

God's
Messiah
in the Old
Testament

EXPECTATIONS
OF A COMING KING

Andrew T. Abernethy
and Gregory Goswell



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Introduction

The subject of this book is fundamental to a proper understanding of the faith we profess, for the name of our faith (Christianity) and the name given to its followers (Christians) derive from a core belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the “Christ” (= Messiah). In terms of a definition of “messiah” and “messianism,” in this book these terms are understood to refer to the hope of the coming of a royal agent who will serve God’s kingdom purposes, an expectation that Christians believe finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ.¹ Put simply, a messianic passage or book in the Old Testament is one in which this royal figure is prefigured, anticipated, predicted, or described. There are many Old Testament portions that Christians see as pointing to Jesus that do not fall under this definition—for example, the Servant Songs of Isaiah, which depict “the servant of the LORD,” whom we would classify as a prophetic rather than a royal figure (see, e.g., Isa. 42:1–4);² however, such texts are not our concern in this book. In other words, our definition of things messianic is narrower than just any Old Testament passage that can be understood to point to Jesus. In fact, messianism is only one of several strands of Old Testament expectation that lead to Jesus. Other strands include Jesus as the ultimate prophet, the true priest, or God himself. This is an important caveat, for it means that in classifying any particular biblical text or book as “non-messianic,” we do not mean to imply or assert that it is unconnected to Jesus.

1. On the vexed problem of definition, see, e.g., Gerbern S. Oegema, *The Anointed and His People: Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba*, JSPSup 27 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 21–34.

2. See chap. 6 in the present volume.

Beyond Word Studies

The study of messianism in the Old Testament is not to be tied too closely to occurrences of the term *māšīaḥ* (“anointed one”), the Hebrew word from which we get the term “Messiah,” as demonstrated, for example, by the fact that the Davidic ruler of Jer. 23:5–6 is clearly a future ideal figure, but the term “anointed” is not used in this passage.³ In determining what biblical passages are to be examined, we will not limit their range to those that specifically refer to an anointed one, for the messianic concept is not limited to specific terminology. Though kings are not the only figures said to be anointed in the Old Testament,⁴ the main application of the terminology is to kings, and, therefore, kingship will be our exclusive focus in this book. The Hebrew root *mšḥ* occurs as a verb (*māšāḥ*), meaning “to anoint,” and as a nominal form (*māšīaḥ*), which in terms of its form is really an adjective with a passive meaning (“anointed”),⁵ as shown by its use, for example, to refer to “the *anointed* priest” (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16, etc.), though in the Old Testament most of the time it is used as a substantivized noun (“anointed one”).

In terms of the biblical use of the Hebrew root *mšḥ*, both as a noun and as a verb, the place to start is the book of Samuel, where it is found many times and where for the first time in the Old Testament it is applied to royal figures. What is obvious from a survey of nominal uses of the root is that the noun (*māšīaḥ*) is always determined. It can be determined in a number of ways:

- by a pronominal suffix—either “his anointed” (1 Sam. 2:10; 12:3, 5; 16:6; 2 Sam. 22:51) or “my anointed” (1 Sam. 2:35)—where the suffix refers to YHWH;
- by being part of a Hebrew construct chain—usually “the LORD’s anointed” (1 Sam. 24:6 [24:7 MT; 2x], 10 [11 MT]; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 19:21 [19:22 MT]);
- once in a poetic passage, “the anointed of the God of Jacob” (2 Sam. 23:1).

This is by no means an unusual occurrence in the Old Testament, since, for example, in the Psalter the expressions that come closest to “the Messiah” are “his anointed” (Pss. 2:2; 18:50), “your anointed” (132:10), and “my anointed”

3. A point made by John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 17.

4. E.g., the high priest (Exod. 29:7; Num. 35:25), other priests (Exod. 28:41; 30:30; 40:15; Num. 3:3), and prophets (1 Kings 19:16; Isa. 61:1; maybe Ps. 105:15 [= 1 Chron. 16:22]).

5. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, rev. English ed., SubBi 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), §88Eb.

(v. 17), with the personal pronoun referring in each case to YHWH. This pattern of usage suggests that there is a close bond between YHWH and his anointed royal agent (indicating authorization, dependence, or submission).

The verb “to anoint” (*māšāḥ*) is used fourteen times in the book of Samuel. These verbal occurrences make the point that the person in question (usually Saul or David) was anointed by YHWH (1 Sam. 10:1; 15:17; 2 Sam. 12:7), by the prophet under divine instruction (1 Sam. 9:16; 15:1; 16:3, 12, 13), or by the people through their own representatives (2 Sam. 2:4, 7; 3:39 [probably]; 5:3, 17; 19:10 [19:11 MT]). Regarding the last category, except in the case of Absalom (19:10 [19:11 MT]), the action of the people is not out of step with God’s purposes and reflects popular knowledge that David was the one whom God wished to be their ruler; we note the statement the northern tribes made about their motivation when speaking to David in 2 Sam. 5:2 (“And the LORD said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel’”).

The title “the Messiah” is not found in Samuel or the Psalter, or, indeed, in the Old Testament as a whole, and the two obscure references to “an anointed one” (*māšīaḥ* without a definite article) in Dan. 9:25 and 9:26 are hardly exceptions, for there is ongoing scholarly disagreement over to what these refer (king or priest?).⁶ Though this surprising fact is often pointed out by scholars, it may not be as significant as it at first sounds. It certainly does not mean that messianism is a postbiblical concept and only *read into* the Old Testament by those wearing Christian spectacles.

Messianism: Defined out of Existence?

Whatever view is taken of the concept of the Messiah in the Old Testament, an essential starting-point for thinking on this subject is the book of Samuel, for it is at this point in the Old Testament that we are first introduced to royal anointed figures, though this way of approaching the subject is not obvious to all.⁷ The reason usually given is that those referred to under the title “the LORD’s anointed” (and variants on this title) and the persons who are anointed in Samuel are historical figures (notably Saul and David), who are reigning kings rather than eschatological figures. On that basis, Joseph Fitzmyer quickly surveys and dismisses the passages in Samuel that refer to an anointed figure

6. See chap. 14 in the present volume.

7. The material in Samuel is often overlooked in treatments of the theme—e.g., Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Stanley E. Porter, ed., *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

(listed above), in each case declaring that they are devoid of messianic connotations, and he sums up his brief study by saying that they do not even *hint* at messianic expectation.⁸ Susan E. Gillingham gives the references to an anointed one in eight psalms the same kind of treatment (2:2; 18:50 [18:51 MT]; 20:6 [20:7 MT]; 28:8; 45:7 [45:8 MT]; 84:9 [84:10 MT]; 89:38, 51 [89:39, 52 MT]; 132:10, 17).⁹ As a result of this way of proceeding, Joseph Fitzmyer finds what he considers a genuine messianic passage only in the book of Daniel (9:25–26), and the result is that messianism is relegated to the fringe of the Old Testament,¹⁰ such that for scholars like Fitzmyer, messianism becomes predominantly an intertestamental development, and consequently their focus is on the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls to provide the background for New Testament thinking about Jesus as the Christ.¹¹

To anticipate our findings, our argument to the contrary is that Saul and David are depicted as messianic figures in Samuel, such that their position and roles presage a royal personage promised by God. Though the book of Samuel is not explicit concerning the prospect of a future ideal ruler in the Davidic line, the experiences of Saul and David present a messianic paradigm that helps to shape what God's people are to expect to see in the coming messianic figure. In other words, the portrait of these *historical* messianic figures carries implications for the realization of a messianic ideal in the end time. Likewise, in the case of the Psalter, we find in the psalms of book 5 a nuanced messianism in the form of a future "David" who depends upon and serves YHWH, the Divine King.¹² As a result, in this book we will present a more extended history of messianism in the Old Testament period than is common among scholars in this field of study.

The Messiah and the Kingdom of God

Another distinctive of our approach is that we believe that by coordinating a theology of divine and human kingship, one achieves a more nuanced

8. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who Is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 13–16.

9. Susan E. Gillingham, "The Messiah in the Psalms: A Question of Reception History and the Psalter," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 212–20.

10. Fitzmyer, *One Who Is to Come*, 56–64.

11. E.g., Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

12. See chap. 13 in the present volume.

interpretation of what kind of Messiah is in view in different books. Without claiming that the theme of God's kingship is *the* center of Old Testament theology, but only asserting that it is central, the following outline focuses on God's kingship, to balance and to provide a context for the theme of human kingship. It is no exaggeration to claim that the metaphor of God as king is pervasive within the Old Testament.¹³ The kingship of YHWH is intimately connected to his act of creation (cf. Pss. 29:10; 74:12–17; 93:2–4), for in creating the cosmos, God was making a realm to rule, and the earth is thought of as his temple/palace in accordance with the ideology of the ANE, and Adam is his vice-regent.¹⁴ The divine victory over Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea (Exod. 15:1–18), in which the Creator God wielded wind and water as his weapons, leads to the acclamation of God's kingship (v. 18: "The LORD will reign forever and ever").¹⁵ Just as the great kings of the ANE made treaties, God made a "covenant" with his people at Sinai. The cultic regulations of Exodus and Leviticus are controlled by the ideal of oriental royal protocol—that is to say, the proper way in which to approach the king¹⁶—and James W. Watts argues that the commandments of Exodus through Deuteronomy implicitly characterize their (divine) speaker as king.¹⁷

It is anticipated in Moses's speeches that Israel will have the institution of kingship (Deut. 17:14–20); however, the king acts alongside other officeholders—judges, priests, and prophets—so that power sharing is the ideal (16:18–18:22), with the king depicted as the "model Israelite" and the "first citizen" in the community of God's covenant people.¹⁸ In this way, human kingship is not allowed to get out of control and threaten God's supreme rule. Compatible with this, Moses, for all his God-given authority,

13. See Marc Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*, JSOTSup 76 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

14. Gary V. Smith, "The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible," *TJ* 3 (1982): 20–38; John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 178–92.

15. Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 199.

16. E.g., God's kingship is presupposed in the idiom of people being required to "appear [MT: *rā 'ā*, a *niphal* verb form] in the presence of" YHWH, such as found in Exod. 23:15, 17; 34:20, 23; Deut. 16:16 and 31:11; see Abraham Geiger, *Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel in ihrer Abhängigkeit von der innern Entwicklung des Judenthums* (Breslau: Julius Hainauer, 1857), 337–39.

17. James W. Watts, "The Legal Characterization of God in the Pentateuch," *HUCA* 67 (1996): 8.

18. J. G. McConville, "King and Messiah in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," in Day, *King and Messiah*, 271–95.

is not depicted in the Pentateuch as a *king*,¹⁹ perhaps because such a move might be thought to detract attention from God's kingship. As a second Moses, Joshua, likewise, is not depicted as a king figure in the book named after him.²⁰ This raises the implicit question, How does human kingship fit within the theocratic structure of Israel as the covenant nation? Unless this question can be satisfactorily answered, any form of messianism is incomprehensible.

In Judg. 8:22–23 Gideon refuses the offer of kingship by referring to God's own status as king ("the LORD will rule over you"), showing that in the judges' thinking, human kingship appeared to be incompatible with divine kingship. In the speeches of Samuel, the people's request for a king is viewed as a rejection of YHWH as king (1 Sam. 8:7; 12:12). The reactions of Gideon and Samuel suggest that the relationship between divine and human kingship is vital to clarify (this "theological work" is done in 1 Sam. 8–12²¹), and the role of the prophet is to keep this dangerous new institution in check (12:23). The transfer of the "ark" (viewed as the throne or footstool of YHWH; see 2 Sam. 6:2) to the new capital of Jerusalem is to be understood as King David's sincere acknowledgment of God's superior kingship (2 Sam. 6), and this is also the godly motivation behind David's desire to build YHWH a temple/palace (2 Sam. 7). These key passages set the theological parameters for the era of kingship (depicted in Kings and Chronicles).

The sacking (and later destruction) of the temple calls in question the reign of YHWH (Dan. 1:1–2), and the book of Daniel explores the relation of God's kingship and the fate of human kingdoms. Kingship, human and divine, is the main theme of the Psalter, with the climactic confession by David of God as his king (Ps. 145:1: "I will extol you, my God and King"). The links of Old Testament wisdom with kingship are strong (e.g., Prov. 1:1; Eccles. 1:1; 2:1–11), with the implicit understanding that wisdom is something handed down by God as the Wise King. Among the writing prophets, Hosea is the first to articulate a clearly expressed criticism of the (northern) kings (e.g., 8:4, 10; 13:9–11), but he also says that there is a place for a future Davidic king in God's purposes (3:5). Isaiah emphasizes the kingship of YHWH (2:1–4; 6:5b: "For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts"; cf. 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7; 66:1). Similarly, in Ezekiel, throne scenes (the appearance and movement of the theophanic glory cloud) form the structural backbone of the prophecy

19. Pace Danny Mathews, *Royal Motifs in the Pentateuchal Portrayal of Moses*, LHBOTS 571 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012).

20. Gregory Goswell, "Joshua and Kingship," *BBR* 23 (2013): 29–42.

21. Lyle M. Eslinger, "Viewpoints and Point of View in 1 Samuel 8–12," *JOT* 26 (1983): 61–76.

(1; 10; 43:1–5). The prophets depict God as the one who saves his people (e.g., Isa. 12:2; Jer. 23:1–3; Ezek. 34:11–19), so what role is left for a messianic figure to play? The same prophets consistently present a truncated form of human kingship as the model for the future, focused on social justice and domestic rule (e.g., Isa. 9:6–7 [9:5–6 MT]; 11:3–4; Jer. 23:5–6; Ezek. 34:23–24).²² In the postexilic period, there is a noticeable loss of interest in messianism, perhaps due to the decidedly negative experience with the kings of Israel and Judah, with the later books having a distinctly theocratic emphasis. For example, neither Haggai nor Ezra-Nehemiah describes Zerubbabel, the temple builder, as having Davidic credentials.²³

Moving to the New Testament, the proclamation of Jesus can be summed up as the preaching of “the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14–15), with Jesus understanding himself to be the bringer of the kingdom that fulfills Old Testament expectation. So, too, Luke pictures Paul as “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31; cf. 20:25), and Rom. 1:1–6 at once confirms that Luke has given an accurate summary of Paul’s message (cf. 9:5). The preaching of the kingdom by Jesus and his apostles serves to confirm that $\Upsilon\text{H}\text{W}\text{H}$ ’s kingship is a key theme in the theology of the Old Testament. If in the Old Testament a certain tension between divine kingship and human kingship surfaces at times, any such tension is finally and fully resolved in the person of the God-man, Jesus Christ, who is both the Divine King who saves his people and the hoped-for Messiah who rules in God’s consummated kingdom. Some think that the designation of Jesus as the Christ is no more than a second *proper name* (e.g., Rom. 1:1: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ . . .” RSV), but that evaluation is not consistent with Paul’s reference to Jesus’s descent from David (v. 3)²⁴ or with the fact that Ps. 2 “resonates” in Rom. 1:3–5 (esp. the key themes of the Christ, Son of God, and all the nations).²⁵ On the other hand, we would not go as far as N. T. Wright, who says that whenever Paul uses the word “Christ,”

22. See chaps. 6, 7, and 8 in the present volume.

23. See Gregory Goswell, “The Fate and Future of Zerubbabel in the Prophecy of Haggai,” *Bib* 91 (2010): 77–90; Gregory Goswell, “The Absence of a Davidic Hope in Ezra-Nehemiah,” *TJ* 33 (2012): 19–31.

24. This approach is roundly rejected by Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 15–18.

25. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 2:815–908, esp. 818; cf. Lidija Novakovic, *Raised from the Dead according to Scripture: The Role of Israel’s Scripture in the Early Christian Interpretations of Jesus’ Resurrection*, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies 12 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 133–46. More will be said on this issue in chap. 16 in the present volume.

he is underlining the messiahship of Jesus such that it should be routinely glossed as “Messiah.”²⁶

Postlude: Canonical Reflections

The prevalence of the use of “Christ” in the New Testament means that its application to Jesus must be carefully studied and read in the context of what is said in the Old Testament concerning messianism. In terms of New Testament fulfillment, the Lord Jesus, as God in human flesh, fulfills what the prophets say God will do—namely, regather God’s people and effect eschatological renewal (e.g., Isa. 11:6–16), and Jesus is also the promised Davidic ruler who will maintain justice in the end-time kingdom (vv. 1–5).²⁷ The divine kingship of Jesus is the presupposition for his ability to save his people. The New Testament writers regularly apply what is said about God in the Old Testament—his character and actions—not just to the Father but to Jesus.²⁸ This realization helps to take the heat out of certain debates and disagreements over “messianic passages,” for many such passages find their fulfillment in Jesus on *two* levels—namely, his advent brings together two aspects of Old Testament hope, the coming of God and the coming of the Messiah. We will have more to say about this after we have surveyed the books of the Old Testament for what they teach about messianism.

In this volume, we are not attempting to make every messianic passage across the Old Testament sound the same but will allow the different biblical books to provide their own variations on this vital Old Testament theme. For example, does the “seed” motif from Genesis figure as strongly in the book of Judges? Probably not. Does the view of Chronicles differ in some respects from the view of the book of Kings on things messianic? Perhaps it does. Our aim in writing is not to force these different canonical perspectives into one mold; instead, we will proceed book by book, allowing each biblical book to sound its unique tune as part of a symphonic whole. As well, we will not be moving backward (NT to OT) but forward (OT to NT). This way of proceeding allows the voice of the Old Testament to be heard before we move to consider the New Testament fulfillment of messianic hopes in the person and work of Jesus Christ.²⁹

26. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 41.

27. Gregory Goswell, “Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 11,” *WTJ* 79 (2017): 123–35.

28. E.g., the use made of the description of God as the unchanging Creator in Ps. 102:25–27 by the author of Hebrews (1:10–12).

29. See chap. 16 in the present volume.

Here is what we believe makes our volume most significant: in providing this survey of the Old Testament, we are mindful of *God's* supreme kingship, with the Messiah seen as God's agent; our focus in this book is on *royal* messianic expectation (other strands such as the priestly and prophetic are beyond our brief); and we work our way through the Old Testament book by book, allowing each book to have its unique witness, confident that the Bible as a whole provides a unified testimony to the coming of Jesus Christ, who is both the Divine King and the hoped-for Messiah.

1

The Seed, the Star, and the Template in the Pentateuch

When my wife and I (Andrew) moved to Melbourne from the US, we expected that encounters with poisonous spiders and venomous snakes would be a daily, or at least weekly, occurrence. After all, every tourism book that we read before our move featured Australia as home to the deadliest spiders and snakes on the planet. As it turns out, after three years in Australia, we had not seen a single snake, and the only scary spiders we had seen were huntsmen (we dare you to do a Google search), which are harmless.

Many Christians have a similar mismatch in expectations when they read the Old Testament. During Jesus’s walk to Emmaus, he helps some struggling disciples see how Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms—all of the Old Testament—bear witness to him (Luke 24:27, 44). With this sort of New Testament passage in mind, some Christians find themselves perplexed by how few explicit references there are to a royal Messiah in the Pentateuch. In this chapter, we will consider how messianic expectations figure into the portion of Scripture Jesus began with in his exposition to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Pentateuch, “the law of Moses.” As is indicated in our introduction, we will limit our attention to passages containing royal messianic expectations while at the same time factoring in how such passages fit into the bigger picture of the Pentateuch.

Messianic Expectations in Genesis

The book of Genesis launches the story line of Scripture, so how do messianic expectations figure into the Bible's opening book?

Creation

There is no need for a messianic agent in the opening two chapters of Genesis. After all, on both the cosmic scale (Gen. 1) and on a narrower scale in the garden (Gen. 2) there is harmony; there is no rupture in God's ideal for his world.¹ A triangulated ideal for God's world emerges from these opening chapters where *God the King* creates *humanity* (his vice-regents) to govern *creation* as both humanity and the rest of creation experience God's blessing.² It is the rupture of this harmonious ideal through the fall that sets in motion a plot that will eventually include messianic expectations whereby God's ideal in creation will be regained.

Genesis 3 and the Seed of Woman

Yes, when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit, they committed sin. There is, however, more wrong in Gen. 3 than Adam and Eve disobeying God. Through a clever play on a word from the final verse of chapter 2, chapter 3 opens by introducing a snake that is more crafty (*'ārûm*) than all other animals (3:1) and threatens to undo the shameless, naked (*'ārûmmîm*; 2:25) existence of Adam and Eve.³ This snake is "the mouthpiece for a Dark Power,"⁴ an evil force at work to rupture the God, human, and creation interrelationship.⁵ As evil's wiles unfold, as humans partake in sinful actions, and as shame sets in, the harmonious ideal of Gen. 1–2 quickly unravels. Any solution to Gen.

1. Alan Jon Hauser, "Genesis 2–3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation," in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 383–98.

2. For more on the triangle of God's presence, people, and place, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

3. E.g., Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 225.

4. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 171.

5. Later in Israel's history, particularly in the New Testament, biblical writers refer to Satan as a central figure in bringing about evil influence and relate Satan with the serpent (e.g., Rev. 12:9). For a discussion on snakes and how ancient Israel conceptualized evil, see John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 203, 209–10.

3, then, must seek to remedy all facets of the problem presented there—the power of evil, sinful human action, and the consequences of sin, including alienation of humans from one another, from God, and from creation. Although the rest of Gen. 3 primarily details the negative outcomes of this event for the snake, the woman, and the man, in God's words to the snake a glimmer of hope arises that has implications for understanding messianic expectations in Genesis and beyond.

Genesis 3:15, often referred to as the *protoevangelium* (first gospel), is a difficult passage to interpret. Debate swirls around two major questions: (1) Is the “offspring” of woman singular or collective? (2) Does the passage envisage the ultimate victory of the “offspring” of woman over the snake’s “offspring” or a perpetual struggle between them? A comparison of the NIV and ESV translations, along with their footnotes, exposes these issues. In Hebrew, *zera'*^c can be either singular or collective. Also, the final two clauses use the same Hebrew verb (*šúp*), which the ESV translates with the same English word (“bruise”) and the NIV translates with different English words (“crush”; “strike”).

NIV	ESV
And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [<i>zera'</i>] ^a and hers [<i>zera'</i>]; he will crush [<i>šúp</i>] ^b your head, and you will strike [<i>šúp</i>] his heel.	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [<i>zera'</i>] ^a and her offspring [<i>zera'</i>]; he shall bruise [<i>šúp</i>] your head, and you shall bruise [<i>šúp</i>] his heel.
a. Or <i>seed</i> . b. Or <i>strike</i> .	a. Hebrew <i>seed</i> ; so throughout Genesis.

Instead of reviewing all the debates, we will present our understanding of this verse in four points and engage with differing views as needed.

First, Gen. 3:15 occurs within God's curse of the snake. The curse opens with God decreeing that the snake will go about on its belly and eat dust (v. 14). As Walter Kaiser suggests, it is likely that this is a “figure of speech, vividly picturing those who had been vanquished.”⁶ The curse is directed against an evil agent itself, not snakes (contra the etiology view).⁷ Although verse 15 does include some negative implications for humanity (i.e., enmity), the fact that it is part of God's curse spoken to the serpent should lead one

6. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 39.

7. For an example of the etiological interpretation, see Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 11.

to interpret verse 15 as a curse primarily for the agent of evil embodied in the serpent. The implications of this will become evident below.

Second, Gen. 3:15 decrees perpetual enmity between the snake's *zera'* (offspring) and woman's *zera'*. Whether *zera'* is singular or collective is the crux of interpreting this verse. On one side, C. John Collins argues for interpreting *zera'* as an individual on grammatical grounds due to the use of singular pronouns for *zera'*.⁸ This leads to an interpretation where woman's singular *zera'* is understood as the Messiah who would reign in the future. The other side, however, which is the view we prefer, is to understand *zera'* as collective, referring to humanity generally. Grammatically, this view is defensible, as singular pronouns can also occur with a collective understanding of *zera'*.⁹ Also, since all the other curses and consequences in verses 14–19 are perpetual and long term, it seems odd to think of verse 15 as pronouncing an isolated occasion of enmity between an individual seed of woman and an individual seed of the snake at a later date. As one reads on into Gen. 4, the struggle between Cain and “sin” that is crouching at his door (v. 7) seems to illustrate what 3:15 has in mind: a battle for humans to obey God in spite of temptation. It seems most natural, then, to interpret Gen. 3:15 as referring more generally to the continual enmity between evil and the sons and daughters of Eve in general.

Third, Gen. 3:15 may be understood as conveying the expectation of victory over evil. The same verb, *šûp*, describes the actions by the offspring of woman and the offspring of the snake toward one another. This leads some to conclude that 3:15 speaks of a perpetual battle, without any sense of victory by either side. While that is a grammatically defensible interpretation, the body parts referred to in the conflict could have some bearing on this text. “Striking” a *heel* is a logical way for a snake to attack a human, but “striking” the *head* of a snake would be a mortal blow. Since this is part of a curse toward the snake, a negative outcome of death for the snake is not unexpected. So, what would victory over the snake entail? The snake is a symbol of an evil force that aims to lead humanity into sin, resulting in shame, death, and a fracture in relationship among humanity, God, and creation. Victory in Gen. 3:15, then, anticipates the victory of humanity over evil through obedience to God resulting in restored relationships with one another, God, and creation.¹⁰

Fourth, Gen. 3:15 should be understood in light of its role in introducing the Pentateuch. The expectation is that there will be perpetual enmity between humanity and evil with the hope that Eve's offspring will ultimately

8. C. John Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?,” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 139–48.

9. See Lev. 11:37–38; 26:16; Deut. 31:21.

10. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1A (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 80.

be victorious over evil. As we will see in the rest of Genesis, what begins as a hope for Eve's offspring in general becomes centered on Abraham's offspring, Israel. Israel carries the hope of humanity to overcome evil. Whereas Adam and Eve face exile from the garden due to sin, Israel will be offspring who enter a new land, with God in their midst, in hope of overcoming evil through obedience to Torah and experiencing God's blessing in the land, which will lead to blessing for all nations.¹¹

So far, we have not addressed any specific messianic expectations; we have just been observing the hope that the sons and daughters of Eve will overcome evil. Across the rest of Genesis, we will see how kingship figures into God's plans for Eve's offspring.

The Collective Seed of Abraham and Kingship

If Gen. 1–3 sets the drama of Scripture into motion, the rest of Genesis depicts how one lineage within Eve's offspring fits into God's plans to bless his fractured world. In fact, as many observe, Genesis itself is a collation of genealogies, some of which incorporate extended narratives about God's workings with particular individuals.¹²

Particularization—God's election of a particular lineage among Eve's offspring—becomes apparent from the very first “genealogy” (Gen. 2:4–4:26). While Cain's lineage plunges deeper into sin, Gen. 4 introduces an alternative line among Eve's offspring, that of Seth. By explaining the reasoning behind the name Seth (*šēt*)—God had given (*šāt*) offspring (*zera'*) to Eve (4:25)—and by associating Seth's lineage with calling upon the name of the LORD (v. 26), the narrative particularizes in the line of Seth the hope from 3:15 that the offspring (*zera'*) of Eve will overcome evil. The hope of a righteous “offspring” continues with Noah, who is described as righteous and blameless (6:9). From Noah, primeval history particularizes upon Shem, one who is portrayed as upright in contrast to his brother Ham (9:18–27). As sin, death, and ruptures in God's ideal develop, the particularization within the genealogies of the primeval history elicit hope that somehow, some way, a righteous line among Eve's offspring will triumph over evil.

Just as God spoke the world into existence out of a formless and void reality (Gen. 1:2), so God speaks to an aged, childless man, Abram, promising to

11. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The One Who Is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 152, who notes how Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Targum Yeruśalmi II, and Targum Neofiti view faithfulness to Torah as what will lead to the death of the serpent.

12. E.g., Walton, *Genesis*, 39–41; T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 258–69.

make out of nothing a great nation through which God will bless every clan across the earth (12:1–3). The term *zera'* figures prominently in the promises to Abram and is nearly always collective in Gen. 12–25.¹³ In Abraham's line through Isaac (17:19), the *zera'* will be as numerous as the stars of the sky (15:5) and dust of the earth (13:16). They will receive God's gift of the promised land (cf. 12:7; 13:15; 15:13, 18; 17:7–8). This same *zera'* is to live according to God's covenant expectations (17:9, 10, 12). The promise of a collective *zera'* through Abraham is passed on to Isaac (26:3–4, 24) and Jacob (28:4, 13, 14; 32:13; 48:4; cf. 46:6–7). Thus, from the beginning to the end of Gen. 12–50, God's plans revolve around a collective *zera'* that will come from the line of Abraham: the nation of Israel. Since barrenness is overcome by God's help throughout, "it is God himself . . . who is responsible for the birth of the promised 'seed.'"¹⁴

Up to this point, our argument has been that through its use of *zera'*, Gen. 3:15 and the rest of Genesis primarily anticipate a collective offspring, not a particular Messiah. Some argue, however, that not only in 3:15 but elsewhere in Genesis there are occasions when *zera'* refers to an individual royal descendant. Rejecting the standard collective interpretation of Gen. 22:17b and 24:60b, T. D. Alexander argues for an individual, as is reflected in the following translations:

Your *zera'* will possess (*yāraš*) the gate of *his* enemies. (22:17b, authors' trans.)

Your *zera'* will possess (*yāraš*) the gate of those hating *him*. (24:60b, authors' trans.)

Drawing on the use of singular pronouns, the progressive specification in Genesis toward the line of Judah, and a parallel between Gen. 22:18 and Ps. 72:17, Alexander concludes that these verses "anticipate that a future member of this line will conquer his enemies and mediate God's blessings to the nations of the earth."¹⁵ There are several reasons why we are unconvinced. First, a singular pronoun refers to a singular understanding of *zera'* only once in Genesis (21:13 [non-messianic]), and it is possible for a singular pronoun to refer to a collective understanding of *zera'* (cf. Lev. 11:37–38; 26:16; perhaps Deut. 31:21). Second, when *zera'* occurs with the verb *yāraš*, the noun is often

13. The exceptions are 15:3; 21:13 (Ishmael); and 19:32, 34 (Lot's daughters' children).

14. Gregory Goswell, "The Shape of Kingship in Deut. 17: A Messianic Pentateuch?," *TJ* 38 (2017): 170.

15. T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 363–67, esp. 367.

collective and can occur with a singular (Num. 14:24; Ps. 25:13; Isa. 54:3). In the case of Isa. 54:3, *zera'* occurs with a singular verb form ("Your offspring shall possess [*yāras̄*] the nations"), and then *zera'* is the assumed subject of a plural verb form in the following line ("And they [your offspring] shall inhabit the desolate cities"). Third, within the immediately preceding lines in Gen. 22:17a and 24:60a, a collective *zera'* is in view:

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring [*zera'*] as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring [*zera'*] shall possess . . . (22:17)

Our sister, may you become
thousands of ten thousands,
and may your offspring [*zera'*] possess . . . (24:60)

In our opinion these passages most likely anticipate a time when Israel, the collective *zera'* of Abraham, will overtake their enemies—as is apparent in the book of Joshua, wherein kings are not required for military victory.

It is more accurate to say that kingship is one aspect of God's collective *zera'* in Genesis. This is apparent when Gen. 17 expresses the expectation that kings will come from the line of Abraham. God says of Sarah, "I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (17:16).

Several points are important: (1) God is the one whose blessing enables Sarah's fertility and her far-reaching impact; (2) the mention of "nations" and "peoples" suggests that multiple nations are in view, such as Edom along with Israel and Judah (cf. Gen. 17:6); (3) the plurality of kings in conjunction with "peoples" suggests that the focus is neither on a singular king in Israel nor on kingship only in Israel. The most one can claim then, in terms of messianic expectations, is that multiple lines of Abraham's offspring will become nations with kings (cf. 35:11).

Thus, instead of a dominant expectation for an individual messianic ruler, the priority in Genesis is on the collective, with kings playing a role within the collective offspring of Abraham as God carries out his mission.

Joseph and a Ruler from the Line of Judah

In the final part of Genesis (chaps. 37–50), "the generations of Jacob," the focus is on the survival of collective Israel through God's providential actions in and through Joseph. The Joseph story within Genesis offers a foretaste of the kingship anticipated in Israel's future. Two observations make this apparent.

First, although the presentation of Abraham's genealogy through Isaac and Jacob unfolds very slowly, the genealogy of Esau in chapter 36 fast-forwards across many generations to highlight the kings who came to rule within Edom (36:31–32; cf. 25:16). Given how this resonates with the expectation of kings emerging in nations stemming from Abraham (17:16; 35:11), it is reasonable for a reader of Genesis to wonder about the place of kingship within the line of Jacob.

Second, the motif of Joseph as “ruler” is prominent in the Joseph narrative.¹⁶ After his first dream about his sheaf rising above his brothers' and theirs bowing down to him, his brothers say: “Will you indeed rule [*mālak*] over us, will you indeed have dominion [*māšal*] over us?” (Gen. 37:8).¹⁷ Of course, the fulfillment of Joseph's dream seems unlikely after he becomes a slave and then a prisoner in Egypt. Joseph's fortunes change dramatically when he takes a prominent role in Egypt after he interprets Pharaoh's dream. He eventually reveals his identity to his brothers as they turn to him for food, and he states: “Now, you yourselves did not send me here, for it was God. He made me a father to Pharaoh and lord toward his house and the ruler [*māšal*] over the entire land of Egypt” (45:8). His brothers continue to highlight Joseph's role as ruler in their first words back to their father Jacob: “Joseph is still alive and indeed he is ruler [*māšal*] over the entire land of Egypt” (v. 26). By opening the Joseph story with the motif of rulership (37:8) and then reintroducing it at these climactic moments (45:8, 26), the narrative directs us to conceptualize Joseph's journey in light of an unexpected ascent to rulership under God's sovereign guidance. Joseph is certainly not a monarchical king in this narrative; nevertheless, in a book that lists kings from Esau's line and expects kings from Jacob's line, Joseph's depiction as a ruler within Egypt—one appointed by God, endowed with wisdom (41:33, 39), and meant as a blessing to many nations—could possibly foreshadow a time when the nation of Israel would have their own wise king in their own land (e.g., 1 Kings 3; 10; Ps. 72; Isa. 11).

Interspersed throughout Gen. 37–50 is an interest in Judah.¹⁸ In what appears to be an oddly placed narrative, the story of Tamar taking initiative to procure offspring and preserve a lineage through Judah (chap. 38) parallels

16. On this motif in the Joseph narrative, see also T. Desmond Alexander, “Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology,” *TynBul* 49 (1998): 206; T. Desmond Alexander, “The Regal Dimension of the תולדות יעקב,” in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller, LHBOTS 461 (New York: Continuum, 2007), 196–212.

17. Our own Scripture translations are used in this paragraph.

18. On the supposed insertion of the Judah materials, along with Gen. 49, into the Jacob story to preserve the legacy of children other than Joseph, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, trans. John J. Scullion, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 21–22, 49.

the Joseph narrative, wherein God uses Joseph's acts of initiative to preserve the entire family of Israel.¹⁹ Additionally, the mention of Judah's somewhat noble actions (37:26; 43:3, 8) and his depiction as a leader and spokesperson for the family (44:18–34) indicate that the final form of Genesis is interested in highlighting the leadership of Judah within Israel. The pinnacle of Judah's prominence emerges in Jacob's blessing of his children in Gen. 49. Although Joseph's rulership in Egypt foreshadows future kingship within Israel, 49:8–10 specifies that Judah's line will be a source of kingship within Israel. Genesis 49:8–10 reads:

⁸Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
 your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
 your father's sons shall bow down before you.

⁹Judah is a lion's cub;
 from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
 He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
 and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?

¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
 nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
 until tribute comes to him;
 and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Although there are several ambiguities in 49:10, three ideas are clearly expressed in this poetic blessing: (1) Judah will have prominence over his brothers and enemies, like a fearsome lion that no one dares to stir (vv. 8–9); (2) Judah will have a perpetual lineage of kingship (v. 10a);²⁰ (3) although the phrase translated as “until tribute [*šîlôh*] comes to him” yields many emendations and translations,²¹ it is apparent that kingship in Judah—whether

19. Lindsay Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37–50*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 78–94.

20. The word *šēbet* (“scepter”) can refer to the power of a king (Judg. 5:14; Pss. 2:9; 45:6 [45:7 MT]; Isa. 14:5; Ezek. 19:11), and *māhōqēq* can refer to a “ruler's staff” (Num. 21:18; cf. Isa. 33:22). The context within Gen. 49:8–12, along with the use of *šēbet* in Num. 24:17, strengthens the case that kingship, not simply military prominence or nobility, is in view in Gen. 49:10a.

21. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 659–61, offers a helpful list of options for understanding *šîlôh* in verse 10b: (1) “until Shiloh comes” (i.e., the name of a future ruler); (2) “until he [i.e., Judah] comes to Shiloh”; (3) “until he comes to whom it belongs” (*š* = relative pronoun “whom”; *lô* = possessive preposition + 3ms suffix [pleonastic with the relative pronoun] “to whom it belongs”); (4) “until its rulers come” (*šîlôh* as containing a Semitic term for ruler); (5) “until tribute is brought to him” (*šy* = “tribute”; *lô* = directive preposition + 3ms suffix “to him”). With Walton, *Genesis*,

an individual ruler or a dynasty—will invoke the “obedience” (*yəqāhâ*) of other nations (v. 10b). Within the larger book context, verses 8–10 narrow the anticipation of kings from the line of Jacob to the tribe of Judah, while expanding the reach of the kings’ impact to the nations.

Assessing Other Views

Up to this point, we have set forth our own approach to messianic expectations in Genesis in as straightforward a fashion as possible. Now, it may prove beneficial to clarify the approach set forth above by evaluating two alternative evangelical views.

Alexander is a leading voice on messianic kingship in Genesis. For him, when *zera*^c is interpreted within the context of Genesis’s structure and the story line of Genesis to 2 Kings, Gen. 3:15 should be interpreted as referring to a royal Messiah who would fulfill the promise to Abraham of a future king from the line of Judah.²² His argument revolves around how the seed in verse 15 comes to be specified across Genesis from Seth → Noah → Shem → Terah → Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → Judah’s king. Additionally, 2 Sam. 7 and Ps. 72 particularize Abrahamic promises in Davidic kingship, so when Genesis introduces the larger story line of Genesis to 2 Kings, the promise of a victorious seed is understood to be a king from the line of David who had not yet appeared by the time of Babylonian exile.

Although we appreciate many of Alexander’s observations, he takes particularization within Genesis one step too far by making a king from Judah the center of all the Abrahamic promises. Particularization in Genesis ends with Jacob (not Esau) before expanding to the twelve sons of Jacob. Genesis 37–50 emphasizes God’s ability to preserve all of Jacob’s family, and Jacob’s children (including and especially Ephraim and Manasseh) are all recipients of the blessing at the end of the book (chaps. 48–49). Although Judah is identified as the seat of kingship (49:8–10), this is just one among numerous promises made to the tribes as a whole. It is safer to say that God’s plans remain for a corporate Israel within which kingship will play a part. It seems, then, to be a stretch to say that “the entire book [of Genesis] highlights the existence of a unique line of ‘seed’ which will eventually

716, it seems that the final option has the advantage of making sense of the parallel noun in the next line: “obedience.” Tribute and obedience could refer to a holistic response of submission to kingship in Judah.

22. See especially T. Desmond Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995), 19–39; Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed.”

become a royal dynasty.”²³ Genesis’s primary focus is on God’s remarkable creation of and preservation of the corporate *zera*—Israel, who will bring blessing to the entire world.

John Sailhamer’s approach is the second we will assess.²⁴ He argues that poems with a focus on “a future king from the house of Judah” were strategically inserted at the final stages of the Pentateuch’s composition (Gen. 49:8–12; Num. 24; Deut. 33:7).²⁵ These poems cross-reference one another (e.g., Gen. 49:9; Num. 24:9; Deut. 33:7) “along the final boundaries of the Pentateuch,”²⁶ creating a messianic framework and lens through which the rest of the Pentateuch is to be read. According to Sailhamer, these poems appropriate language from the Abrahamic promises and apply it to the anticipated king (cf. Gen. 27:29 in Gen. 49:8 and Num. 24:9); thereby, “the author of the Pentateuch moves decisively away from a collective reading of the promise narratives and toward an individual understanding of Abraham’s ‘seed’ (Gen. 12:3–7).”²⁷ Since Gen. 3:15 is poetic too, Sailhamer claims that ambiguity regarding the identity of the “seed” there is clarified through these later poems; the victorious seed anticipated in 3:15 is a ruler from the line of Judah.²⁸ He concludes, “Within the structure of the Pentateuch, the poems are the author’s last and most important word regarding the message of the Pentateuch. . . . The texts and connections that we have examined clearly envision an individual king as the recipient of the patriarchal promise. The ‘seed of Abraham’ is an individual king.”²⁹

Sailhamer’s schema is problematic for several reasons. First, although Deut. 33:7 mentions Judah, as Gordon McConville states, “The prayer has no messianic hint.”³⁰ If 33:7 is removed from the equation, this greatly weakens Sailhamer’s argument regarding the strategic placement of these poems along the boundaries of the Pentateuch. With or without a messianic poem near the Pentateuch’s conclusion, how much weight does its final author expect a reader to give to messianic kingship within its overarching message? Can a few scattered poems really play such a dominant role in reframing the Pentateuch’s message around a coming ruler from the line of

23. Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed,” 269.

24. John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

25. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 335.

26. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 467.

27. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 478.

28. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 321, 587–88.

29. Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 479–80.

30. J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ApOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 470.

Judah? Second, the cross-references between poems and their application of language from Gen. 27:29 is not driven by “messianic” concerns as Sailhamer claims. In Num. 24:9, there is a consensus that its subject is Israel, not a singular king:³¹

He [Israel] crouched, he lay down like a lion
and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?
Blessed are those who bless you,
and cursed are those who curse you.

Through a verbatim quotation from Gen. 49:9b, Num. 24:9a applies a prior description of Judah’s prowess to Israel as a whole. Through a possible association with Gen. 27:29, Num. 24:9b reverses the order of blessing and cursing to reiterate a prior claim about God’s commitment to Israel. In our estimation, there is no basis in these linguistic parallels for a claim that the author of these poems guides the reader to narrow the transmission of the Abrahamic promises exclusively to a singular king. If these poems do not play an overarching role in structuring the entire Pentateuch and if they do not in fact transfer promises from corporate Israel to an individual king, Sailhamer’s argument becomes untenable.

Summary

What, then, can we say about royal messianic expectations in Genesis? Instead of there being a dominant expectation for an individual messianic ruler, the priority in Genesis is on a collective offspring from the beginning, when victory over evil is anticipated through Eve’s offspring (3:15). As the book progresses, the corporate remains in view, while centering on the collective offspring of Jacob, among whom kings from the line of Judah will play a role as God carries out his mission through the offspring of Israel to overcome evil and restore a world ruptured by sin.

Messianic Expectations in the Rest of the Pentateuch

After Genesis, the focus on corporate Israel continues throughout the rest of the Pentateuch. In fact, Exodus and Leviticus pay no obvious attention to a

31. For representative treatments of Num. 24:9, see R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, NAC 3B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 422; Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, AB 4B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 197–98; Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 205.

future royal king. Instead, their interest is on God saving Israel from bondage in Egypt so that they can become a *kingdom* of priests (Exod. 19:5–6) who live as a righteous and obedient nation in Canaan with God, their saving and holy king (15:18), in their midst. These books are preparing Israel to be a nation through which victory over evil comes. Generally, Numbers and Deuteronomy retain this same corporate focus, as they recount Israel's wilderness experiences and present a vision for Israel's life as God's people as they are on the brink of the promised land. Two passages, however, in Numbers and Deuteronomy express expectations for future rulers: Num. 24 and Deut. 17.

Numbers 24 and a King of Military Might

As the first generation of those saved from Egypt dies off in the wilderness, Israel heads toward the land of promise and camps on the plains of Moab across from the Jordan River. The king of Moab, Balak, requests that the prophet Balaam curse Israel, for Balak fears their power (Num. 22:6). From the time Balaam receives this request to his final oracle, it is clear that Balaam is unable to curse Israel because God is committed to blessing Israel (cf. 22:6, 12; 23:7–8, 20, 25; 24:9, 10). As King Balak's anger increases because Balaam's oracles favor Israel, chapter 24 offers King Balak a rhetorical punch in the gut through two of its oracles that speak of kingship in Israel (24:3–9, 15–19). A brief comment regarding kingship in verse 7b is expanded on in verses 17–19, which depicts the king as a victorious military figure who will destroy Moab and Edom.

As Balaam looks down from a mountain upon Israel spread across the wilderness, he extols how far Israel's tents will stretch (Num. 24:5–7a) and declares that this people whom God brought out of Egypt will destroy their enemies (vv. 8–9). Amid this depiction of Israel's future greatness, Balaam says, "His king shall be higher than Agag" (v. 7b).

The mention of a future king here is just one of numerous components of hope in Num. 24:5–9. Israel's future greatness will include an expansive population, beautiful and bountiful environs, military prowess due to divine favor, and also a well-known king. As was argued above, there is no reason to believe that promises to corporate Israel are being transferred to a future king; instead, just as having a powerful king like Agag can signify the power of a nation, so the greatness of Israel's king will correspond with the greatness of the nation.

What is mentioned in Num. 24:7b develops into a more expansive portrayal in the next oracle:

¹⁷I see him, but not now;
 I behold him, but not near:
 a star shall come out of Jacob,
 and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
 it shall crush the forehead of Moab
 and break down all the sons of Sheth.
¹⁸Edom shall be dispossessed;
 Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed.
 Israel is doing valiantly.
¹⁹And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion
 and destroy the survivors of cities! (24:17–19)

Although “star” (*kōkāb*) and “scepter” (*šēbet*) can have nonroyal meanings, astral imagery (e.g., Isa. 14:12–13; Ezek. 32:7) and the “scepter” (e.g., Gen. 49:10; Isa. 14:5) can convey the idea of kingship in the Old Testament.³² In Num. 24:17, the ESV’s translation of the verb associated with the “star” obscures its meaning. The root *drk*, translated as “shall come out,” often calls to mind the militaristic notion of treading down enemies—a sense not readily apparent in the English translation.³³ This militaristic depiction of the king extends through the rest of the verses as Moab and Edom are the representative victims of Israel’s military valor through the leadership of a king within Jacob. Given the context of these oracles, Balak, king of Moab, would not have missed their message: the very nation he wishes to curse will become a great and powerful nation, whose king will crush Moab. Although this is indeed an oracle about the future, it is not clear whether this oracle refers to a singular king who ushers in a new era or envisions an ideal for greatness among kings within Israel in general. As one reads forward in the story of Scripture, David aligns with the mold presented here, as a king who brings victory to Israel over Moab and Edom (cf. 2 Sam. 8). Due to the cosmic language here and the way Edom can symbolize judgment of nations in general (cf. Isa. 34; Obadiah), it is possible that this oracle would create expectations for a greater display of military might by a king than was seen in David.

Deuteronomy 17 and the King as a Model of Obedience

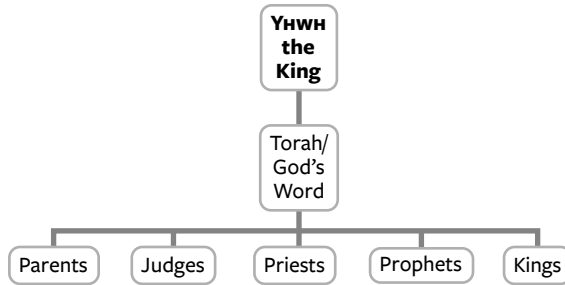
Deuteronomy offers its own portrayal of kingship. The canonical presentation of Deuteronomy situates Israel at the edge of the promised land, with Moses imparting a final vision of covenant life under YHWH when they enter

32. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 207–8.

33. E.g., Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, 200–201.

the land. Peter Vogt has convincingly argued that, according to Deuteronomy, YHWH is the king whose will is expressed *through Torah* to his people.³⁴ The primary task of leaders across Israel, then, is to promote Torah obedience. Figure 1.1 illustrates this schema.

Figure 1.1
Leadership in Deuteronomy



Set among the general (Deut. 5–11) and specific (chaps. 12–26) instructions by which Israel would display their love for God through obedience, many facets of leadership within Israel receive direction for the role they will play within the community of the Divine Suzerain. Parents (6:7), judges (16:18–20), priests (17:8–13; 18:1–8), prophets (18:18–19), and kings (17:14–20) were all to play their role in fostering faithfulness to YHWH through obedience to Torah.

Deuteronomy 17:14–20 does not offer an extensive description of duties for the king; instead, the passage is most concerned with the heart of the king. First, verse 15 gives two qualifications: the king must be chosen by God and not be a foreigner. Second, God specifies what the king *should not do*—all of which pertain to multiplication (vv. 16–17). The king is not to multiply horses, wives, or silver and gold. These prohibitions revolve around protecting the king from trusting in the accumulation of resources available to him. He would not attain security by stockpiling military machinery (horses), strengthening foreign alliances through countless marriages, and hoarding reserves through taxation; instead, he was to trust God as the King of Israel. Third, God describes what the king *was* supposed to do: write out the Torah on a scroll and read it all the days of his life (vv. 18–19a). The reasons for this were to cultivate reverent obedience (v. 19b), to protect the king against any pretension of superiority (v. 20a) and apostasy (v. 20b), and to result in

34. Peter T. Vogt, *Deuteronomistic Theology and the Significance of Torah: A Reappraisal* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), esp. 204–26. The following paragraphs summarize his argument.

longevity for the king and his dynasty (v. 20c). Thus, Deuteronomy does not spell out what the king should actually do in his duty as king; presumably, Israel shared with its neighbors a common understanding of what the office of a king would involve. What Deuteronomy aims to impart, instead, is an inspiring vision for the king to be “the model Israelite,”³⁵ whose love for YHWH through Torah obedience would revolutionize the way an Israelite would fulfill the office of the king. In being such a model, the king was a member of corporate Israel offering leadership that would remind Israel of what the heart of every Israelite should look like.

To what extent is Deut. 17:14–20 messianic? It is not necessarily a promise regarding a future messianic king so much as an ideal through which future kings would be assessed. As will become evident in our chapter on 1–2 Kings, this ideal of Torah obedience looms large as kings such as Solomon and Josiah receive either a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down based on this ideal standard. Since Davidic kingship will ultimately fail to live according to Deut. 17:14–20, this ideal, while not messianic in its first instance, comes to inform hopes for a Messiah who will align with this paradigm.³⁶

Conclusion

Let’s return to how this chapter opened. My wife and I (Andrew) expected to see poisonous spiders and snakes everywhere in Australia, but we did not encounter any during our three years there. What can one expect to find pertaining to royal messianic expectations in the Pentateuch? The Pentateuch establishes the framework and seedbed by which messianic expectations elsewhere in the Old Testament can be understood. Genesis 3:15 anticipates a time when the offspring of Eve, particularized throughout Genesis to be corporate Israel, will attain victory over evil through obedience amid God’s mission to restore what sin had fractured: harmony among God, humanity, and creation. As God’s commitment to victory through corporate Israel unfolds, kings (Gen. 17:6, 17; 35:11) through the line of Judah (49:8–10) will play an important part, with Joseph’s rule in Egypt possibly foreshadowing this anticipated rule. In Numbers and Deuteronomy, two dimensions of kingship receive elaboration—Israel’s king will be a great military victor (Num. 24:17–19) and is to be an exemplar of obedience to Torah as the first among equals within corporate Israel (Deut. 17:14–20).

35. Vogt, *Deuteronomical Theology*, 218.

36. For a more thorough discussion of Deut. 17:14–20 as a paradigm for subsequent messianic expectations, see Goswell, “Shape of Kingship in Deut. 17,” 169–81.

Postlude: Canonical Reflections

Without circumventing what subsequent chapters will examine, several reflections on how messianic expectations in the Pentateuch correspond with a theological witness to Christ across both testaments will draw this chapter to a close.

The Church as the Corporate Offspring of Eve

Romans 16:20 alludes to Gen. 3:15, with a number of elements reconfigured. It reads: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Whereas Eve’s offspring is the subject that strikes the serpent, Rom. 16:20 makes explicit what is implicit in Gen. 3:15: God will be the one crushing evil, albeit through the feet of the church. Since the verse just prior to this exhorts the Roman Christians to be wise about what is good and innocent about evil, Paul is casting a vision whereby the church is enabled by God to be the obedient offspring of Eve that overcomes evil.

In Rev. 12:9, Michael and his angels throw “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan,” down to the earth, resulting in increased fury by the evil one toward God’s people. Heaven, however, breaks out in song because the faithful martyrs “have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (v. 11). The blood of the Lamb enables the redeemed to reign on the earth (5:9–10), living obedient lives that are victorious over Satan under the reign of Christ as King. This corporate outlook, however, looks ahead to a time when the devil meets his definitive demise through being cast into the lake of fire (20:10).

Paul’s “Seed” and “Seed” in Genesis

Paul’s reference to the “seed” of Abraham as “referring to one . . . who is the Christ” (Gal. 3:16) hovers over any Christian who interprets “seed” in Genesis. Would the apostle Paul disagree with a “corporate Israel” interpretation of seed in Genesis? Several thoughts are in order. First, in Gal. 3:29 Paul uses the Greek word *sperma* in the singular form with a collective referent (“you [pl.] are the seed of Abraham,” authors’ trans.), so Paul clearly knows that there is latitude for how the word *sperma* could be interpreted in (the LXX of) Genesis.³⁷ One may infer, then, that Paul knows that an argument purely based on the grammatical singularity of the noun would not be convincing.

37. Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 229.

Second, Paul is utilizing a common Jewish interpretive practice of utilizing ambiguity in terms of singularity or collectivity to make a point.³⁸ Third, such ambiguity leads Paul to interpret the “seed” promise in Genesis typologically in light of God’s culminating work in Christ to bring blessing to the gentiles. It is this salvation-historical framework that enables the grammatical part of his argument to have credence. Fourth, and related to our third point, the corporate is not entirely discarded if Christ is the corporate representative.³⁹

Christ as the Obedient King

In Ps. 40:7–8, the psalmist says:

Behold, I have come;
 in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
 I delight to do your will, O my God;
 your law is within my heart.

If this is an allusion to the scroll of Deuteronomy, where it expresses that a king would be devoted to Torah obedience (17:14–20), then the application of Ps. 40 to Christ in Heb. 10:5–10 presents Christ as one who exemplifies the royal paradigm of Deut. 17.⁴⁰

38. E.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 172–73.

39. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 229–30.

40. See George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *CNTUOT*, 976.