

The Light
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 5

Shortly after Mary’s purification (41 days after birth [Lev 12:2-4]), the Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon that the infant Jesus was the prophesized Messiah. However, instead of identifying Jesus as the Messiah, Simeon states, “my eyes have seen Your salvation,” and alludes to several prophetic passages from Isaiah. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s salvation!

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,
According to Your word;

For my eyes have seen **Your salvation,**

Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

A Light of revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:26-32)

Simeon’s Old Testament References	Observations
<p>The Lord has bared His holy arm In the sight of all the nations, That all the ends of the earth may see The salvation of our God. (Isa 52:10)</p> <p>Yahweh has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the eyes of the nations. He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (Ps 98:2-3)</p>	<p>Both Isaiah and the psalmist speak of “the salvation of our God” in the context of being visibly seen by the whole world.</p>
<p>“I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.” (Isa 42:6-7)</p> <p>He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isa 49:6)</p>	<p>Appointed “as a covenant to the people”(i.e. New Covenant), God’s righteous Servant is to “raise up” and “restore the preserved ones of Israel,” and will be a “light of the nations” to “open blind eyes” so that God’s “salvation may reach the end of the earth.”</p>

When Jesus was conceived and born, the earliest messages of His Sonship and role of Messiah came from angelic beings who referred to Old Testament passages that pointed to Him. Now through Simeon, the Holy Spirit reveals how the infant Jesus fulfills (or will fill) the Old Testament passages of the Messiah; Jesus is the Light that will “open blind eyes” and bring salvation to the world. They reflect God’s faithful commitment to His promised New Covenant and salvation prepared for humanity, and Jesus’ name in Hebrew means, “Yahweh is salvation.”

When Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee, He visits a synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:14-16). Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth reads a passage from Isaiah and proclaims that it is immediately fulfilled.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

The Light
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 5 (page 2)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
 Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
 He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
 And recovery of sight to the blind,
 To set free those who are oppressed,
 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17-21)

Jesus’ Old Testament Reference	Observations
The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, (Isa 61:1-2)	Jesus sees Himself as the object of Isaiah’s prophecy: a) anointed by God and the bearer of His Spirit, b) the Messiah who brings the Good News of God’s salvation, c) the Prophet who opens eyes to the truth that sets man free from sin and proclaims freedom in the context of Jubilee or otherwise the eschatological day of God’s vengeance.

With this reference to Isaiah, Jesus:

1. Confirms Simeon’s Messianic prophecy of Jesus being the Light - God’s salvation that brings good news.
2. Foresees the liberating consequence when His role as Servant completes the task of atonement (Isa 53:10-12).

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, the motif of being the Light is understood in the figurative sense representing God’s salvation and the source that could open blind eyes to the good news.

The imagery of the Light is depicted in a variety of ways. In this reference to a Messianic prophecy, Isaiah 9:1-2 is loosely quoted; however, Matthew is positing a contrast: Galilee, a place despised for its spiritual darkness, is where the Light dawns.

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
 By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
 Galilee of the Gentiles—
 The people who were sitting in darkness
 saw a great Light,
 And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,
 Upon them a Light dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt 4:12-17)

The Light
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 5 (page 3)

In another instance where the Light is not mentioned, Jesus alludes to the motif by speaking of miracles that validate the Light. While he was in prison, John the Baptist wonders if Jesus is the Messiah because Jesus' healing ministry (Matt 9:18 - 10:15) does not speak much of impending judgement, which was a contrast to his ministry of exhorting people to urgently repent in light of the immediacy of the Lord's arrival and judgment (Matt 3:7-10; Luke 3:7-9).

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." (Matt 11:2-6)

Borrowing phrases from Isaiah, Jesus assures John the Baptist that He is the Light, the salvation of God, because as Isaiah prophesized - when people return to their covenant: the blind see (Isa 29:18; 35:5), the lame walk (Isa 35:6), lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear (Isa 29:18; 35:5), the dead are raised (Isa 26:19) and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Isa 61:1).

However, there appears an apparent contradiction. While Jesus' ministry brings very public physical salvation to those afflicted, in some instances the message of spiritual salvation, salvation from one's sins, is intentionally veiled, and Jesus speaks to this as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy although these passages are not Messianic in nature.

Therefore I speak to them in parables;
because while seeing they do not see,
and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.
In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,
'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
With their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes,
Otherwise they would see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and return,
And I would heal them.' (Matt 13:13-15; Mark 4:10-12)

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

"I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world." (Matt 13:34-35)

So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them. But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them." These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. (John 12:35-43)

The Light
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 5 (page 4)

On the surface, it appears that Jesus intentionally teaches in parables so that people will not be saved from their sins; there is an implication that salvation is a matter of divine selection. However, Jesus cites Isaiah's prophetic message of judgment against Judah's gross infidelity to their covenant agreement and rejection of the Law.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go, and tell this people:
'Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.'
Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull,
And their eyes dim,
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And return and be healed. (Isa 6:8-10)

Judah's infidelity to their Mosaic Covenant was rooted in their lack of faith, which rendered their offerings and worship unacceptable and turned God's hand against them (Isa 1:10-15). If Judah only had a genuine faith in God, they would have seen, heard, and understood Isaiah's calls to repent and return to their covenant commitments, and God would have blessed them (Isa 6:10).

For wayward people of the covenant, a genuine faith opens blind eyes, deaf ears and hearts. When the Mosaic Covenant was made, there was a condition that had to be met before one could be God's own possession and a priest of a holy nation.

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Ex 19:3-6)

The idea that genuine faith opens blind eyes, deaf ears and hearts that misunderstand is seen when Moses speaks to the second generation out of Egypt **before** they make their covenant treaty with God.

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. (Deut 29:2-4)

"You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, that you may enter into the covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath which the Lord your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Deut 29:10-13)

The Light
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 5 (page 5)

When Jesus was speaking specifically to Jews, He alluded to this very issue in explaining why they cannot hear the truth of His message. It is worthwhile to observe that He was speaking to “Jews who had believed Him” (John 8:31). In this instance, the “Jews who had believed (Greek: pisteuo)” initially placed some confidence in what Jesus taught; but, their confidence was not a conviction that Jesus was the truth that should be fully trusted, which was the distinction for faith and demonstrated by their intention of stoning Him (John 8:59).

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.” (John 8:42-47)

When Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10, He is speaking of Jews, the ones who were supposed to have a genuine faith in God keep their promises of the covenant, and be His possession and kingdom of priests. If they had faith in God and returned to their covenant, they would have seen, heard, and recognized that Jesus was the Messiah – God’s salvation.

By forsaking God and their covenant responsibilities, the Jews brought upon themselves God’s judgment, which was intended as a discipline to bring them back into their covenant relationship. And this judgment can include spiritual blindness, deafness and a hardness of heart that might appear as divinely ordained when in fact it was a response to a covenant keeper’s rejection of God and His Law.

“The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. (Deut 28:20)

This view is further corroborated when Jesus answers the disciples’ questions about parables; as Believers, they were “granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.”

His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. And He said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. (Luke 8:9-10)

There appears two causes of spiritual blindness. For the Gentiles, they were spiritually blind due to their ignorance of God. For the unfaithful Jews, they were spiritually blind as God’s judgment against their infidelity to the Mosaic Covenant.

Thus, as the Light, Jesus can speak of “the blind receive sight” (Matt 11:5) to describe wayward Jews, returning to their commitment to the moral Law of the Covenant, recognizing the Messiah, and Gentiles hearing the gospel and placing their faith in the Son of God.

And, as the Light, Jesus can speak in parables so that unfaithful Jews will see “but will not perceive” (Matt 13:15).

After Jesus Christ dies, Believers are called to accept the future of suffering for His sake in the process of proclaiming His great salvation (Rom 8:16-18; 1 Pet 2:19-21). While the Light leaves the earth, Paul informs disciples that they become the light!!

The Light
A Series on Messianic Prophecies: Part 5 (page 6)

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us,

'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles,
That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'" (Acts 13:46-47)

The Messianic passages about "the Light" appear to be used in the figurative sense when applied to Jesus; however, in keeping with the literary beauty of the Bible, Jesus is literally the Light of New Jerusalem!

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (Rev 21:23-24)

References:

1. Gaeblein FE ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vols. 8 and 9, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House (1992).
2. Green JB, Mcknight S, Marshall IH, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press (1992).