed, including the noble high-priest Ananus.³ The effort to force the hand of Jehovah and to compel him to hasten the deliverance of an abortive messianic state had become, like so many a later revolution, a carnival of blood. Yet through all this struggle one can see the persistent, though ever-diminishing, idealism of the Zealots. They would have a peasant high-priest, a new state, a new people, and no king but God.⁴ The ancient prophets in whose words they trusted could not be seen to foretell anything but triumph for such an ambition,⁵ and during the miseries of the last days of the capital the later prophets were urging the people to await deliverance from God.⁶

Their mad hope of deliverance included, as has already been said, a conqueror, whose appearance was assured by the "ambiguous oracle" (χρησμός ἀμφίβολος) of which Josephus speaks, and which can be no other than that of Daniel.⁷

¹ Yet, cf. *War*, vi, 6:3.

² *War*, ii, 17:6, 9. That they were seeking after some ideal state is clear from Eleazar's execution of the would-be tyrant Menahem.

³ *War*, iv, 5:1-3.

⁴ Cf. *War*, iv, 3:6-8; 5:4, 5; 6:1.

⁵ *War*, iv, 6:3.

⁶ *War*, vi, 5:2. Many portents are described by JOSEPHUS, *War*, vi, 5:3.

⁷ That Josephus himself regarded this prophecy as foretelling the destruction of Rome seems implied by his refusal to interpret the "stone" of Dan. 2:45 in *Ant.*, x, 10:4.

Here in this hope the *motif* of the entire Zealot movement may be seen: its members believed that, if once they could organize an independent republic, during its struggle with Rome the Messiah himself would come to its aid.¹ It is even possible to see in the desperate faith of the Jerusalem prophets² a faith born of Dan. 9:25, that the very destruction of Jerusalem would in God's own time—"seven weeks and three score and two weeks"—be followed by the appearance of the Messiah.³

In very truth, the Jews who had rejected Jesus as Messiah paid terribly for their rejection of "the things that pertained to peace" and their choice of another hope. The Jewish state fell, the victim of an ever-developing fanaticism, born of a faith in a coming kingdom and king. In the attempt made by the Zealots to hasten God's time there is to be seen a hope for an actual commonwealth, which, however we may admit our lack of information, was clearly to embrace new social institutions. How vain was their dream is apparent, but it was no less dreamed. Nor did messianism of this type perish with the temple. A half-century later it again blazed out, but with its champions no longer separated from the party of the Pharisees. In its new form revolutionary messianism was guided and inspired by no less a person than the great rabbi Akiba.

¹ The rôle played by the prophecies of Daniel throughout this period of the Jewish state is great. Chief reliance was undoubtedly laid upon the vision of the "stone cut without hands from the mountain" (Dan. 2:45) and the vision of the "Son of man" (7:13), the Messiah (9:25), and the apocalypse of chaps. 11 and 12. The "ambiguity" in these oracles can have been only whether the new prince was to be a native Jew of Palestine or a foreigner. JOSEPHUS interprets it in the latter sense (so GERLACH, *Die Weissagungen d. A. T. in den Schriften d. Fl. Jo.*, p. 73), apparently thereby giving up all further expectation of a coming Messiah—a conclusion, however, hard to accept in the light of *Ant.*, x, 10:4, and his treatment of the prophecy of Balaam (*Ant.*, iv, 6:5). It is perhaps worth noticing that this familiarity of the people at large with the prophecies of Daniel is an important element in judging the meaning Jesus conveyed by speaking of himself as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

² War, vi, 5:2.

³ GERLACH, p. 84.