

JANUARY 21-27, 2019

John 1

We Have Found the Messiah

Summary: *Christ is the Word of God—He created all things and was made flesh—John baptizes Jesus and testifies that He is the Lamb of God—John, Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael believe in Christ and follow Him.*

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What and Who is the Word?

Gospel writers had different approaches to describing Jesus'

life. John's purpose is to explain WHAT He is and begins by describing Him as the WORD. ". . . God was not so much putting Abraham through a test, as making his unswerving obedience a shining example of man's devotion to the word of God."

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

To the Jews, the scriptures, the words of God, are so special they must never touch the ground. Many use a pointer to read the words rather than touch the scrolls with their fingers. The scroll cabinet, the "Ark," is said to contain the "presence of God," meaning the word of God.

Messiah Means Anointed

The word Messiah literally means "the anointed one." Anointing includes the practical and symbolic qualities of softening and healing.

"Anointing with oil is a very ancient custom. It was done for both practical and symbolic reasons. The practical use was cosmetic, to soften and protect the skin, as well as

medicinal, to heal various afflictions.

Anointing also figured in the coronation of the king, in the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests, and in the purification of a person suffering from leprosy. These anointings . . . symbolized the new rank and power given to the anointed person and they evoked God's blessing on him."

"The anointing oil was holy and made according to a special formula. It could be used for no purposes other than those outlined above. In the case of leprosy, the oil used was not holy. According to the Talmud, the anointing oil was compounded only once in history --- by Moses, who made enough to last for the whole period from the anointing of Aaron until the residue was hidden away by King Josiah. After that time no anointing took place."

"In the case of kings, the whole head was anointed, i.e., covered with the oil, whereas the priests had only a mark made on the head with the oil. For King David and his descendants, the oil was poured out of a horn; for King Saul it was from a phial since "his kingdom was not a lasting one." The kings of the Northern

Kingdom of Israel were not anointed with oil but with balsam.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Basic Principles

As late as 11th century, there were still some Jewish scholars who saw, as basic to the Jewish religion, the following four principles: (1) belief in God; (2) belief in the prophets; (3) belief in the World to Come; and (4) belief in the coming of the Messiah.

The latter two items of a belief in a world to come and in the coming of the Messiah have greatly diminished in modern Jewish society.

One of the problems is that the gathering of the Jews and the coming of the Messiah are linked. There's no question about the gathering of the Jews, but where is the Messiah?

“Isaiah describes a glorious age, the coming of "the day of the Lord." After the evil are punished, "it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people" ([Isaiah 11:11](#)). With the coming of the Messiah, Jews will come home to Jerusalem, the everlasting city.”

“The majority of religious leaders believed that there could be no return to Zion before the coming of the Messiah; and the active Zionists were mostly those who had abandoned their traditional religious roles and replaced them with secular, political activities.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Recognizing the True Messiah and Other Messianic Persons

Let us examine Jewish thought about the Messiah so that we may understand our brothers' points of view. The comparisons

might be helpful in identifying the true Messiah and what He would really do.

“I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.’ This is the 12th of Maimonides' 13 articles of faith and clearly expresses what has become a cardinal belief of traditional Judaism.”

“In the Bible there is no direct reference to the Messiah although certain passages are interpreted by later scholars to be referring to him. It seems that belief in the Messiah started to develop during the Babylonian exile after the destruction of the First Temple, when the Jews came into contact with other religions, particularly oriental, mystical faiths. However, by Talmud times belief in the Messiah had become firmly a part of normative Judaism.”

“In traditional Judaism, the Messiah will be a human being --- albeit it a perfect one --- who will come and bring harmony to the world. He will not have a divine aspect other than having been chosen by God for his task. The Hebrew word for Messiah, *mashi'ah*, means "anointed" and indicates that the Messiah has been chosen by God. The coming of the Messiah therefore has come to mean the redemption of the Jewish people and an end to its suffering and tribulations.”

“Throughout history many men have presented themselves as the Messiah and because of the Jews' great longing for his coming, these "messiahs" have sometimes attracted large followings. Of course, the most famous was Jesus, although Christianity deviated from Judaism in ascribing to him divine characteristics. Of the purely "Jewish"

messiahs, the best known is undoubtedly Shabbetai Zevi who electrified the whole world, both Jewish and gentile."

"According to the Talmud, the Messiah will be a descendant of the House of David and will be preceded by a secondary Messiah, from the House of Joseph. Folklore has it that he will arrive riding a donkey, although some sources have him arriving triumphantly riding the clouds. A widespread belief was that the Messiah will be born on the 9th of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second Temples."

Throughout the ages there has been a great deal of speculation as to when the Messiah will come, and many kabbalists and mystics worked out exact dates for his expected arrival. Most rabbinic authorities were against such speculation, probably because it always brought extreme disappointment to those who accepted the dates."

"In modern Judaism, the idea of the Messiah has undergone great change. Reform Judaism has substituted a belief in a perfect world when mankind progresses sufficiently, and many Orthodox thinkers describe the establishment of the State of Israel as "the beginning of the redemption," that is, the start of the messianic era."

"Throughout Jewish history, Jews all over the world have yearned for the coming of the Messiah. But at various times, especially in periods of trouble and suffering, the passive yearning turned into active preparation on the part of those who believed that the Messiah had indeed arrived and that the redemption was about to begin. The troubles afflicting them, such as the Crusades or the

Chmielnicki massacres, were considered at the time to be the *hevlei mashiah* or "birth pains of the Messiah" which must be endured before his actual appearance."

"Time and time again whole communities became convinced that their redemption was finally at hand. The excitement and jubilation would spread from town to town as the rumors and stories of signs and miracles were passed on. People sold their possessions, neglected their work and prepared themselves for their trip to Erez Israel. What terrible disappointment when in the end their Messiah proved to be merely a false hope!"

"An early example of messianic expectation took place during the period of the Second Temple in Judah. The turbulence accompanying the rule of King Herod and, later, that of the Romans led to the emergence of messianic leaders, each of whom claimed to be the "king of Israel," about to free the Jews from the hated foreign rulers. Many of these, like Jesus of Nazareth, were crucified for their efforts. ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

The Herods

The Herods preceding and during Jesus' time had a significant role in establishing a political and economic era that provided an environment of enough religious freedom that the ancient law and priesthood could be restored, albeit in a rather insignificant way. People desired to be delivered from the cruelty of the Romans (brought on by the traitorous onslaught of Jewish zealots) and the corruption of the Jewish priesthood. It was the precise time that events would result in the Savior's great atonement for all mankind, a deliverance, largely unnoticed at the time, that had eternal implications for everyone.

“Herod I (73--4 B.C.E.), a cunning and ruthless tyrant and vassal of Rome, was king of Judea from 37 B.C.E. until his death. Herod was the second son of Antipater, the Idumean whose family had converted to Judaism in the time of John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean king (135--104 B.C.E.). Antipater himself was the governor of Edom during the reign of Alexander Yannai who succeeded his father, John Hyrcanus. After Alexander's death, Antipater supported one of the two sons who contended for the throne and had his own son Herod appointed governor of Galilee in 47 B.C.E.”

“Herod crushed a revolt against Antipater's rule led by a Jewish nationalist named Hezekiah, executing the leaders without trial and escaping the sentence of the Sanhedrin by flight to Roman Syria, where he was appointed a provincial governor. After the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.E., Herod threw in his lot with the assassin Cassius (who had temporarily established his rule in the East). Herod zealously extracted heavy taxes from Judea in order to curry favor with Rome. In 43 B.C.E. Antipater was murdered at the instigation of the Judean ruler Hyrcanus II. By marriage to Mariamne at this time, Herod attached himself to the Hasmonean dynasty.”

“In 41 B.C.E. Herod bribed the Roman ruler Mark Anthony into granting himself and his brother Phasael the rule of Judea under Hyrcanus' supervision. The following year Mattathias Antigonus (a grandson of Alexander Yannai) seized the Judean throne and besieged Herod, Phasael, and Hyrcanus in Jerusalem. Phasael committed suicide, Hyrcanus was captured, and Herod escaped to Rome, where he was granted the Judean throne by Mark Anthony and Octavian. With Anthony's aid Herod took Jerusalem in 37

B.C.E. and Mattathias Antigonus was put to death.”

“Immediately on seizing power, Herod executed 45 Sanhedrin supporters of the Hasmoneans, effectively destroying the court's legislative power. He succeeded in extending the area under his control by bribing and flattering successive Roman emperors. Although in internal affairs Herod had unlimited authority, he remained a mere and willing vassal of Rome, possessing no authority to conduct foreign policy or to appoint an heir without imperial sanction. Always fearful of opposition, he had murdered all members of the Hasmonean family who were potential threats to his power, including his wife Mariamne and her embittered sons Alexander and Aristobulus, Hyrcanus, and his own son and heir Antipater. When granting permission for Antipater's death in 4 B.C.E., Augustus is reported to have commented: "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son," because Herod would not eat pork. Herod himself died five days later.”

“Herod's rule had destroyed the internal organization of the Jewish community and displaced the authority of the Torah. Though a Jew himself, he was hated by the people. One of the few productive aspects of his reign was the large number of cities, fortresses and palaces he had built, amongst which is the mountain lair of Masada. He also employed 11,000 workmen to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and it was so beautiful that people said: "He who has not seen the Temple does not know what beauty is." His last act was to have burned alive two Jewish scholars who had incited the people to remove the Roman eagle from the Temple facade. His death was celebrated throughout Judea.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

The New Testament reports that it was this Herod who ordered all babies in the nearby

town of Bethlehem up to two-years old to be killed. This was in response to the “wise men” who came looking for the “new king” about two years after He was born.

“Matthew’s account of ‘wise men from the east’ coming to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in search of the Christ Child is sometimes recited as a visit of three Magi. Actually, there is no historical basis for the prevailing legend that they were from the apostate Persian cult or that they were three in number. It is much more probable that they were devout men who knew of our Lord’s coming advent, including the promise that a new star would arise, and that they came as prophets of any age would have done to worship their King. It is clear, that they were in tune with the Lord and were receiving revelation from him, for they were ‘warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod.’

(Matthew. 2:12.)”

(Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.462)

There are three Book of Mormon prophets in this particular time frame who prophesied the Lord’s imminent coming. These three also seemed to “*disappear,*” or, “*were not heard of again,*” an Alma, Samuel the Lamanite, and a Nephi. Alma and Nephi had light skin and Samuel the Lamanite, likely, a darker skin.

(Alma 45:18, Helaman 16:7-8, 3 Nephi 1:3, 3 Nephi 2:9)

“Our Lord’s birth into mortality was accompanied by the appearance of a new star in the heavens. One of Samuel the Lamanite’s Messianic prophecies foretold this heavenly sign **(Helaman. 14:5)**, and the Nephites knew of the promised birth because they saw the new star that arose according to Samuel’s word.”

(3 Nephi 1:21.)”

(Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, p.765)

The Herod that dealt with Jesus at the end of his mortal life was Herod Antipas.

“An early example of messianic expectation took place during the period of the Second Temple in Judah. The turbulence accompanying the rule of King Herod and, later, that of the Romans led to the emergence of messianic leaders, each of whom claimed to be the “king of Israel,” about to free the Jews from the hated foreign rulers. Many of these, like Jesus of Nazareth, were crucified for their efforts.” **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)**

A Better Time for the Savior’s Coming

It is important to note that Herodian and Roman rule was not always oppressive. Most of the difficulties that the Jews encountered were caused by a fairly-small segment of society, the Zealots, who made murderous raids against the Roman government.

“Agrippa I (10 B.C.E. - 44 C.E.) became a beloved and respected king of Judea although his early life was one of quarreling, drunkenness and flight from debt. The son of Aristobulus and Berenice, grandson of King Herod of Judea, and Mariamne, the Hasmonean princess, he was educated in Rome with the princes of other courts. These connections were important to him later in his life. During periods of political turmoil among the vassal states of Rome, Agrippa was rewarded with appointment as ruler of parts of the Kingdom of Israel (37 C.E.) and later of Judea and Samaria (41 C.E.). His three-year reign was a period of relief and benefit for the Jews. He was sympathetic to the Pharisees and careful to observe Jewish laws. Thoughtful and sincere, Agrippa once stopped his own procession to let a bride's pass first. He was not proud, and celebrated the festival of First Fruits with other residents of Jerusalem. When called to read the Torah he stood, although a king was allowed to sit. When he read the

passage: "One from among thy brethren shalt thou set a king over thee: thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee" (**Deuteronomy 17:15**), his eyes filled with tears, since he was not of pure Jewish descent. But the rabbis called out, "Agrippa, you are our brother." His death (44 C.E.) was sudden and mysterious. It was thought that he had been poisoned by Romans who feared his popularity with his subjects." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

Immediately preceding Jesus' life, another series of events paralleled the political and economic events of the time. A prophet was preparing the way for a deliverer. His effort was to teach the people to have faith in the true redeemer, repent, and make covenants so that they might receive the Holy Spirit which the redeemer would give them.

The First Principles

In Judaism, Faith, Repentance, Baptism (immersion - Mikveh) and the Holy Spirit are viewed as follows.

Faith: "In the Bible there are no articles of faith or dogmas in which the Jew is commanded to believe. Belief in God's existence and infinite ability is taken for granted and is the basis of the Bible. This is the importance of the story of the Exodus from Egypt; the Children of Israel witnessed God's wonders and passed on the record of their own personal experience to their descendants. The biblical word *emunah* (and its other forms) which is often translated as "belief" really means "trust" or "confidence," which is something quite different."

"Judaism insists on belief, faith and good deeds (which are also called *mitzvot*); but by themselves they are not enough. The actual observance of the *mitzvot*, notwithstanding the fact that it may

occasionally cause inconvenience, is a prime doctrine of Judaism."
(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

Repentance: "A unique aspect of the Jewish faith is that although God rules the world with absolute justice, He is also merciful and forgives sins against Him. The doctrine of repentance is based on this belief."

"Although Judaism sees sin as a most serious matter, even the sinner is not without hope. One of the most important theological doctrines of both the Bible and the Talmud is that if a sinner repents his bad deeds, God will forgive him. Repentance consists of several stages --- firstly the sinner must reflect on his actions and realize that he has indeed done the wrong thing. He must then make up his mind never to do it again, and confess his sin. This confession is not made to any other human being but is made by the sinner directly to God. On this basis the two confessions *Ashamnu* and *Al-Het* were introduced into the prayers for the Day of Atonement which is a special occasion for repentance and forgiveness. However, even when a sinner has done all these things, his repentance is still not final until he has been exposed to the same temptation and withstood it. Of course, he should not deliberately put himself on that spot again."

"Repentance in Hebrew is known as *teshuvah*, which literally means "return," and signifies a return to God. A person who repents his sins is known as a *ba'al teshuvah*. Many rabbis of the Talmud believed that the real *ba'al teshuvah* is greater even than a person who has never sinned and they furthermore said that when a person repents out of love of God (and not just out of fear of divine punishment), all the sins he had committed are considered to be *mitzvot*. This is perhaps

the most comforting doctrine that Judaism has given to the world.”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Conversion - Immersion: “A convert to Judaism is considered a new-born child, and, from the halakhic point of view, he has no father or mother. Thus, if a whole family converts, the children and the parents start their lives as Jews with no legal relationship. Because of this state of affairs, converts are always named as though they were the sons of Abraham, the first Jew. A husband and wife who convert must also have another wedding ceremony in order to be married under Jewish law.”

“A potential convert (or proselyte) is first questioned by a court (*bet din*) of three rabbis. They usually begin by trying to persuade him to give up the idea of joining a nation which has been, and today still is, severely persecuted. If the candidate still affirms sincerely that he is ready to "accept the yoke of the commandments," he or she must undergo a period of instruction in Judaism, in its laws and practices. After thorough study, when he understands the *mitzvot* and is ready to begin his life as a Jew, the candidate is ready for the rituals of conversion. For both males and females the *bet din* oversees their immersion in a ritual bath (*mikveh*).”

([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

Jewish thought requires that the Bet Din should always have the presence of Levites. They will witness the total immersion of the person.

“Just how to construct a *mikveh in* accordance with the numerous legal specifications involved constantly posed a technological problem of great seriousness, and over the generations

rabbinic thinkers were repeatedly challenged to come up with novel solutions to this unusual problem which demanded a rare combination of technologic and halakhic ingenuity.”

“Briefly the basic legal requirements are these: 1) A *mikveh* must not be filled with water that has been drawn (i.e., has been in a vessel or a receptacle), but with water from a naturally flowing source; spring water or rainwater are the ideal sources, but melted snow and ice are also permitted. 2) The water must be able to flow into the *mikveh* freely and unimpeded (any blockage renders the water "drawn water") and must reach the *mikveh in* vessels that are not susceptible to ritual uncleanness. 3) The minimum size of the *mikveh* is of a vessel which has a volume of "40 *seah*," variously estimated at between 250 and 1,000 liters (quarts). 4) The *mikveh* must be watertight and must be constructed of natural materials on the spot, for otherwise it is deemed itself to be a "vessel" and renders the water in it "drawn water.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

John, a Levite, was administering immersions in a classic Jewish environment. The water source came from springs (living water), it flowed freely (Jordan River), it exceeded the minimum amount of water needed, and it was a natural setting. Jewish tradition also includes a requirement that the Mikveh should be below ground level. The Jordan River, where John the Baptist was immersing people, is at the lowest place on the face of the earth, near the Dead Sea.

Holy Spirit: “*Ruah ha-Kodesh* (holy spirit) is often used as a synonym for prophecy. However, according to some rabbis, unlike prophecy, there are some types of *ruah ha-*

kodesh which also can be attained by doing good deeds.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

The possession of the “Holy Spirit has been used to describe various righteous teachers and sages. “. . . Luria already had a reputation as a man of striking personality who possessed the holy spirit.” “. . . Nahman was the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, and his mother was said to “possess the holy spirit.” “. . . Phinehas is known to have traveled to redeem captives, and on one journey a river in flood parted for him, so as not to delay his mission. He constructed the famous "ladder of saintliness" in which Caution (against evil) leads through Eagerness (for good), Cleanliness, Purity, Asceticism, Holiness, Humility, Fear of God, Attainment of the Holy Spirit (divine inspiration), ultimately to the Resurrection of the Dead.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

John the Forerunner

John prepared the way, was a forerunner of the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. John taught that recognition of the Messiah came through Faith, Repentance, Baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins and the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

John, a Religious Evangelist

John the Baptist was the son of the priest, Zacharias, who's lot it was to administer the offering at the incense altar of the Jerusalem temple that particular year, and received a remarkable vision that in his and his wife's advanced age, she would conceive and bear a prophet son, John. That son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The anger, persecution and subsequent slaying of Zacharia, slain between the temple (Holy of Holies) and the altar (Matthew 23:35), carried over to the harassment of John by Pharisees and Saducees.