

MESSIAH: THE STAR FROM JACOB AND THE SCEPTER FROM ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT:

MESSIAH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. THE PROMISES MADE TO THE MESSIAH'S ANCESTORS WERE VERY MANY AND, IN THE SAME TIME, VERY PROFOUND.

THE IDENTITY OF MESSIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IS POINTED OUT THROUGH TERMS, SUCH AS: "THE SEED", "THE STAR" AND "THE SCEPTRE".

THE AIM OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO HIGHLIGHT THE PROPHECY THAT DESCRIBES MESSIAH AS "THE STAR" OF JACOB, AND THE SCEPTRE OF ISRAEL. THIS PROMISE, JUST AS STATED IN NUMBERS 22 COMES AS A CONTINUATION IN THE DESCRIPTION OF THE GENEALOGICAL LINE THAT MESSIAH BELONGS TO. THEREFORE, AFTER HAVING BEEN FORETOLD THAT MESSIAH IS "THE SEED OF THE WOMAN", HE WOULD BE BORN OF THE "SEMITES", AND THEN HE WOULD BE THE SEED OF ABRAHAM, WE ARE TOLD THAT HE WILL BE THE DESCENDANT OF JACOB.

WE WOULD THEREFORE SUGGEST APPROACHING NOT ONLY THE MESSAGE THAT WAS SENT THROUGH THE PROMISES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT REGARDING THE IDENTITY OF MESSIAH THE KING BUT ALSO THE ONE THAT PROVES THAT JESUS CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FOLLOWED THE PATH DRAWN FOR HIM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

KEYWORDS: THE STAR FROM JACOB, THE SCEPTRE FROM ISRAEL, NUMBERS, MESSIAH THE KING.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most relevant Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament through which the genealogic line of the Messiah is marked out, is the one stated by Balaam in the book of Numbers. Chapter 22 of this book highlights the fact that the Israelites, during their trip from Egypt to Canaan, camped in the plains of Moab right in front of the city of Jericho. The King of Moab, Balak son of Zippor, being terrified of such a great² number of Jewish people (22:3-4), sent messengers to summon Balaam³, son of Beor, in Pethor, on the River Euphrates, in Mesopotamia, so they could put a curse on Israel. Therefore, just as with the prophecy from

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² The manner in which Balak describes the Israelites (Num. 22:4-5) proves that the fulfillment of the prophecy given to Abraham about his descendants being as numerous as "the sand of the sea" started to pan out.

³ Terminologically, Balaam (~[l.Bi – WTT or Balaa.m – BYZ) appears 79 times in the Bible (VDC), specifically 76 times in the OT and only 3 times in the NT.

Gen. 3:15, the promise (that foretold the blessings) stated in Num. 23 and 24 is part of the Moabites' curse. As it can be noticed from Num. 22, Balaam even if he refused the first invitation of the Moabite King Balak, when messengers were sent a second time (being more influential than the first messengers), he accepted it. Although Balak called Balaam to curse the Jewish people, God changed the curse into a blessing (Deut. 23:5) and "The LORD put a message in Balaam's mouth" (Num. 23:5, 12, 16 – NIV).

During his staying with Balak, Balaam uttered four distinctive prophecies, each of them being of great importance for both the present and the future of Jewish people. The ritual used by Balaam was to build seven altars and on each of them sacrifice a calf and a ram (23:1, 14), then asked Balak to stay next to these altars while he was going to another place (sometimes this was referred to as going "to a high place" - Num 23:3 - KJV) so as to observe what God had to reveal to him regarding the Jewish people.

The first prophecy (Num. 23:7-10) portrays Israel as a special people "a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations. (Num 23:9 - NIV)" (v.9); a very numerous people („the dust of Jacob" - Num 23:10 - NIV) and blessed by God (v.8).

The second prophecy (Num. 23:19-24) is uttered from „the field of Zophim" (v. 14 – NIV) and reveals the following: (1) God never lies and whatever He promises, He fulfils, therefore, once He has blessed the Israelites, nobody can curse them (v.19,20); (2) The Lord God of Israel is with them⁴, being even their King (v.21); (3) The Lord God fulfilled marvellous things for the Jewish people and no divination or evil omens will have power over Israel (v.22,23); (4) „The people rise like a lioness; they rouse themselves like a lion that does not rest till he devours his prey and drinks the blood of his victims" (v. 24 – NIV)⁵.

The third prophecy (Num. 24:5-9) is proclaimed from the top of mount Peor (Num. 23:28) and consists of the following: (1) the Jewish people are special because of the tents they possess for their dimension and beauty (vv.5,6); (2) their kingdom will be strong (v.7); (3) God fights for Israel, so it will become extremely powerful, like an invincible lion (vv.8-9a); (4) whoever blesses Israel shall be blessed, and whoever curses them shall be cursed⁶(v. 9b).

The fourth prophecy (Num. 24:17-19) is the most relevant for the present topic, as it describes not only a God who comes to help a blessed people, but also an extremely important event that will happen in the future of this nation and that will bring a complete change upon it.

1. The Promise – Num. 24:17-19

Therefore, God spoke this profound Messianic prophecy, even through a prophet from outside the Jewish territory⁷, namely through Balaam. This prophecy consists of similar expressions to those from Gen. 49⁸. First of all, we have to notice that Balaam before uttering this prophecy tells Balak that he will deliver a message about things that will take place „in the days to come" (Num. 24:14 - NIV) (~ymiY"h; tyrlx]a;B. – WTT).

⁴ This part of the prophecy which claims that "God of Israel is with them" is a fulfillment of the promise given to Shem (that God will live in his tents) and also to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:7), a promise reinforced to Isaac and Jacob.

⁵ God through Balaam in Num. 23:24 and in 24:9 reiterates the prophecy spoken through Jacob for Judah in Gen. 49:9.

⁶ The promise made to Abraham in Gen 12:3 is also reiterated through this promise.

⁷ The fact that Balaam was not from Israel, proves the fact that the message of this Messianic prophecy, namely, the Messianic idea, was known even outside of the Judaic territory, from ancient times, apud Nicolae Neaga, (*Christ in the Old Testament*), (Cluj-Napoca: Publishing House Renaşterea, 2004), 45.

⁸ One of these is "the ruler's staff", that will have analyzed in details with the terminology of the prophecy from Gen. 49:10.

The Messianic character of this prophecy is further proved in the Hebrew verses from Num. 24:17. *Onkelos* Tragum translates: „When a King shall rise out of Jacob, and out of Israel, Messiah shall be anointed.” Targumul *Jonathan* translates: „When a valiant King shall rise out of the house of Jacob, and out of Israel, Messiah, and a strong Sceptre shall be anointed.”⁹ *Pseudo-Jonathan* Targum translates: „I see him, but he is not at the present time, I behold him but he is not near; but when a mighty king of the house of Jacob shall reign, and shall be anointed Messiah, wielding the mighty sceptre of Israel.”¹⁰ Also, even the Hebrew perception of those who lived only a century ago from the Ascension of the Lord to heaven, consider that the prophecy from Num. 24:17-19 refers to Messiah, because the leader of the Jewish rebellion during King Adrian (in 132 AD) called him Simeon Bar Kochba translated „Son of the Star”, because they considered Messiah foretold in Num. 24:17¹¹

The prophecy itself begins with the verse 17 only, but just as it was with the third prophecy, there is a foreword uttered by Balaam which has the purpose of reassuring that the message that is about to be delivered is authentic. Therefore, right from the very beginning, Balaam emphasizes that the author of the promise that will be uttered is God, and he is only a means through which the divine message is revealed, because Balaam says that “he who hears the words of God” (24:4a, 16a –NIV), “sees a vision from the Almighty (Num 24:4b, 16b - NIV) and “falls prostrate” (Num 24:4c,16c).

The promise itself starts with the verse 17 and it contains some specific terms, namely:

- ✓ The verbs ha'r' (ra'ah - WTT, “to see”) and rWv (shuwr - WTT, “to look/to see”) have the future tense form, moreover the other expressions: “but not now” and “but not near” (Num 24:17)” acknowledge the idea that the message delivered refers to a person who is about to come in the future;
- ✓ The noun bk'AK (kowkab – WTM, “star”) designates an important person, „a ruler or king”¹² and „the sceptre”, as it could be noticed from the analysis of the prophecy described in Gen. 49:10, which further confirms this account.

Therefore, this passage introduces a ruler who is going to come from the lineage of Jacob and who will be like a “star” and will hold “the sceptre”. The important role of the king that will be born from Jacob’s seed is mostly highlighted by his main actions, emphasized by the verbs used in verses 17-19, namely: “will crush” (v.17), “Edom will be conquered” (v.18), „hall have dominion and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city (Num 24:19 - KJV)”.

The promise goes hand in hand with the prophecy written in Genesis for Jacob, namely that his descendants will be blessed and that kings will come from his seed.

⁹ E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary of the Messianic Predictions*, vol. I, (translated from German by Theodore Meyer), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1868, 99; Samson Levey, *The Messiah: an Aramaic interpretation - the Messianic exegesis of the Targum*, (California: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974), 21.

¹⁰ Samson Levey, *The Messiah: an Aramaic interpretation*, 23. For more translation from Targumuri, check out pp 21-27, of the above book.

¹¹ Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, 55; Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary of the Messianic Predictions*, 99; Samson Levey, *The Messiah: an Aramaic interpretation*, 22; Nicolae Neaga, *Christ in the OT*, 45.

¹² Nicolae Neaga, *Christ in OT*, 44. In the same context N. Neaga highlights the fact that both in the OT and in the NT, the word “star” was associated, in many contexts, with important people or kings, namely Dan. 12:3 (“those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens”); Gen. 37:9 (Joseph’s brothers are “11 stars”) and in Rev. 22:16 (Jesus Christ Himself is called “the Bright Star” or “The Bright Morning Star” – D. Cornilescu Version). See Justinian Cârstoiu, *Messianic Prophets*, course for students, (Bucharest: Sigma, 2006), 61.

Therefore, both phrases “A star will come out of Jacob”, and “That who will be born from Jacob” clearly point out to the fact that Messiah will be born from Jacob and that He will be like a star, meaning that he will be among other things a King.¹³

2. THE FULFILLMENT

There were commentators who found that the promise from Num. 24:17-19 is of no messianic significance but that it only describes a Jewish king, who will have victory over the Edomites, the Moabites and the Ammonites and according to them this king is king David. This king, according to them is revealed by Balaam through the following phrases „the star from Jacob”, “the sceptre”, saying this: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near” (Num 24:17 –NIV).¹⁴

Kaiser¹⁵, as a counter-argument to the idea that “the star from Jacob” and „the sceptre from Israel” are exclusive images of David asserts that the prophecy is taken from Jer. 48-49¹⁶, clearly making reference to the future.

Moreover, along the history, not only David defeated these nations, but Jehoshaphat, king of Judah had fought against "the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir" (2 Chronicles. 20: 1, 10 - KJV) and through a God's miraculous intervention (2 Chronicles. 20: 17.22 to 24) he had defeated them. Therefore, it is easy to understand that Balaam's prophecy did not picture only king David's victory over these nations but also the final triumph that will be brought by Messiah.

It is very important for us to understand that the star of Jacob designates Messiah as King (fact that is perceived even by those outside of Judaism). It is equally important to take a closer look at the symbols used in the prophecy namely: the star and the sceptre (staff). Hengstenberg emphasizes that in the Scriptures the star is the symbol used to express the magnificence of power and the sceptre, the one of authority.¹⁷ Origen claims that “the star of Jacob” does not portray only a king, but its purpose is to also reveal the deity of the king it represents, whereas “the sceptre”/ “the ruler's staff” points to his humanity.¹⁸ Furthermore, Franz Delitzsch claims that “the star” is symbol of his heavenly origin and glory, whereas “the Sceptre” is the symbol of his royal dignity.¹⁹

We could claim therefore that the prophecy from Num. 24:17 describes Messiah as the King who will defeat all the nations surrounding them (Moab, Edom, “the children of Seth” and the Seir) becoming a universal king from whom no one can escape not even those who decide to run away from Him because he “loses the remnant of the cities.”

This promise, just as Briggs argues, shows Messiah as a King, who will establish the Kingdom of God within Israel, a Kingdom that will be invincible. Therefore, the nations named in Num. Num. 24:17b-18, are only the predecessors of all the nations who will fight against God's chosen nation, Israel—followed by many other nations who will become its

¹³ This prophecy has as a main subject the messianic idea of a king that will come in the future, Kaiser, *The Messiah in the OT*, 54.

¹⁴ Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that cometh: the Messiah concept in the Old Testament and later Judaism*, traducerea de G. W. Anderson, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956, 13; Joachim Becker, *Messianic expectation in the Old Testament*, traducerea de David E. Green, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 36.

¹⁵ Kaiser, *The Messiah in OT*, 55.

¹⁶ Chapter 48 from Jeremiah is intended to describe the defeat of the Moabites² and in chapter 49 the one of the Ammonites' and the Edomites'.

¹⁷ Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary of the Messianic Predictions*, 99.

¹⁸ Origen, *In Numbers Hom., XVIII, M.G., tom. 12, col. 717 și 716*, apud , Nicolae Neaga, *Christ in OT*, 45.

¹⁹ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic prophecies: Lectures*, 40.

enemies until the final battle outlined in Rev. 20:8, with Gog and Magog at the end of the world.²⁰

We can therefore assert that the analyzed promise was partially fulfilled in Israel's history, but in the same time it also implies a profound waiting regarding Israel's fate, one of being victorious over all other nations, fact that will be proven in the future through all the significant battles in which Israel will be involved, and especially in the final battle at the end of the world.

The special role of King that Messiah holds is exhaustively described through specific excerpts from the NT among which we mention:

Messiah – the Davidic King in the NT:

- “the son of David”²¹ (Mat. 1:1,6,20);
- “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” (Mat. 2:2);
- “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” (Joh 1:49 - NIV) – named by Nathanael from his very first meeting with the Lord Jesus;
- People's desire to make him King by force, after the multiplication of the loaves (John 6:15);
- Being indirectly introduced as a king through parables that had as main topic the Kingdom of God²², respectively, “The Kingdom of heaven”²³ (Mat. 13:24–52; 20:1–16; 21:33 –22:14; 25:1-46);
- The noun “King” (in Greek *basileu.j*) referring to Messiah appears 38 times²⁴ only in the NT. It is of great importance to notice that Jesus never introduced Himself as a King. There is only in one context in which He revealed His true identity, that of a namely, when He was judged when the governor asked him “Are you the king of the Jews?” „Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.” (Mat. 27:11; John 18:37).

Messiah – the Glorious King in Jerusalem

The evangelist Matthew cites in Zechariah 9:9 while describing Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem: “This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet: ‘Say to the Daughter of Zion, „See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”(Mat. 21:4-5)²⁵

Messiah - Perceived as King even from the time of His contemporaries

- Messiah's contemporaries accused Him of claiming Himself to be the promised King (Luke 23: 2; John 19:12);
- Derision during His catch and investigation reveals the people's self-perception regarding Messiah being a King (soldiers said „and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said.” (Mat. 27:29).²⁶

²⁰ Briggs, Messianic Prophecy, 108. Walter Kaiser shares the same opinion, who even quotes Briggs' phrase in Kaiser, The Messiah in the OT, 56-7

²¹This expression appears on multiple occasions in the NT; in most of the cases it is clearly pointing to the bloodline of Messiah from the royal family of David.

²² The concept of “The Kingdom of God” is found 135 times in the NT

²³ The expression “Kingdom of heaven” is very common in the Gospel of Matthew and it appears 33 times.

²⁴ Matt. 2:2; 5:35; 21:5; 25:34,40; 27:11,29,37,42; Mc. 15:2,9,12,18,26,32; Luca 19:38;23,2,3,37,38; Ioan 1:49; 12:13,15; 18:33,37(x2),39; 19:3,14,15,19,21; 1Tim. 1:17; 6:15; Apoc. 15:3; 17:14; 19:16;

²⁵This quote is also used by the evangelist John specifying the following phrase “as it is written” (12:14, 15).

²⁶ All the elements used by the soldiers, the crown of thorns, a reed given to Jesus—and their crying, all these would only become an irony to His identity as a King which proves the great impact that this situation had on Jesus's contemporaries. We notice therefore that during His judgment and even the crucifixion the most

- The label on His cross “THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Mat 27:37)”;
Messiah proven as King after His exaltation
- Paul and Silas accused in Thessalonica for claiming to introduce Messiah as King (Acts 17: 7).
- The main topic dealt with by early Christians is related to the identity of Messiah as King (in Acts 4:26 apostles adjudge Ps. 2 to Messiah mainly, who is the Anointed and King Father).

CONCLUSION

Therefore the promise from the OT that a star will rise from Jacob, namely a Sceptre from Israel materialized strictly through Messiah’s role as a King, confirmed especially through the Gospels, but nonetheless existing from eternity and into eternity.

frequently mentioned status was the one of the King of Jews (Mat. 27:11; Mc. 15:2 – even when Jesus stood before Pilate; Mat. 27:42 - while hanging on the cross, the passers-by asked Him to prove that He was a King “Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross” (Mar 15:32 - NIV)...; Mc. 15:9,12,18 – Pilate while judging Him, called Jesus “The King of Jews”).

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