

## Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, Judaism Before Jesus, Session 14, Jewish Messianism

### Abstract:

This lecture by Dr. Anthony Tomasino explores the evolution of **Jewish Messianism** during the intertestamental and early Roman periods. He explains how **Roman oppression** and heavy taxation intensified the public longing for a **Davidic deliverer** to restore Israel's independence. The text identifies various messianic archetypes that emerged from scripture and tradition, including **human kings, priestly figures, and supernatural beings** like the "Son of Man." These diverse expectations were often rooted in the reinterpretation of the **Book of Daniel** and the failures of the Hasmonean dynasty. Ultimately, the source argues that **Christianity** gained unique traction by synthesizing these multiple, sometimes conflicting, messianic threads into the single person of **Jesus**.

### Briefing Document:

Jewish Messianism: Evolution, Context, and Divergent Expectations

Executive Summary

The concept of the "Messiah" underwent a significant evolution from its Old Testament roots to the early Roman period. Originally a general term for any "anointed" official—including priests, prophets, and kings—the title *Mashiach* eventually became a technical term for a specific, future deliverer. This transformation was driven by the failure of the Hasmonean dynasty, the trauma of Roman conquest, and a reinterpretation of biblical prophecy, specifically the Book of Daniel.

Key takeaways from the analysis of intertestamental and early Roman Jewish thought include:

- **Socio-Political Catalysts:** High Roman taxation, an influx of refugees in Jerusalem, and a blow to national pride created a "misery level" that fueled messianic obsession.
- **Prophetic Reinterpretation:** The Romans were identified as the "fourth kingdom" from Daniel's vision—a kingdom destined for destruction at the coming of the "Son of Man."
- **Divergent Models:** Messianism was not a monolithic belief. Expectations included a military Davidic King, a righteous Priestly Messiah, and supernatural figures like the Archangel Michael or a celestial Son of Man.
- **Christian Synthesis:** The New Testament is unique in its capacity to harmonize these disparate messianic threads—Davidic royalty, priestly atonement, and supernatural judgment—into the single person of Jesus.

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### The Socio-Political Environment of the Early Roman Period

The resurgence of messianic hope was deeply tied to the deteriorating conditions in Judea under Roman rule.

#### The Roman Impact

- **Economic Strain:** Taxes under Roman generals rose significantly to feed occupying armies. While Augustus Caesar eventually reformed the tax farming system to reduce corruption and graft, tax collectors (like Matthew) retained a negative reputation among the populace.
- **Refugee Crisis:** As the Romans forced Jews to return conquered Greek cities to their original residents, Jewish refugees flooded into Jerusalem, leading to increased poverty and street begging.
- **National Humiliation:** After a brief period of independence under the Hasmoneans, the return to "the yoke of the Gentiles" was a profound blow to national pride and the Jewish sense of identity.

#### Prophetic Fulfillment and the Book of Daniel

During this period, many Jews believed the end of the age was imminent based on the "Four Kingdoms" vision in Daniel 7 and 8.

- **Rome as the Fourth Kingdom:** The Romans were seen as the "great and terrible" fourth kingdom that crushed everything underfoot.
- **Linguistic Connection:** In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Hebrew word for "crush" (*ramas*) was noted for its phonetic similarity to "Rome," reinforcing the belief that prophecy was being fulfilled in real-time.
- **Imminence:** According to Daniel, the fourth kingdom's destruction would coincide with the appearance of the "Son of Man," leading many to believe the Messiah's arrival was at hand.

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### Biblical Roots and Linguistic Evolution

The term "Messiah" evolved from a functional description to a technical title.

Term	Meaning	Old Testament Usage	Technical Title Usage
<b>Mashiach</b>	Anointed (or "smeared")	Applied to anyone anointed for office (priests, prophets, kings like David, or even Abraham).	Not used as a technical title for a future deliverer in the Old Testament.
<b>The Messiah</b>	The specific coming deliverer	Non-existent in the Old Testament.	Appears late in the intertestamental period (approx. 1st Century BC/AD).

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### The Davidic Covenant

The primary basis for messianic hope is found in **2 Samuel 7**, where God promises David a "perpetual" kingship. Despite the Babylonian exile, the prophets (Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Zechariah) maintained the hope that a "righteous branch" of David would one day reunite the divided kingdom and rule with justice.

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### Major Messianic Models

By the late intertestamental period, several distinct messianic figures emerged in Jewish literature.

### 1. The Davidic Messiah (The Kingly Model)

This was the most prominent expectation among the general populace and is reflected in the *Psalms of Solomon* (c. 50 BC).

- **Role:** A military leader and warlord who would shatter unrighteous rulers, purge Jerusalem of Gentiles, and lead Israel to world dominance.
- **Evidence:** The Dead Sea Scrolls (*4Q Florilegium*) refer to the "Branch of David" who will rise at the end of time. The *War Scroll* mentions a "Prince of the Congregation" who leads the people in conquest.
- **Historical Figures:** This model inspired several figures, including Simeon Bar Kokhba (135 AD), who led a rebellion against Rome.

### 2. The Priestly Messiah (The Levitical Model)

Influenced by **Zechariah 6**, which depicts the High Priest Joshua receiving a crown, some groups expected a messiah from the line of Levi.

- **Role:** This figure would teach righteousness and make atonement for the people through sacrifices and good deeds.
- **Two Messiahs Doctrine:** In the Dead Sea Scrolls (*Community Rule*), a Kingly Messiah and a Priestly Messiah appear together. The priest actually holds more honor at the messianic banquet, focusing on atonement while the king focuses on warfare.

### 3. The Supernatural Messiah (The Angelic/Celestial Model)

Later texts moved away from purely human figures toward supernatural ones, often drawing on Daniel 7 and 12.

- **Angelic Messianism:** In the Dead Sea Scroll *11Q Melchizedek*, the Archangel Michael is envisioned as a deliverer who becomes incarnate to defeat the nation's enemies.
- **The Son of Man:** Originally appearing as a "human-like" figure in Daniel 7 representing the kingdom of God, later texts like *1 Enoch* (c. 100 BC) and *4 Ezra* (c. 90 AD) reinterpreted this as a specific supernatural judge with the power to destroy enemies by breathing fire.

- **Enochic Reincarnation:** In *1 Enoch*, the patriarch Enoch is himself identified as the "Son of Man" who will return to deliver Israel.

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The Title "Son of God"

The origins of "Son of God" as a messianic title are subject to scholarly debate.

- **Biblical Foundation:** While 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2 refer to the King as God's son ("You are my son; today I have begotten you"), it was rarely used as a formal title for the Messiah in pre-Christian Jewish texts.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls Controversy:** A fragment referring to a "Son of God" was once thought to be a messianic "smoking gun." However, recent analysis suggests this text likely refers to a Roman emperor (an antagonist) who arrogantly claims the title, rather than the Messiah.
- **Roman Counter-Claim:** The title was a primary designation for Roman emperors (e.g., Augustus as *Divi Filius*). Early Christians likely adopted this title for Jesus as a way to undercut Roman imperial claims, asserting that Jesus, not Caesar, was the true Son of God.

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Conclusion: The Christian Convergence

The primary "genius" of the early Christian faith was its synthesis of these varying messianic expectations. The New Testament depicts Jesus as simultaneously fulfilling multiple roles:

- **The Davidic King:** A descendant of David who will eventually conquer the nations.
- **The Supernatural Priest:** The high priest who makes atonement through self-sacrifice.
- **The Son of Man:** The celestial judge from Daniel's vision.
- **The Son of God:** The legitimate claimant to the title usurped by Roman emperors.

While Jesus' claims were not inherently illegal or incompatible with Jewish theology of the time, he was largely rejected because he prioritized a "kingdom not of this world" over the immediate military campaign against Rome that many anticipated.

## Study Guide:

Comprehensive Study Guide: Jewish Messianism in the Intertestamental and Early Roman Periods

This study guide provides a detailed synthesis of the historical, social, and theological factors that shaped Jewish messianic expectations leading into the New Testament era. Based on the analysis of the intertestamental period and early Roman rule, it explores the evolution of the "Messiah" concept from its biblical roots to its diverse manifestations in the first century.

### I. Historical and Social Context of Messianism

The rise of messianic fervor was closely tied to the deteriorating conditions in Judea following the Roman conquest. Several factors contributed to a climate of desperation and hope:

- **Economic Pressure and Tax Reform:** Under Roman generals, Judea was heavily taxed to support military forces. While Augustus Caesar reformed the tax farming system to reduce graft and extortion, the public perception of tax collectors remained negative. Despite these reforms, taxes continued to rise, contributing to widespread poverty.
- **The Refugee Crisis:** Roman mandates required Jews to return conquered Greek cities to their original residents. This resulted in a massive influx of Jewish refugees into Jerusalem, leading to increased homelessness and begging.
- **Blow to National Pride:** After a brief period of independence under the Hasmoneans, the return to "the yoke of the Gentiles" was a significant psychological blow. The Jews had transitioned from being the conquerors back to being the conquered.

- **Political Resentment:** There was significant animosity toward the Hasmonean dynasty for assuming offices (king and high priest) for which they were not traditionally qualified. Similarly, the rule of Herod the Great was deeply resented.
- **Prophetic Fulfillment:** The Roman Empire was increasingly identified as the "fourth kingdom" from the Book of Daniel—a kingdom described as great, terrible, and crushing. A linguistic connection was noted by some (such as in the Dead Sea Scrolls) between the Hebrew word for "crush" (*ramas*) and "Rome."

## II. Biblical Roots and Linguistic Evolution

The term "Messiah" underwent a significant transformation from the Old Testament period to the late intertestamental period.

### Linguistic Origins

- **Mashiach:** A Hebrew term meaning "anointed" or "smeared." In the Old Testament, it was not a technical title for a future deliverer but was applied to anyone set apart for a holy office by anointing oil, including priests, prophets, and kings.
- **Technical Title:** The phrase "The Messiah" as a specific title for a coming deliverer does not appear in the Old Testament. It emerged late in the intertestamental period.

### The Davidic Promise

The foundation of messianic hope is found in **2 Samuel 7:11–16**, where God promises King David a perpetual dynasty. This "Davidic Covenant" established the expectation that a descendant of David would always rule. When the Babylonian exile ended the visible monarchy, prophets (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) began to look forward to a "righteous branch" or a "new David" who would reunite the divided kingdom and restore justice.

## III. Diverse Messianic Expectations

Messianism was not a monolithic belief; different groups held varying visions of the coming deliverer.

Type of Messiah	Key Characteristics	Source Examples
<b>Davidic King</b>	A human descendant of David; primarily a warlord and conqueror who would defeat the Romans and establish Israel as a world power.	<i>Psalms of Solomon 17, Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q Florilegium)</i>
<b>Messianic Priest</b>	A figure from the tribe of Levi who would teach righteousness, make atonement for the people, and oversee cultic purity.	<i>Testament of Levi, Zechariah 6</i>
<b>Supernatural/Angelic</b>	A heavenly being, sometimes identified as the Archangel Michael or a pre-existent "Son of Man," who intervenes with divine power.	<i>1 Enoch, 11Q Melchizedek, Daniel 7</i>

#### Key Figures and Variations

- **The Hasmonean Influence:** During the height of the Hasmonean era, messianic hope for a Davidic king faded because the Hasmoneans held power. However, as the Hasmoneans became corrupt, the longing for a legitimate Davidic monarch re-emerged.
- **The Two Messiahs:** Some texts, particularly in the Dead Sea Scrolls, suggest a "division of labor" between two messiahs—one kingly (to handle war and governance) and one priestly (to handle atonement and law).
- **The Son of Man:** Derived from Daniel 7, this figure was originally interpreted as a symbol for the kingdom of God but later evolved into a supernatural individual with the power to destroy enemies with "fire" or divine commands.

#### IV. The Title "Son of God"

The title "Son of God" has a complex history in Jewish thought:

- **Ancient Near Eastern Context:** It was often a title for kings.
- **Biblical Context:** Based on 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2, the king was considered God's son by adoption or covenant.

- **Roman Rivalry:** Some scholars suggest the early Christian use of "Son of God" for Jesus was a direct challenge to Roman Emperors (like Augustus), who used the title for themselves.
  - **Intertestamental Use:** While the title appears as an attribute in some scrolls and in *4 Ezra*, it was not a standard, widespread technical title for the Messiah in the same way it is used in the New Testament.
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#### V. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences based on the source context.

1. How did the Roman requirement regarding Greek cities affect the population of Jerusalem?
2. What is the linguistic pun related to the Roman Empire found in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls?
3. How did the use of the term *Mashiach* change from the Old Testament to the late intertestamental period?
4. Why did messianic expectations for a Davidic king fade during the early Hasmonean period?
5. According to *Psalms of Solomon 17*, why were the Hasmoneans considered illegitimate rulers?
6. What are the two primary roles assigned to the "two messiahs" in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls?
7. How is the "Son of Man" depicted in the later text *4 Ezra* compared to earlier interpretations?
8. What is the significance of the "Messenger of the Covenant" in the book of Malachi regarding messianic hope?
9. According to the source, why might the title "Son of God" have been adopted by early Christians in relation to the Roman Empire?

10. Why did many first-century Jews reject Jesus despite his claims to be the Messiah?

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#### VI. Answer Key

1. **Question 1:** The Romans required Jews to return conquered Greek cities to their original residents, forcing Jewish inhabitants to flee. These displaced people arrived in Jerusalem as refugees, leading to a swelling population living in poverty and begging on the streets.
2. **Question 2:** The Hebrew word for "crush" is *ramas*, which sounds very similar to "Rome." This linguistic connection led some Jews to believe the Romans were the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy regarding a "crushing" fourth kingdom.
3. **Question 3:** In the Old Testament, *Mashiach* (anointed) was a general term applied to priests, prophets, and kings. It was not until the late intertestamental period that "The Messiah" became a specific, technical title for a future deliverer.
4. **Question 4:** During the Hasmonean period, the Jews had achieved independence and were expanding their territory. Because they had a functioning (though non-Davidic) monarchy, the desperate hope for a restored Davidic king was less prominent until the Hasmoneans became corrupt.
5. **Question 5:** The text explicitly repudiates the Hasmoneans because they were "sinners" who rose up and took a monarchy that God had not promised them. They were seen as having "laid waste to the throne of David" through their arrogance and violence.
6. **Question 6:** In these texts, the kingly messiah (Prince of the Congregation) is responsible for leading the people in war and conquering nations. The priestly messiah is responsible for judging the people, teaching righteousness, and procuring atonement through sacrifices.
7. **Question 7:** In *4 Ezra*, the Son of Man is a supernatural figure who destroys his enemies by breathing fire upon them. He possesses the power to turn

back armies and decide the tides of war through simple commands rather than conventional weapons.

8. **Question 8:** In Malachi, the "Messenger of the Covenant" does not prepare the way for a human Messiah or a Davidic king. Instead, the messenger is specifically preparing the way for the Lord Himself to come and deliver His people.
9. **Question 9:** One theory suggests that Christians used the title "Son of God" to undercut the claims of Roman emperors. Since emperors like Augustus claimed the title for themselves, calling Jesus the "Son of God" served as a direct theological and political counter-claim.
10. **Question 10:** Many Jews rejected Jesus because his "kingdom" was not of this world and did not involve an immediate military campaign to overthrow Rome. They were looking for a glorious campaign in their own lifetimes, whereas Jesus' plan involved a different type of everlasting kingdom.

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## VII. Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Use the provided source context to develop comprehensive responses to the following prompts.

1. Compare and contrast the "Davidic Messiah" with the "Supernatural Messiah" (Son of Man). How do their origins, powers, and goals differ based on intertestamental literature?
2. Analyze the role of the Roman Empire as a catalyst for messianic expectation. How did economic, social, and prophetic interpretations of Roman rule combine to create an "obsession" with the coming deliverer?
3. Trace the evolution of the Davidic Covenant from 2 Samuel 7 through the Hasmonean period to the first century AD. How did historical events dictate the "waxing and waning" of this specific hope?
4. Discuss the concept of "Priestly Messianism." Why did some groups feel a need for a priestly deliverer in addition to, or instead of, a kingly one? Use Zechariah 6 and the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence.

5. Evaluate the synthesis of messianic titles in the person of Jesus as presented in the source. How did Jesus adopt and re-interpret the titles "Son of David," "Son of Man," and "Son of God"?
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#### VIII. Glossary of Key Terms

- **11Q Melchizedek:** A fragmentary Dead Sea Scroll that envisions the archangel Michael as a deliverer who becomes incarnate to lead his people to victory.
- **4Q Florilegium:** A collection of Dead Sea Scroll texts that interpret Old Testament passages as referring specifically to the "Branch of David" or the Messiah.
- **Abomination of Desolation:** A prophetic image from the Book of Daniel referring to a sacrilege in the temple; in the Roman period, some associated this with figures like Pompey entering the Holy of Holies.
- **Augustus:** The Roman Emperor who reformed the tax collection system, removing the incentive for graft, and who used the title "Son of God."
- **Bar Kokhba:** Simeon Bar Kokhba, a leader of a Jewish rebellion (c. 135 AD) who was hailed by some as the Messiah ("Son of the Star").
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end of the current age or the final events of history.
- **Hasmoneans:** A Jewish dynasty that ruled Judea during a period of independence but faced criticism for holding both the kingship and the high priesthood without Davidic or proper priestly lineage.
- **Mashiach:** The Hebrew word for "anointed"; the root of the word Messiah.
- **Prince of the Congregation:** A title used in the Dead Sea Scrolls for the kingly messiah who leads the people in battle.
- **Psalms of Solomon:** A collection of 18 Jewish texts from the 1st century BC/AD that explicitly call for a Davidic king to replace the corrupt Hasmonean and Roman rulers.

- **Ramas:** A Hebrew word meaning "to crush," used as a pun to identify Rome as the fourth beast of Daniel's prophecy.
- **Son of Man:** A figure from Daniel 7; originally a human-like figure representing God's kingdom, later interpreted as a supernatural individual and Messiah.
- **Tax Farming:** A corrupt system of tax collection where individuals paid the government for the right to collect taxes, often extorting the population for personal profit.