

All Hail the Conquering *Lamb*?

When Jesus told his disciples he would soon be *crucified* by the Romans in cahoots with the Jewish authorities, they were to a man, aghast. Peter the self-appointed spokesman for the disciples, recoiled in utter disgust, even to the point of “rebuking” Jesus ... “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22)!

The idea of Messiah being executed as a felon has posed a serious difficulty to Jewish minds right down to the present day.

Remember, death by crucifixion was so repugnant, that the Romans reserved such capital punishment only for non-Roman citizens. If a Roman citizen ran foul of the government, he would be executed by the sword ... dispatched quickly. However, crucifixion was reserved for Rome’s enemies and was designed for maximum deterrence. Rome designed crucifixion as a public lesson to those she subjugated. It dragged on for days, with the victim hanging spread-eagled in a public place in naked shame.

When Pontius Pilate put the sign above Jesus’ head, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews”, the Jews were incensed. “Do not

write, 'The King of the Jews'" they protested, "but that he said, 'I am King of the Jews'" (John 19:21). This was no way for a Messianic king to be displayed before the world.

No wonder preaching "Messiah crucified [was] to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness" (I Cor. 1:23). What sort of Messiah and king is this who gets ingloriously squashed by the world and seemingly cursed by God?

The Cross ... God's Wisdom.

The genius of the Christian message turned these values upside down. Although "Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel" had "gathered together against God's holy servant Jesus" they really had only succeeded in fulfilling what God's Hand and purpose had all along "predestined to occur" (Acts 4:27-28).

Indeed, the crucifixion of Messiah was a demonstration of the world's ignorance of God's master plan. If they had known who Jesus was, "the rulers of this world would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians 2:8).

But God chose that which the world despised to display His wisdom, “that no man should boast before God” (I Cor. 1: 29). We will humble ourselves before the Almighty and confess our weakness, our sinfulness, our need of His grace and salvation, or we will perish in our pride. So, His Messiah would be *the Lamb* who would *conquer* through a cursed *death* ...

“Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree’ - “ (Gal.3:13).

Paul considered the cross a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 21:

“And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is cursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance” (vs. 22-23).

The NT is replete with the testimony that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” who saves us

from our sins. Jesus conquers paradoxically by his sufferings and death. In his own person he combines the Lamb and the Lion aspects of Messianic salvation.

So why is this message still offensive to most Jews? This is a puzzling question when we realize informed Jews are quite aware of the extensive rabbinic commentary of a suffering Messiah. The Talmud, the midrashic writings, and more recent medieval and modern commentaries from important branches of rabbinic literature all speak of Messiah's sufferings. Summarizing these key rabbinic teachings the Jewish anthropologist Raphael Patai writes:

“Despised and afflicted with unhealing wounds, he sits in the gates of Great Rome and winds and unwinds the bandages of his festering sores; as a Midrash expresses it, ‘pains have adopted him.’ According to one of the most moving, and at the same time psychologically most meaningful, of all Messiah legends, God, when he created the Messiah, gave him the choice of whether or not to accept the sufferings for the sins of Israel. And the Messiah

answered: 'I accept it with joy, so that not a single soul of Israel should perish.' ... In the later, Zoharic formulation of this legend, the Messiah himself summons all the diseases, pains, and sufferings of Israel to come upon him, in order thus to ease the anguish of Israel, which otherwise would be unbearable." (1)

In many of the rabbinic commentaries it is noteworthy that texts such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53:5 are cited as explaining why Messiah will suffer. These texts are quoted extensively by the apostles as proof that Jesus of Nazareth is the predicted Messiah.

Dr. Michael Brown says Psalm 22 was "cited several times in the most extensive depiction of the Messiah's sufferings in rabbinic literature, found in chapters 34, 36, and 37 of the eighth and ninth-century midrash known as Pesikta Rabbati. "So, here is a rabbinic text prized by traditional Jews that outlines in graphic detail the vicarious sufferings of the Messiah." (2)

A host of other Jewish commentary could be cited to demonstrate that a suffering Messiah is well known in Jewish tradition, and that Jews have no basis for rejecting

Yeshua's messianic claims because he suffered before he was exalted. Yet, there still remains a hurdle (or two) before Jews can accept that the Bible Messiah is found in one person and not two.

Messiah the Priest?

That the predicted Messiah of the Hebrew prophets is a royal figure, a king, nobody doubts. But what do verses predicting a suffering and indeed, a dying messiah, have to do with the picture?

The solution is found in the office of the priestly Messiah. In ancient Israel kings and priests were anointed for service. Indeed, the Hebrew word *Messiah* means "anointed one". In this sense then, Jewish kings and priests were *messiahs*.

It is not surprising there is a long tradition within Jewish commentary, that the expected Messiah would exercise the office of a priest. But would the coming priestly Messiah be another person as well as the royal Messiah, or could it be possible that both offices could be fulfilled in just one individual? Was it possible to combine the two messianic offices of Aaron and David in one person? Is it possible to marry the tribe

of Levi and the tribe of Judah in one Messiah?

To our Western minds this is not a problem at all. But put yourself in the shoes of a Bible-believing Jew for a moment. This question represents a real conundrum. Remember how King Saul got into serious trouble for presuming to exercise priestly functions? King Saul offered a sacrifice without priestly authorization and had the crown torn from his head (1 Sam. 13:14).

And remember King Uzziah? God struck him with perpetual leprosy (that is he was cursed), for daring to burn incense in the Temple --- a function only permitted by the priests (2 Chron. 26:16-26). Kings were not priests.

The answer is found in Psalm 110:4:

“The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”

None other than the Almighty Himself makes an emphatic oath that the Davidic king is to be a priest forever!

Melchizedek was the king of Shalem (i.e. ancient Jerusalem mentioned in Genesis 14)

and he exercised the office of priest of God to Abraham. Thus, long before Moses and the Sinaitic covenant with Israel, the Hebrew Scriptures tell of one man who was both king and priest before God. And all of this right in front of Abraham, the "father of the Jews"! The Hebrew Scriptures prove the king could also be a priest. Two offices combined in one Messiah.

There is a fascinating picture of this found in Zechariah where the prophet is commanded:

"And take silver and gold, make an ornate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Then say to him, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for he will branch out from where he is; and he will build the temple of the LORD. Yes, it is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he who will bear the honor and sit and rule on his throne. Thus, he will be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.'" (Zech. 6:11-13).

Observe carefully: ***The prophet is commanded to put a king's crown on the head of the High Priest!***

This High Priest who is also now king is then called "the Branch" or the "Sprout". It is common knowledge amongst Jewish folk that Messiah will be called "the Branch". And this Branch as he exercises the offices of priest and king will demonstrate "the counsel of peace between the two offices": One Messiah exercising priestly rule for his people. "Two offices" in one Messiah ... extraordinary!

It is the witness of the NT commentary that Jesus is this Messiah. Certainly, we await the final consummation when our Messianic Lord returns to wind up this present evil age. Certainly there are a number of critical prophecies yet to be finalized through Jesus Messiah. Certainly, I can understand my Jewish friends who say Yeshua of Nazareth still has some unfinished business. He most certainly has. But based on the evidence so far, he will not fail to finish God's business. The Lamb is coming again as the Lion!

Jesus told many parables of the nobleman leaving his affairs in the hands of his servants while he left to go on a journey into another country for an unspecified length of time (e.g. Luke 19:11f). But he promised he would return and bring his

rewards with him for those who had unashamedly been faithful to him during his absence. The many fulfilled prophecies from the Hebrew Bible give us great confidence the business end is coming.

In Jesus our Lord Messiah, God has displayed for the world His wisdom and His power. Paradoxically, Jesus is God's *conquering Lamb*. How wonderful for my Jewish friends to have a king who is gentle and understands the pain and suffering of his people. How wonderful that the very people who have suffered the hardest and the longest of any other people in this world -- the Jews -- should have a Messiah both "acquainted with their sorrows" and also able to bring them world justice and peace when he finally comes to bring in the Kingdom of his God.

All hail God's *conquering Lamb*!

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted by Dr Michael L. Brown, PhD in *The Real Kosher Jesus: Revealing the Mysteries of the Hidden Messiah*. Front Line. Florida. 2012. p140
2. Ibid. p144