

Messianic Passages in the Torah – The First Coming

Tonight, we are going to talk about some Messianic passages in the Old Testament. I chose this topic for several reasons. First, for a while I've been interested in knowing about the passages in the Old Testament that Jesus probably used when he appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Look at Luke 24:13–27:

¹³ And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and *began* traveling with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. ¹⁷ And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ One *of them*, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?” ¹⁹ And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, ²⁰ and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. ²¹ “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. ²⁵ And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” ²⁷ **Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.**

Notice– vs. 27 – He explained the things written about Himself “beginning with Moses.” Remember that, for the Jews, the Scriptures were divided into 3 divisions – The TaNak – the Torah (or the Law, the first 5 books of the OT), the Neviim (the Prophets) and the K’tuvim (the Writings). So when Christ explained about Himself “beginning with Moses”, He was explaining about Himself by explaining what the Torah said about the Messiah.

Second, I just got done reading one of the books Jeremy recommended called “Ha-Mashiach: The Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures”, by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum. I’m sure Dr. Fruchtenbaum is familiar to most of us – we’ve listened to some of his lessons occasionally here at our church and he’s an excellent resource on the Old Testament and Israelology. He is a messianic believer, the founder and director of Ariel Ministries – a messianic Jewish ministry– and is one of the foremost authorities on the nation of Israel. I got his book – Ha-Mashiach – and it is a great summary of the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of the Messiah. It is not that long, has a lot of good information and is very understandable.

Finally, as with most other traditional views of Scripture, the view that there are direct messianic prophecies in the Old Testament is being eroded - even among evangelical scholars. Michael Rydelnik, in his book “The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic” – another excellent resource that I used for this lesson – points out this reason for his book:

“Why write a book advocating the idea that the Hebrew Bible is messianic? Since Jesus told his disciples, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must

be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44), it would seem obvious to affirm the messianic nature of the Hebrew Bible. But this is not the case. Although a few evangelicals would deny that there are some direct messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, it is becoming increasingly popular to reject the idea that the Hebrew Bible has specific predictions of the Messiah. Instead, evangelical scholarship tends to affirm that the messianic prophecies are merely a form of general promise..... There is a growing movement by evangelicals away from interpreting the Hebrew Bible as a messianic book.”

Wow - the trend in evangelical scholarship is away from interpreting the Hebrew Bible as a messianic book **despite Jesus own words**. Poor Jesus – He needed more learning. I guess these guys will set Him straight at the Bema seat.

Now, we don’t have enough time in one lesson to cover everything that the OT says about the Messiah. And we don’t even have enough time to cover everything the Torah says about the Messiah. So, our focus tonight is going to be on what the Torah tells us about the first coming of the Messiah. These are things that the nation of Israel and their leaders would know very well about the Messiah and would have been the basis in the Torah for qualifying Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah. Obviously, through later revelation in the Prophets and the Writings, they would have had much more information that clearly verified Jesus as the Messiah; however, as we will see, just from the Torah, a lot of information was available.

The first passage we are going to cover is Genesis 3:15. It is traditionally called the “protoevangelium” because it is the earliest Messianic passage in the Bible. Let’s first look at the context of the passage, then we’ll look at what it says, and then we’ll look at some “hints” that may give us some information about how Adam and Eve (and their descendants before the Flood) might have interpreted the passage.

First, the context – which all of us know very well. God created the heavens and the earth – the entirety of the created universe – in six days, culminating with the creation of the first man – formed from the dust of the earth - on the sixth day. God planted a garden – the Garden of Eden – and placed the man there and then, after showing Adam that no other creature corresponded to Adam, God put Adam to sleep and created the first woman out of the rib of the first man – they were joined together and the two became “one flesh”. They were both created in God’s image – the only creatures created in God’s image – and were given instructions to be “fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over it.”

Adam and Eve had dominion over the earth, but were to exercise that dominion subject to God’s instructions and authority – faithfully according to His instructions to them. Adam was in authority over Eve, they both were in authority over the earth and all its creatures, and they both were under the authority of God. God gave them some basic instructions – positively, they were instructed to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Adam was the head and Eve was created to be Adam’s helper. They were to accomplish their task together.

The only proscription – or negative instruction – they were given, was that they could not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told them not to eat of it and graciously told them the consequences – if they ate that fruit they would “surely die”.

On the seventh day, God declared everything He made to be “very good” and rested from His creative activity.

Sometime after the seventh day, Satan fell – unrighteousness was found in him. Acting through a creature – a serpent – Satan tempted Eve to disobey God. Eve was deceived, ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and then gave it to Adam and he ate some, too. They immediately became ashamed of their nakedness and tried to cover themselves and hide from God. God called to them and, after God questioned them, they confessed to having eaten from the tree. Note that they tried to avoid responsibility for their own actions and shift the blame to someone else – Adam blamed God and Eve – “the woman that you gave me” – and Eve blamed the serpent. The serpent was silent. God then “curses” each of them – first the serpent, then Eve and finally Adam.

Genesis 3:14-15 contain the curses against the serpent. Genesis 3:14 is a curse on the earthly creature – this earthly serpent is cursed more than the other beasts and is to crawl on its belly and “eat dust” all the days of its life. Even though a serpent – being an animal – does not have moral responsibility, God curses the animal as a constant reminder, an “object lesson”, of the Fall (kind of like the rainbow is a reminder of the Flood). However, Genesis 3:15 is not a curse against the animal, but shifts the curse to the angelic power behind the animal – Satan.

Now, let’s look at the words of Genesis 3:15. Here’s how it reads:

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”

“Enmity” is hostility. According to Rydelnik, the term always refers to enmity between moral agents (not animals). (Note: this supports the view that Genesis 3:15 does not involve an animal, but is addressed to Satan, who is a moral agent). “You” is referring to Satan – Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 tells us that. “The woman” is Eve.

“Seed” is offspring. There are several interpretations of “your seed” and “her seed”, even within our own conservative camp. Fruchtenbam says that “your seed” is the AntiChrist and that “her seed” is the Messiah. Rydelnik says that “your seed” is “the collective offspring of both the woman (humankind) and the tempter (meaning his followers).” Others, including Jeremy, say that “your seed” is collectively the followers of Satan, including human unbelievers, and “her seed” are believing humanity.

“Bruise” means strike or batter.

The “He” in “He shall bruise you on the head” is a singular pronoun pointing to a certain individual who is one of the “woman’s seed”. Notice that “you” in “you shall bruise him on the heel” is referring to Satan himself – not his “seed”.

So, here’s the way Gen 3:15 should be read:

“And I will put enmity Between you [Satan] and the woman [Eve], And between your seed [Satan’s followers] and her seed [believing humanity]; He [an individual who is of the seed of the woman] shall bruise [strike] you [Satan] on the head, And you [Satan] shall bruise [strike] him on the heel.”

So, the verse is telling us:

1. There is an enmity – a hostility, an adversarial relationship - between Satan and Eve that was not there before. God put it there as a consequence of the Fall.
2. This adversarial relationship includes Satan’s followers (including humans) and believing humanity, and therefore continues through time and history. ¹ It is an ongoing battle.
3. A particular seed of the woman – an individual – will bruise Satan on the head. Because it is a head strike, it is a mortal wound. This individual will destroy Satan (and presumably his followers).
4. Before Satan is destroyed, he will manage to bruise this individual on the heel. A bruise on the heel is not fatal. So, Satan will inflict a non-fatal blow against the individual who eventually destroys him.

Who is this individual? We all know, but let’s think about what we can get just from this verse. First, being a “seed of the woman” He is human. Also, His descent will be “reckoned after a woman and not a man.” According to Fruchtenbaum, this is “highly unusual”, there is “something that necessitates tracing His ancestry through his mother, not his father”. Also, He is not in existence at that time, but He will come during this time of hostility. Also, He has power and authority that no other human will have – he will have the power and authority to destroy Satan, thereby ending the historical hostility. But, it will not be without cost to Him – Satan will strike Him a non-fatal blow, but He will be able to overcome Satan’s strike.

There may also be a hint here that this individual will be more than human. Satan is an angelic being and the strikes are described as being between the individual and Satan himself – not Satan’s followers. Satan, as an angelic being, will remain in existence until this individual comes, and this individual has power and authority over the angelic realm that no human being has.

Who fits this description? We know now. The Messiah. Jesus Christ.

So, as this verse pertains to the first coming of the Messiah, it tells us:

- Clearly – the Messiah will be human
- Hints at:
 - Virgin Birth – unusual descent “reckoned after an woman and not a man.”
 - His Death - Satan will bruise him on the heel - Satan Will Harm Him, But Not Fatally
 - His Final Victory - He will crush Satan’s head - He Will Destroy Satan – (Has not yet occurred in history)
 - His Deity – He is more than human and has the power and authority to withstand Satan’s attacks and to destroy Satan.

It is interesting that later verses also provide hints about how Adam and Eve, as well as the Pre-Flood descendants of Seth, **may** have interpreted this verse. Turn to Genesis 4:1:

In the NASB translation of this verse, it reads:

¹ If Satan’s seed includes human followers, then Eve’s seed must exclude Satan’s human followers, leaving the “seed of the woman” in this context to be believing humans.

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with *the help of* the Lord.”

Notice that “with the help of” is in italics. This is an addition to the text made by the translators to try to help clarify what is being said. If you have an NASB Bible you might see a translation note by “manchild” in the verse that gives a more literal translation. In my NASB translation note, it says “man, the Lord” meaning a more literal translation of the verse is “I have gotten a man, the Lord.”

And, according to Fruchtenbaum, the proper translation of Genesis 4:1 is:

“And the man knew Eve, his wife, she conceived and bare Cain and said “I have gotten a man: Jehovah.”

It is the same grammatical construction as verse 2 where it says:

“Again she bare his brother: Abel”.

So, the translators of the NASB and others chose to add “with the help of” in verse 4:1 but didn’t add this language to the same words in vs. 2. Why? To avoid a reading of verse 4:1 that they didn’t think was acceptable. It implied that Eve thought she had given birth to the Lord.

Also, according the Fruchtenbaum, the rabbis clearly understood this interpretation and tried to avoid it as well, quoting the Midrash Rabbah:

“Rabbi Ishmael asked Rabbi Akiba, “Since you have served Nahum of Gimzo for 22 years and he taught that every *ach* and *rach* is a limitation but every *et* and *gam* is an extension, tell me what is the purpose of the *et* here.” He replied, “if it is said ‘I have gotten a man: the Lord’ it would have been difficult to interpret, hence *et* ‘with the help of the Lord’ is required.”

“The footnote on Page 181 of this Midrash says, “it might imply that she had begotten the Lord.” **The rabbis clearly understood the implications of this construction and so had to make the necessary adjustments in their translation.**”

So, what this is saying is that the actual Hebrew words in Gen 4:1 are “I have gotten a man: Jehovah”. Fruchtenbaum also says:

“Few Bible translators understand what Eve was saying here, which is why our English translations do not read as given above. Eve clearly understood from God’s words in Genesis 3:15 that the serpent will be defeated by a God-Man. She obviously thought that Cain *is* Jehovah.”

So, if Fruchtenbaum is correct, Eve thought Genesis 3:15 promised a God-Man who would defeat Satan.

There’s more hints in Genesis 5. Turn to Genesis 5:28-29:

²⁸ Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son. ²⁹ Now he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands *arising* from the ground which the Lord has cursed.”

Genesis 5:21-29 is the genealogy of Adam through his son, Seth. Notice what Methuselah's son, Lamech, named his son - "Noah". Noah means "rest" and Lamech said this of Noah - verse 29 - "this one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed." Here's Fruchtenbaum again:

"Lamech clearly hoped that Noah, meaning "rest" will be the longed-for Messiah. It is clear from the ages and years given in Genesis 5 that Lamech was 56 years old when Adam died. Lamech would therefore have been given a clear firsthand account of all that happened in the Garden of Eden and all the words that God had spoken. It is very interesting, therefore, to see in Genesis 5:29 how Lamech expressed his own Messianic hope: he saw Messiah as a redeemer who will remove the curse of Adam's fall and all its results. As with Eve, his basic theology was correct, but he misapplied it."

So, Noah's name provides us with some evidence that the godly men before the Flood were looking for a man to come to correct the curse on the earth.

There's more - the Pre-Flood account of Genesis 6 and the corruption of mankind indicates that Satan understood Genesis 3:15 to be Messianic. Genesis 6:1-4 is an attempt by Satan to corrupt all of mankind in order to stop the Messiah from coming. If Satan had been successful, there would have been no believing humans left on earth. God sent the Flood when only 8 godly people were left on the earth - Noah and his family.

So, at least some interpreters, faithful, thoughtful and intelligent men who know their Hebrew, see some indications of how Eve and the following generations of believers might have perceived Genesis 3:15 - Eve apparently was looking for a God-Man, Lamech was looking for a man to "give us rest from the curse", and Satan tried to prevent the Messiah from coming by corrupting all of mankind.

After the Fall, lots of things are going on, but one of the things Genesis appears to be doing is tracing the "two seeds" - Satan's seed and Eve's godly seed - and narrowing the focus of the Messianic line:

- In Genesis 4 - Unrighteous Cain kills righteous Abel; Cain's genealogy is traced through murderous Lamech.
- In Genesis 4:25 - Chapter 5 - Adam and Eve have Seth; Seth's godly line is traced to Noah.
- In Genesis 6 - Genesis 8 - God destroys all of Satan's seed in the Flood, preserving the only godly seed left on earth - Noah and his family (8 people).
- In Genesis 10 - the genealogy of all 3 of Noah's sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth - is traced.
- In Genesis 11 - the genealogy of Shem to Abraham is traced.
- In Genesis 12 - we have the Call of Abraham.

So, now we come to the Abrahamic Covenant for our next Messianic passages. The terms of the Abrahamic Covenant are found in six different passages - Genesis 12:1-3,7; Genesis 13:14-17; Genesis 15:1-21; Genesis 17:1-21; and Genesis 22:15-18. Fruchtenbaum says:

“A study of these passages show that there is a total of fourteen specific provisions within this covenant...if the covenant is reduced to its very basics, then it can be said to contain three main aspects: the land, seed, and the blessing. The land aspect is developed further in Scripture by the Palestinian Covenant. The seed aspect is developed further by the Davidic Covenant,...The blessing aspect is further developed by the New Covenant.”

For our purposes tonight, we are going to focus on one of the covenant passages – Genesis 22:18. First, the context.

Genesis, Chapter 22, is the account of Abraham and Isaac. God tests Abraham and instructs him to “take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” Now remember, God has already explicitly told Abraham in Genesis 21:12 that “through Isaac your descendants shall be named.” So, having already clearly told Abraham that his descendants will be named through Isaac, God is now telling Abraham to go sacrifice Isaac. What a position Abraham is in – does he trust God to fulfill His promise in Genesis 21:12? How can God fulfill His promise if He demands Isaac’s sacrifice?

Abraham passes the test – he acts in faith on both accounts – he trusts God to fulfill his promise in 21:12 and he trusts God to work things out even though Isaac’s sacrifice is commanded. Here’s what Hebrews 11:17 says about Abraham:

“(17) By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; (18) *it was he* to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.” (19) He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”

So, after Abraham demonstrates his faithfulness to God, God stops Abraham before he sacrifices Isaac and provides a ram as a substitute sacrifice. In Genesis 22:15-18, God confirms His covenant with Abraham:

(15) Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, (16) and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, (17) indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. **(18) “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”**

Let’s focus on verse 18 – what does it have to do with Messiah’s first coming? What new information does it (and the similar terms in the Abrahamic covenant) give us about the Messiah?

Two things:

1. The Messiah – the “seed of the woman” – will be a descendant of Abraham.
2. Even though He is a descendant of Abraham, the Messiah will be a blessing to all the nations (Jews and Gentiles).

Note that the Apostle Paul considered this verse to be Messianic. He uses it in his argument in Galatians that justification is by faith alone apart from the law. Galatians 3:16 says – “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ.”

So, when we consider Genesis 3:15 and the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 22:18, what information do we have about the first coming of the Messiah?

- Genesis 3:15:
 - The Messiah will be human
 - Hints at:
 - Virgin Birth – unusual descent “reckoned after an woman and not a man.”
 - His Death - Satan will bruise him on the heel - Satan Will Harm Him, But Not Fatally
 - His Final Victory - He will crush Satan’s head - He Will Destroy Satan – (Has not yet occurred in history)
 - He will remove the curse on the earth
 - His Deity – He is more than human and has the power and authority to withstand Satan’s attacks and to destroy Satan
- Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 22:18, as example):
 - He will be a descendant of Abraham
 - He will be a blessing to all the nations (Jews and Gentiles).

The source of the “seed of the woman” has now been narrowed to be an ancestor of Abraham. In Genesis 21:12, God limited it to the line of Isaac and this was confirmed in Genesis 26:2-5. In Genesis 35:9-12 it was further limited to the line of Jacob who is renamed “Israel” and is the father of the 12 tribes constituting the nation. Our next passage limits it even further.

Turn to Genesis 49. Here is the context. Jacob is dying; he summons all of his sons; and he prophesy’s about each one of them. Verse 10 concerns his son, Judah:

(10) The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

Let’s talk a little bit about the translation of this verse. “Scepter” indicates royalty and “ruler’s staff” indicates authority. That’s pretty easy. Those words indicate kingship. They are talking about a king.

What’s harder is the word “Shiloh”. The translators of the NASB translated this as a proper name. However, once again, if you have a New American Standard Bible, you will see a small translation note beside the word “Shiloh”. In the NASB, the translation note says “Until he comes to Shiloh” or “Until he comes to whom it belongs.” There are differences in the translations concerning this word – the NASB, NKJV, and KJV all translate it as a proper name – either the name of a person or the name of a place; other versions, such as the NIV, do not translate it as a proper name. There is obviously a debate among scholars about how to translate this word, but Rydelnik and Fruchtenbaum and others take the position that the most appropriate

translation is not as a proper name, but that it should be translated “whose right it is” or “to whom it belongs.”² So, the best translation of “Shiloh” means “whose right it is” or “to whom it belongs.” Fruchtenbaum says a more literal translation is:

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes whose right it is, and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.”

So, what this verse is saying is that Judah’s identity and right to rule cannot be lost until a person from within the tribe of Judah comes who has the full rights to the scepter, the right to rule. The full rights to be king.

This verse tells us three things about the Messiah’s first coming that weren’t revealed in Genesis 3:15 or Genesis 22:18:

1. Ancestry - The Messiah will come from the line of Judah. The Messianic line of descent from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, is now narrowed to the line of a particular son of Jacob – Judah.
2. Authority - Messiah will be a king. (There is also an indication that Messiah’s rule as king will extend beyond Israel, because it says “And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.”) At the Messiah’s first coming, He possessed the right and authority to rule as king, but Israel had to accept Him as their king in order for Him to assume the throne. But, as we now know, because of Israel’s rejection, the Messiah’s rule as King has been delayed until the Millennial Kingdom.
3. Timing – The Tribe of Judah must maintain its identity until Messiah comes. Messiah must come before the tribe of Judah loses its identity.

This last point is interesting. Here’s the thought – this verse tells us that one qualification of the Messiah is that he come from the tribe of Judah. If he is not from the Tribe of Judah, he doesn’t qualify to be the Messiah. So – in order to properly identify the Messiah, you have to be able to trace his genealogy back to Judah. Think about the genealogies of Christ in Matthew and Luke. This is one of the reasons those genealogies are there. Both go through David and David came from Judah.

Now, today, are the records available that will allow the ancestry of anyone claiming to be the Messiah to be traced back to Judah? Can that been done today? No. Why not? Because the official records were kept in the Temple in Jerusalem and were destroyed when the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Here’s what Fruchtenbaum says:

“The records by which tribal identities were maintained were kept in the Jewish Temple. These records were lost with the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Immediately after, the rabbis passed laws which would preserve the identity of the priestly tribe of Levi, but Jews from the other tribes lost their identity within a few generations. Since the tribe of Judah lost its pre-eminence and identity in A.D. 70, it can be clearly seen that Messiah

² This conclusion is based on ancient texts that vary from the Masoretic Text. Also, Rydelnik and Fruchtenbaum both support their argument with reference to Ezekiel 21:27 using Shiloh in the same way. The Ezekiel passage message was that the line of David would not be restored until the righteous, God appointed King would come.

must have come some time before that year. It is simply not possible for Messiah to come after A.D. 70.”

That’s Genesis 49:10. Now, let’s move to the next passage – Numbers 24:17. Remember that, at the time Jacob dies, his family is in Egypt where they joined Joseph during the famine. After a while, a pharaoh arose who didn’t know Joseph and enslaved and oppressed the Israelites. During this time, God had them in an incubator – He was preserving their bloodlines and national identity in an environment where intermarriage with Gentiles – like the Egyptians – was not likely. The Egyptians were not inclined to intermarry with the Israelites. When the time came, God raised up Moses to bring them out of Egypt and into the land He promised to Abraham. Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave, and God demolished Egypt with the 10 plagues, destroyed the Egyptian army when they pursued the Israelites into the Red Sea, and led the Israelites to Mt. Sinai where He gave them the Mosaic Law. He led them from Mt. Sinai to the border of the promised land at Kadesh Barnea – but they were afraid to trust God to give it to them and enter, so God punished them by having them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that unfaithful generation all died, except Joshua and Caleb.

This brings us to Numbers chapters 22-24. These chapters recount the story of Balaam. This occurs at the time God has taken them to the border of Moab and God is about to allow them to enter the promised land. Everybody in the regions of Moab and Midian were afraid of the Israelites. So, Balak – the king of Moab – joined together with the Midianites and came up with a plan. Here’s how they decided to solve their problem – Numbers 22, verses 5-6:

“(5) So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, *in* the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, “Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. (6) “Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

Balaam was a Gentile astrologer who came from the region of Babylon. As you can see in verse 6, he had a powerful reputation – “he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.” He would bless and curse for pay. He was a professional.

So, Balak calls on Balaam to come curse the Israelites and promises he will pay Balaam handsomely. And if you remember the story, Balaam at first refuses to go. Then he goes and his donkey saves him from destruction by an angel God placed in his path to prevent him from going. Then, when he gets there, God does not allow him to curse the Israelites but in fact causes Balaam to bless them three times. It’s kind of humorous – after the first blessing, Balak is horrified and moves Balaam to two other places and asks him to curse them. Each time, Balaam blesses the Israelites. Balak is really frustrated after this and tells Balaam to leave and there’s no way he’s paying him. So, Balaam leaves, but before he does, he says he’s going to leave them with something to think about – he tells them what the Israelites will do to the Moabites “in the days to come.”

Anyway, our next passage – Numbers 24:17 is part of Balaam’s parting oracle before he leaves Balak. Here’s what it says:

I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
A scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
And tear down all the sons of Sheth.

Notice anything in this verse that we've seen before? The "scepter" – once again, this represents the right to rule – a king. But this king is not immediate, he is "not now" and "not near". He's coming in the distant future.

Notice something also – a "star" is associated with the "scepter". Both are references to a king. And remember where Balaam came from and where he returned to after his visit to Moab? The region of Babylon. When Jesus was born - where were the magi from who traveled to Jerusalem when they saw His "star"? The region of Babylon. These magi associated the appearance of a "star" with the birth of a king. Where did they get that? It's possible that Balaam took the prophecy of the star back with him and later generations of Babylonian astrologers remembered the prophecy.

So, here's what Numbers 24:17 tells us about the Messiah's first coming – two things:

- He will be king.
- A "star" will be associated with His coming.

In case you were wondering what happened to Balaam – here's the rest of the story. Even though God would allow Balaam to bless Israel and not curse it, Balaam did give them some advice. Maybe he thought it might help get him paid. According to Numbers 31:16, he advised the Moabites and the Midianites to use their women to seduce the Israelis and induce Israel to worship Baal. Very quickly, the scheme began to work and also very quickly God sent a plague on Israel that killed 24,000 men. Later on, in Moses' last battle, God sent the Israelites to destroy the Midianites for their role in the seduction. Balaam was one of the ones killed in this battle.

The last passage we will cover tonight is Deut 18:14-19. This is a part of Moses' address to Israel just before they crossed the Jordan into the promised land. In this part of his address, Moses is warning them not to imitate the "detestable things" of the Canaanites – particularly their pagan "fortune telling" practices – divination, sorcery, witchcraft, etc... - and in that context, he tells them:

¹⁴ "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you *to do so*. ¹⁵ **"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.** ¹⁶ "This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.' ¹⁷ "The Lord said to me, 'They have spoken well. ¹⁸ **'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all**

that I command him. ¹⁹ ‘It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.

The issue with this passage is who or what does the “prophet like Moses” refer to. According to Rydelnik, most interpreters believe that that this passage speaks of the establishment of a prophetic order that ultimately culminates in the Messiah. In other words, the “prophet like Moses” that God will raise up is referring to both the prophetic order and the Messiah – a kind of double reference. It is establishing the office of prophet – which is the line of OT prophets after Moses – with the Messiah being the ultimate prophet at the end of the prophetic line. On the surface, this seems to fit with the context of the passage, as well as the New Testament passages that say the Messiah is a fulfillment of this prophecy - such as Acts 3:20-23.

However, there are some problems with this interpretation. According to Rydelnik:

“The essential problem with this view is that what the biblical writer intended is unclear. It is unlikely that he intended a double or progressive fulfillment. The text itself offers no evidence whatsoever that the writer saw multiple fulfillments. In fact, this sort of multiple referent interpretation would never be attempted apart from the desire to harmonize with the New Testament. It is unlikely that anyone would adopt this method by looking at the Old Testament itself, without using the New Testament as a guide.”

Rydelnik is saying that the majority view is the result of a departure from proper hermeneutical principles in order to make the passage fit with the New Testament. He believes that, if proper hermeneutics are applied, the majority view doesn’t hold up.

In addition, he points out that Moses “obituary” in Deuteronomy 34:10, tells us that after the time of Moses’ death – “no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face...” Rydelnik takes this obituary to have been an editorial comment added to Deuteronomy – possibly by Ezra - as part of its final canonical form. There are a few instances of editorial additions to the Old Testament, and this is not inconsistent with inspiration. The editorial comments were just as inspired as the text they edited. If this editorial comment was added just before the Old Testament canon was closed, it would support the interpretation that – even though there had been numerous prophets after Moses and before the Old Testament canon was closed - none of those prophets had been “a prophet like Moses.”

So, a minority of interpreters say that Deut 18:15 promises an individual who will be “a prophet like Moses” and refers exclusively to the Messiah – not the office or order of prophets. In other words, none of the prophets after Moses were “prophets like Moses”. Only the Messiah. Rydelnik says that this is the view of “some conservative, mostly older, commentators”. Rydelnik and Fruchtenbaum both take this minority view. This view is consistent with proper hermeneutics, with Deut 34:10, as well as with the New Testament passages that say it was fulfilled in the Messiah. It doesn’t force an interpretation based on the NT back into the OT, but it is consistent with the NT (as it should be).

So, if Deut 18:15 refers exclusively to the Messiah, why weren’t the other prophets “like Moses” and what is it about the Messiah that makes Him a prophet “like Moses”? In other words, there were a lot of prophets after Moses and before Christ – so what is it that is unique about Christ as compared to these other prophets? Look at Numbers 12:1-8:

“¹ Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); ² and they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” And the Lord heard it. ³ (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.) ⁴ Suddenly the Lord said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, “You three come out to the tent of meeting.” So the three of them came out. ⁵ Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, ⁶ He said, “**Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream.** ⁷ “**Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;** ⁸ **With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the Lord.** Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?”

Aaron and Miriam – primarily Miriam - are complaining about Moses because he married a Cushite woman and claim to speak for God just like Moses does – in other words, they are saying – “who does Moses think he is - we are prophets just like Moses.” Numbers 12:4-8 is God’s defense of Moses. Notice how God distinguished Moses, as prophet, from Aaron and Miriam and the other prophets – God speaks to Moses mouth to mouth, face to face, openly – not in visions or dreams like He does the other prophets. And look at the very last part of vs. 8 – “he beholds the form of the Lord” – this prophet will see the very form of Jehovah. In these ways, Moses is unique from all the other prophets. According to Fruchtenbaum:

“Even with great men like Elijah and Isaiah, God did not reveal Himself directly but used dreams, visions and other methods. Moses is the only man who received direct revelation from God.”

So, according to Deut 18:15, the Messiah will be a unique prophet – not an ordinary prophet – but a prophet like Moses. Being a prophet like Moses – God will speak to Him “mouth to mouth” and “face to face”. And He will behold the very form of God. This brings to mind what Jesus said in John 8:28 – “So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.” And John 6:46 – “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.” In these ways, among others, Jesus was the prophesied prophet like Moses.

Now, lets summarize what the first 5 books of the Old Testament – the Torah – tell us about the first coming of the Messiah. Remember, we got this information out of just the first 5 books of the Bible:

Human Ancestry:

- He will be human – the “seed of the woman” – Genesis 3:15
- He will be a descendant of Abraham – Genesis 22:18
- He will be a descendant of Jacob’s son Judah – Genesis 49:10

King:

- He will be a King – Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17
- His coming is associated with a “star” – Numbers 24:17

Prophet:

- He will be a prophet like Moses – a unique prophet – Deut 18:15

Timing:

- If Deut 34:10 was added at the end of the OT canon, He could not have come before the closing of the Old Testament canon – Deut 34:10 – no prophet like Moses had risen before then.
- Could not come after AD 70 – no official way to verify His descent from Judah after Temple was destroyed.

With Some Hints of:

- His Deity - He will be a God-Man – Genesis 3:15, as understood by Eve in Genesis 4:1
- His Virgin Birth – Genesis 3:15 – unique usage of “seed of woman” – His ancestry reckoned through a woman
- His Death – Genesis 3:15 – Satan will bruise His heel.
- His Resurrection and Ultimate Victory – Genesis 3:15 – He will crush Satan’s head.
- His Removal of the Curse on the Earth – Genesis 3:15, as understood by Lamech in Genesis 5:29

Looking at that summary, that’s a lot of information that we have about the Messiah from just the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Later revelation gives us much more information so that, by the time Jesus came to present Himself to the nation as the Messiah and bring in the Kingdom, had the nation and their leaders not hardened their hearts to Scripture, they would have clearly understood that Jesus was the Messiah.

So - Before we close, let’s think about some things.

First, think about what this tells us about God’s love and mercy and grace. Instead of executing judgement on us and wiping us out after the Fall, and instead of leaving us to live our sinful lives without any hope after the Fall, at the same time He imposes on us the consequences of our sin, He gives us the hope of redemption and restoration. Genesis 3:15 gives hope in the midst of the catastrophic consequences of the Fall. He didn’t have to tell us this. He didn’t have to give us any hope. This is nothing but God’s pure love, mercy and grace. But He knows that we need it. And God has demonstrated His love, mercy and grace, to us over and over and over again throughout history even in the midst of our foulest transgressions. Even after men rejected and crucified the promised Messiah, His plan was not to condemn us, but to use it for our redemption. We sin, we suffer, He still loves us and gives us hope. Incredible.

Also, in His omniscience and sovereign plan, He didn’t wait to give us this hope. He could have left us hopeless for a while and then promised a Messiah. But He didn’t. Immediately when we fell, He gave us hope. All of mankind was given this hope. Adam and Eve were the only humans then. They obviously repeated their hope to their children – and this hope was carried on through Noah and his family after the Flood. So, when Noah and his family got off the boat – and for a time after that - the entire world knew of the hope of redemption. After a while – probably pretty quickly - the world, being the world, for the most part took it and distorted it. But it was nevertheless known by all. It’s our fault if we ignored it, corrupted it, distorted it, or refused to believe it.

Another thing – If the Old Testament does not contain any direct Messianic prophecies – as even some evangelical scholars claim – how in the world were men supposed to identify the Messiah when He came? When Jesus came, how was Israel supposed to know that Jesus was the promised Messiah? Anyone could claim to be the Messiah – how were they supposed to distinguish the true Messiah from the false Messiah? How are we supposed to be able to demonstrate to others that Jesus is the Messiah? If you take away the Messianic passages in the Old Testament, you ultimately take away the historical criteria that you use to convince yourself and others that Jesus is truly the Messiah.

Finally, think about this – these messianic passages help strengthen our faith even now. How? They are tangible, verifiable, prophecies that demonstrate God's sovereign power and faithfulness to His Word in history. Through these prophecies, and many others, He tells us what He will do and we can verify in history that He is absolutely able to do what He says and that we can trust Him to always do what He says. No other religion has that and no other religion can have that because all the others are merely man made gods. That is why the integrity of the Bible – its inspiration and inerrancy – as well as literal interpretation are so important. Because when the Bible loses its integrity and its literal meaning – we eliminate God's Word as real history and we erase His works from real history. His Word and His works are His historical proof to us that He is who He says He is. If we take these things away, how do we know we can trust Him? How do we know that He is faithful? How do we know that He can do what He says He can do? Again, the trend in evangelical scholarship is moving away from interpreting the Old Testament as a messianic book. This trend is just part of a bigger Satanic movement to destroy the integrity of God's Word and disarm our faith. We must pray for God to continue to raise up good, solid Bible scholars who will faithfully interpret and teach the Word. May God protect us against this constant and relentless attack against God's Word and the Church.