

The suffering Servant
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 4

What constitutes a Messianic prophecy? At times it can be difficult to understand how an Old Testament passage, read within its context, is a Messianic prophecy; the New Testament reader only knows that it is, because the New Testament writers refer to that Old Testament passage as applying to Jesus. The disciples apparently had the same problem, and it was not until the resurrection of Jesus Christ when they were fully informed how the Old Testament spoke of Him, which they passed on when they penned the gospels.

Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, "**Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?**" (Luke 24:27-32)

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:44-49)

When Jesus starts His ministry with the cleansing of the Temple, His ardent actions demonstrated to the disciples how "the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it was written, "**Zeal for Your house will consume me.**" (John 2:14-17)

The Old Testament passage the disciples recalled is Psalm 69:9; however, this passage appears to describe the actions of the Messiah and does not initially appear as a prophecy.

For zeal for Your house has consumed me,

And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. (Ps 69:9)

Psalm 69 is a psalm of David and is the second most quoted psalm in the New Testament (after Psalm 22). In this psalm of lament, David is sharing his difficulties with God and calling upon His deliverance and judgment. But while he is speaking of himself, the New Testament authors refer to this psalm as though it is speaking of David's descendant Jesus; they see the suffering Jesus as the fulfillment of God's covenant promises of the Old Testament. Thus Messianic passages of the Old Testament, that just describe something about Jesus, are viewed within the larger context of fulfilling the prophecy of the Promised Messiah. The following tables provide a side by side comparison of the Messianic passage with the New Testament quote of Psalm 69 so that one can understand their respective contexts and the continuity with the Old Testament.

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Messianic Passage: a righteous sufferer	New Testament
Those who hate me without a cause... (Ps 69:4)	But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me without a cause.' (John 15:25)
David laments of his personal distress with images of drowning and non-stop crying (Ps 69:1-4). The innumerable forces against him are so great that he is forced to unjustly repay what he did not steal.	During His Upper Room Discourse, Jesus refers to David's self-portrayal of the righteous sufferer. The Jews saw God through His Son and accused Jesus falsely of not being the Son of God. The Jews hate Jesus without cause and will make Him pay for something He did not do.

Messianic Passage: a zeal for God	New Testament
For zeal for Your house has consumed me, (Ps 69:9a)	His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me." (John 2:17)
In hoping that his suffering will not bring shame and disgrace to Believers (Ps 69:6-12), David's passion for God is unrestrained.	Witnessing Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, regardless of what others thought, demonstrated to the disciples a passion for God in a manner that they could only imagine of David.

Messianic Passage: an example to follow	New Testament
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. (Ps 69:9b)	For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." (Rom 15:3)
And for his love of God, David received persecution by those who hate God.	To his Jewish audience, Paul refers to David's psalm to show that Jesus' love for God was not motivated by self-interest and instead brought the hostility of those who hate God upon Himself. Paul extends this concept further: in persevering adversity, one's faith encourages the faith of others.

The idea that Psalm 69 is Messianic is given considerable support when David's enemies are contemporaneously identified as Jesus' enemies.

Messianic Passage	New Testament	First Century Enemy
May their table before them become a snare; And when they are in peace, may it become a trap. May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, And make their loins shake continually. (Ps 69:22-23)	And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever." (Rom 11:9-10)	Paul applies David's psalm of those who mistreat the righteous with impunity to the Jews who confidently refuse to believe in Jesus Christ and assail those who do.

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May their camp be desolate; May none dwell in their tents. (Ps 69:25)	"For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead be made desolate, And let no one dwell in it'; and, 'Let another man take his office.' (Acts 1:20)	Peter applies David's psalm to Judas Iscariot.
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The citations of Psalm 69, where Jesus is associated with the characteristics of David, are identified as Messianic passages. When the enemies of David are seen contemporaneously with the enemies of Jesus Christ, the Messianic passages of Psalm 69 can be more easily recognized as being prophetic in nature.

While David depicts the righteous sufferer, God uses Isaiah to develop the concept of the righteous sufferer further as the Suffering Servant.

Messianic Prophecy	New Testament
Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. (Isa 53:4)	When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him. When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases." (Matt 8:14-17)

In one of His earliest large healing events, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and others who visited "to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'" (Matt 8:14-17). Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 53:4 revealed that Jesus' physical healing metaphorically represented the spiritual healing of salvation that results from His atonement.

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 is largely recognized as the prophecy of the suffering Servant. Isaiah speaks of servanthood, an individual who was rejected, and voluntarily gave up his life suffering an innocent atoning death for "the many" who will benefit.

Messianic Prophecy	New Testament
"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." (Isa 42:1-4)	But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, and warned them not to tell who He was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out; Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, And a smoldering wick He will not put out, Until He leads justice to victory. And in His name the Gentiles will hope." (Matt 12:17-21)

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When Jesus conducts His ministry of healing, He does not come as the Son of Man Lord of the Sabbath; instead, He comes as a fulfillment of Isaiah's God chosen Servant on whom God has poured out His Spirit. Jesus comes in humility and gentleness (i.e. He will not quarrel nor cry out) and with compassion for the weary and burdened (i.e. battered reed and smoldering wick).

Matthew 12:17-21 indicates that Jesus was more than a suffering righteous Servant. Jesus came to establish justice. But Jesus did not come asserting His power; with His message of salvation, Jesus must be embraced as Savior or be faced as Judge.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Messianic prophecies place a greater emphasis on Jesus as the unblemished sacrificial lamb.

Messianic Prophecy	New Testament
<p>He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? (Isa 53:7-8)</p>	<p>Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; Who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.”</p> <p>The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. (Acts 8:32-35)</p>

There are significant reasons for Messianic prophecies identifying Jesus as the righteous, suffering Servant.

1. They emphasize the divine necessity of the Servant's voluntary sacrificial death juxtaposed with His vindication and glorification. The resulting atonement opens the way for repentance and forgiveness – the healing of one's relationship with God.
2. They demonstrate that the way of salvation is the way of discipleship; one must put aside self-glorification and obediently adopt the role of servanthood. God who is faithful vindicates one who is faithful.
3. They provide examples for how one serves and carries out His message of salvation to the world.

References:

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