



THE GOSPEL IN THE PROPHETS

“Paul, . . . who has been set apart for the gospel of God, which he proclaimed in advance through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”

Romans 1:1–2

THE PROPHETIC WRITINGS were fundamental for the early Christians' understanding of Christ. His nature, the manner of his life, work, and death, his resurrection, and his glorification were thought to be described in the prophetic writings. While the early Christians wrestled with the law, as we saw in chapter 2, they reveled in the prophets. Isaiah, Jerome said, “seems to me to compose a gospel rather than a prophecy,” and David, he added, “makes Christ resound from his lyre” (*Epistle* 53.8).

The fathers considered many texts in the Old Testament to be prophetic that fall outside our present list of prophetic books. They did this because they believed that the authors of these books were recipients of prophetic inspiration. Moses, for example, was thought to have been a prophet as well as the lawgiver. Passages such as Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17 were considered to be prophecies of Christ proclaimed by Moses. This includes the somewhat more obvious prophetic statement Moses makes in Deuteronomy 18:15–19. It was David, however, who was considered preeminently to be a prophet. Christ was often considered to be the true speaker in the Psalms of David. The traditions

concerning David and Moses as prophets are present already in the New Testament writings (e.g., Mark 12:36; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 1:16; 2:29–30; 3:22; 4:25). David was also considered to have spoken prophetically by the pre-Christian Jewish community at Qumran (11Q5 27), and they considered God to have spoken through Moses as though he were an angel (4Q377).

The early Christians saw references to Christ in many minor points in the prophets. A number of central passages were, however, consensually recognized from very early times as fundamental to the understanding of Christ. These passages were repeatedly cited by numerous Christian authors in the first four centuries of the church. It is usually assumed that these common passages from the Old Testament were collected in one or more books referred to today as *Testimonies*, and that these *Testimony* books were the sources from which the earlier fathers, at least, drew their quotations.¹ The first reason for the collection of such texts was, no doubt, for use in the debate with the Jews concerning Jesus as the expected Messiah of the Jewish Scriptures. Most of these passages, however, were also cited as messianic prophecies in the Jewish literature of the same period. Per Beskow has pointed out that this setting of conflict between Jews and Christians does not preclude both from having drawn on a common deposit of texts. “On the contrary,” he states, “the central Messianic texts of Judaism were taken over by the church, which believed these prophecies to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.” He cites Numbers 24:17, which, as we will see below, was often applied to Christ by the early Christians, as an example. The passage has also been found in a list of messianic texts drawn up by the Jews at Qumran (4Q175).² In this chapter we will discuss how the church fathers understood these core prophetic passages and, where possible, set this in relation to the interpretation given them by the Jews. While Jews and Christians often applied the same passages to the Messiah, they frequently derived dif-

1. Rendel Harris, *Testimonies*, Part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916) and Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), presented the strongest argument for this view. Harris argued that there was only one book of *Testimonies* but that it was modified and expanded over the years. He also argued that this work was the earliest actual Christian writing. Per Beskow, *Rex Gloriam: The Kingship of Christ in the Early Church* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1962), 77, points out that Harris's insistence on a single book of *Testimonies* and its extremely early date did not win general acceptance but that many accepted a modified form of his argument. This latter group assumes not one single rather large book of *Testimonies* but several smaller collections of *Testimonies*. No such actual collections of texts by Christians are extant today except the *Testimonia* of Cyprian produced in the third century. Beskow points out, however, that the list of Messianic testimonies found at Qumran (4Q175) has placed “the existence of such texts in Christianity within the bounds of reasonable possibility” (*Rex Gloriam*, 77).

2. Beskow, *Rex Gloriam*, 80–81.

ferent meanings from those passages and, consequently, had different views of the Messiah.

The earliest Christian interpreters of the Old Testament believed that the choice of texts they discussed and their understanding of those texts went back through the apostles to Christ himself. This view is found as early as the Gospel of Luke, where it is attributed to Jesus in the words, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:44–45 NRSV; cf. 24:27). The earliest extant listing and discussion of Old Testament texts understood as prophecies of Christ comes from Justin, who wrote in the mid-second century.³ He is convinced that his exposition of the prophetic texts stands in continuity with that of the apostles and that they received their understanding of these texts from the risen Christ.⁴ Justin's conviction rests on the passages cited above from Luke's Gospel (*Dialogue* 76.6; 53.5; *1 Apology* 50.12).

The “Proof from Prophecy” Argument of the Early Christians

In the early twentieth century a German scholar named A. F. von Ungern-Sternberg made a detailed study of the Christian use of Old Testament prophecy as proof that Jesus was the Messiah and that the gospel of Christ supersedes the law of Moses.⁵ Ungern-Sternberg was able to show convincingly that there was a common set of prophetic texts that grounded the fundamental points of the Christian faith from the time of Justin in the middle of the second century to the time of Eusebius in the fourth. He argued, furthermore, that the “elements” o

3. The lost writing of Aristo of Pella, titled *The Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus*, predates the work of Justin and appears to have contained a discussion of the prophetic texts related to Christ and the gospel. See Adolf von Harnack, *Die Überlieferung der griechischen Apologeten des zweiten Jahrhunderts in der alten Kirche und im Mittelalter* 1.1.2, *Texte und Untersuchungen* 1 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1883), 115–30; and A. L. Williams, *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 28–30.

4. See the excellent discussion in Oscar Skarsaune, *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile*, Supplement to *Novum Testamentum* 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 11–13, 256–59; cf. Jack T. Sanders, “The Prophetic Use of the Scriptures in Luke-Acts,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, ed. C. A. Evans and W. F. Stinespring (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 193–95.

5. A. F. von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der traditionelle alttestamentliche Schriftbeweis “In Christo” und “De Evangelio” in der alten Kirche bis zur Zeit Eusebs von Caesarea* (Hall: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1913).

this prophetic proof are already present in the New Testament. From this he concluded that there is a uniformity in the proof from prophecy used by the church in the more than 250 years stretching from approximately AD 50 to AD 315. He noted, further, that Adolf von Harnack, a well-known church historian, had asserted that few things from the time of the apostles passed over so directly into the ancient church as did that which is called the proof from prophecy.⁶

The church fathers used the texts referred to as the “proof from prophecy” in three general settings. The first setting was in the debate with the Jews over the messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, to which we referred above. The second setting was the struggle of the church against Marcion and his followers, which we discussed in chapter 2. Marcion was anti-Jewish but his view of the applicability of the Old Testament prophetic texts to Jesus of Nazareth was very similar to that of the Jews. He did not believe that the Christ announced in the gospel and proclaimed by Paul was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. For Marcion, the Christ of the New Testament represented a different God from the one found in the Old Testament. The third context in which the “proof from prophecy” texts were used by the church fathers was in developing and grounding Christian doctrine. Irenaeus’s work, titled *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, shows that in the last decade of the second century these Old Testament prophetic texts were still being used more extensively than texts found in the New Testament to instruct Christians in the basic Christian doctrines.⁷ They continued to be used in this way by many of the later fathers as well. One scholar has noted that in the fourth century, Eusebius considered the proof from prophecy to constitute “the strongest and most definitive proof of the truth of Christianity.”⁸

This chapter is structured around the six major points that the “proof from prophecy” texts were used to establish and support: (1) the deity and preexistence of Christ; (2) the incarnation (including the time of Christ’s appearance, his birth from a virgin, and the place of his birth); (3) the healing ministry of Christ; (4) the suffering and death of Christ; (5) the resurrection and glorification of Christ; and (6) the calling of the Gentiles.⁹ These topics were the foundation stones of Christian

6. *Ibid.*, 295–96.

7. *Ibid.*, 27–28; Harris, *Testimonies*, 1:63.

8. Aryeh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea against Paganism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 75.

9. This outline is drawn from conclusions reached in the studies of Ungern-Sternberg on the proof from prophecy in general (*Schriftbeweis*, 27, 197, 204–5, 221–22) and from Skarsaune’s study of Justin’s use of the proof from prophecy (*Proof from Prophecy*, 139, 260). Ungern-Sternberg divides his analysis of the texts between those related directly to Christ and those related more generally to the gospel-versus-law controversy. I have taken only those related to Christ, as the question of the law has been treated above in chap. 2. I have added, however, from his second category, that related to the calling of the

doctrine. The early Christians found them addressed in the teachings of the prophets. They believed that the prophetic texts, in fact, interpret the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and give them eternal significance in God’s plan of salvation for the world.

The Deity and Preexistence of Christ

DID THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH COMMUNITY ANTICIPATE A DIVINE, PREEXISTENT MESSIAH?

It is difficult to say whether Jews in the time of the church fathers thought the Messiah they awaited to be a divine, preexistent figure. Pre-Christian Judaism appears to have thought of the Messiah as only a human descendent from the house of David.¹⁰ The evidence, which is not extensive, suggests that in the time of Jesus and extending later into the first century the concept of a preexistent, heavenly Messiah was held by some Jews, at least, but that this was later abandoned, perhaps in reaction to the Christian viewpoint.

A Jewish document from the first century AD known as *The Similitudes of Enoch* speaks of a preexistent heavenly Son of Man who is a messianic figure. This Son of Man, it says, was “given a name, . . . even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars” (*1 Enoch* 48:2–3).¹¹ It may be that the author of this statement was reflecting on Psalm 72:17, which refers to a “name” and serves as a basis for statements about the heavenly preexistence of the Messiah in later Christian thought.

Scholars have differed strongly on what this passage in *Enoch* suggests about Jewish messianic beliefs. Christian scholars have tended to argue that the term “name” in this passage refers to the actual person of the Messiah and the passage, consequently, proves that at least some Jews thought of the Messiah as preexistent and divine.¹² The Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner argued, however, that among the rabbis of the first two centuries AD “there was still no conception of a . . . ‘preexister

Gentiles because that was used by many of the fathers as a proof that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

10. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & Clark, 1986), 518–19.

11. E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 35.

12. See Wilhelm Bousset and Hugo Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im Späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, 3rd rev. ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), 263; and Schürer *History*, 2:519–23.

Messiah.” He argued that the reference to the “name” of the Messiah in this connection can refer only to the *idea* of the Messiah, not to his actual person, so that the *Enoch* passage cannot refer to anything more than a preexistent *concept* of the Messiah.¹³

PROPHETIC TEXTS USED BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS TO PROVE THE PREEXISTENCE OF CHRIST

The deity and preexistence of the Christ¹⁴ were definitely Christian beliefs from the time of the New Testament (e.g., John 1:1–3; Phil. 2:5–7; Col. 1:15–17). In the late second and third centuries these beliefs were strongly maintained against the views of some Christians who believed that God had adopted the human Jesus for his redemptive work in the world at the time of his baptism. In the third century, Origen argued that the Son had existed eternally with God the Father. This view became accepted orthodoxy and was essentially the point that was used in the argument against Arius and his followers at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.¹⁵ It was this council that produced the creed that defined the orthodox doctrine of the deity of the Son and the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

Prophetic texts from the Old Testament played a significant role both in the debate between Christians and Jews on the subject of the deity and preexistence of the Christ, and in the development of the Christian understanding of Christ. The use of three of these texts will be examined here: Psalm 72:17, Zechariah 6:12, and Psalm 110:1.

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF PSALM 72:17

Psalm 72:17 was alluded to above as a possible text that stands behind the mention of an eternal name in the early Jewish writing called *The Similitudes of Enoch*. Later Jewish traditions clearly connect this verse

13. Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, trans. W. F. Stinespring (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), 459, 461; cf. 465–66. For an opposing view from a Jewish scholar, see Moses Bottenwieser, “Messianism,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: KTAV, n.d.), 511; and Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation. The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974), 98.

14. “Christ” and “Messiah” are interchangeable terms, the first being the Greek term meaning “one who has been anointed” and the second being the Hebrew term for the same. Christians used the Greek terminology and Jews the Hebrew. In this chapter, “Christ” will be used when discussing Christian views and “Messiah” when discussing Jewish.

15. See Ronald E. Heine, “Articulating Identity,” in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 201–6.

with the Messiah. The targum¹⁶ of the Psalms, which cannot be dated precisely but appears not to be earlier than the fourth century AD,¹⁷ treats the entire Psalm as messianic. It translates verse 17 as, “May his name be remembered forever, his name which was made ready even before the sun came into being.”¹⁸ Psalm 72:17 is one of seven messianic prophecies cited most often in the Talmud.¹⁹ The verse is also cited in the Babylonian Talmud in a discussion of things that were created before the world, among which was the name of the Messiah: “Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: the Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and *the name of the Messiah*. . . . The name of the Messiah, as it is written (Ps. 72:17), ‘His name shall endure forever, *before the sun his name shall exist*’” (*b. Pesahim* 54a).²⁰

The verse is cited also in the fourth-century AD midrash on Lamentations in a discussion of names given to the Messiah by various rabbinical schools. “The School of J. Jannai said: His name is [J]innon; for it is written, *E'er the sun was, his name is [J]innon*” (Ps. 72:17).²¹ There is a wordplay involved in this statement. The Hebrew verb *yinnon* (= *Jinnon* in pronunciation) in the second clause (translated “continue” in the NRSV) is treated as a name rather than as a verb. This is done to relate the name of the Messiah to the somewhat similar name of the leader of the school.

The earliest documented Christian use of Psalm 72:17 in relation to Christ appears in Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, written in the middle of the second century. It is one of the texts that the second- and third-century Christian authors, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, use in common to prove the preexistence and deity of Christ.²² Justin indicates that there was a debate between Christians and Jews concerning the

16. See “The Text of Scripture Used by the Early Christians” in chap. 1 above. The various translations discussed in that section will be repeatedly referred to in this chapter, as the debate between Jews and Christians sometimes involved what the proper reading or translation of the text itself should be. The latter, however, is not the case with Ps. 72:17.

17. See Philip S. Alexander, “Targum, Targumim,” in *ABD* 6, ed. David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, David F. Graf, and John David Pleins (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 326.

18. Levey, *Targum*, 117.

19. Jean-Joseph Briere-Narbonne, *Exégèse Talmudique des prophéties messianiques* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1934), 34–35.

20. Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, 460; cf. the third- or fourth-century AD midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 1.4, in H. Freedman, trans., *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 6.

21. A. Cohen, trans., *Lamentations*, in vol. 7 of *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 138. The comment in the midrash quoted from the *b. Sanhedrin* 98b.

22. Ungern-Sternberg, *Schriftbeweis*, 141.

proper referent in Psalm 72. The Jews, he says, referred the psalm to Solomon because the title of the psalm relates it to Solomon. Justin, expressing the Christian viewpoint, says the psalm refers to Christ; he is the one who “existed before the sun” (Ps. 72:17; *Dialogue* 64.5–7). In a second citation of Psalm 72:17, Justin says it predicts that Christ would “be born from the womb before the sun and moon” (*Dialogue* 76.7). This citation conflates Psalm 72:17 with Psalm 110:3, as the latter is translated in the Septuagint.

Irenaeus begins his proof of the preexistence of Christ with a peculiar interpretation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1. Irenaeus did not know the Hebrew language, so he must be dependent on some other source for his remarks. He treats the Hebrew verb “created” (*bara*) as if it were the Aramaic noun meaning “the son” (*bara*) and understands it to mean, “The Son was in the beginning; later God created the heavens and the earth.”²³ This interpretation probably grew out of reflection on John 1:1–3, which Irenaeus subsequently cites. We should compare this methodology with that of the rabbinical school of Jannai noted above, which said that the Messiah’s name would be Jinnon on the basis of Psalm 72:17. Irenaeus finds additional support for the preexistence of Christ in a conflation, like that noted above by Justin, of Psalms 110:3 and 72:17: “‘I brought you forth before the morning star,’ and ‘your name exists before the sun.’ That means,” Irenaeus comments, “before the creation of the world, for the stars came to exist at the same time as the world” (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 43).

Tertullian attacks the Marcionite/Jewish view that Psalm 72 refers to Solomon. There are statements in the psalm, he argues, that can apply only to Christ, and these should prove that the entirety refers to him and not to Solomon. Psalm 72:17 is one of those statements. Tertullian understands the statement “before the sun” to mean, “The Word of God, that is Christ, was before the sun” (*Against Marcion* 5.9.9–11). We noted above that both Justin and Irenaeus conflate Psalm 110:3 with Psalm

23. This is the suggestion of Norbert Brox in *Irenäus von Lyon*, vol. 1, *Fontes Christiani* 8.1, trans. and intro. Norbert Brox (New York: Herder, 1993), 62n22. Skarsaune (*Proof from Prophecy*, 235–36) cites a different reconstruction of Irenaeus’s words, proposed by J. P. Smith (“Hebrew Christian Midrash in Iren. *Epid.* 43,” *Biblia* 38 [1957]), that would mean “In the beginning God (blessed be his name!) created a Son, afterwards the heaven and the earth.” Jerome knew of an understanding of Gen. 1:1 that, as he relates it at least, was based on the Hebrew word meaning “in the beginning” (*bereshith*) and was understood to mean, “In the Son, God made heaven and earth.” He says this interpretation appeared in the *Dispute of Jason and Papiscus* by Aristo of Pella, which has been lost but which was earlier than Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*. He says the interpretation is also found in Tertullian’s work *Against Praxeas* (5.1) and in Hilary’s *Commentary on the Psalms* (2.2) (*Saint Jerome’s Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, trans. with intro. and commentary by C. T. R. Hayward, OPCS [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995], 30, 100–101).

72:17. Tertullian does not conflate these verses in this section, but he does discuss Psalm 72 immediately after his discussion of Psalm 110, which suggests, at least, that he knew of a connection between the two psalms in Christian tradition.

Christian discussion of Psalm 72 as late as the fourth century indicates that the debate about the proper referent in the psalm had still not been settled. Theodoret of Cyrus indicates that the Jews continued to hold that the psalm was about Solomon and suggests that some Christians also held this view. He argues, much like Tertullian above, that because so much of the psalm can apply only to Christ, so too must the whole (*ComPs* 72).²⁴ Theodoret gives Psalm 72:17 the standard Christian interpretation, which understood “name” to refer to Christ and which placed the existence of Christ prior to that of the sun. Psalm 72:17 is also used in the fourth century to defend the eternity of Christ in Christian doctrinal debates. Hilary of Poitiers cites this verse in an argument directed against the Arian Christians, who denied the eternity of the Son. The verse proves, he says, that Christ precedes all time measured by the sun and moon (*On the Trinity* 12.34).

THE DIFFERENT WORDING OF ZECHARIAH 6:12 AMONG JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

Justin joins Zechariah 6:12 with Psalm 72:17 in an interesting discussion that demonstrates how divergent passages in the Old Testament could be brought together on the basis of a common word in both texts. Both Jews and Christians made these connections in their interpretation of Scripture. “His name will rise above the sun” (Ps. 72:17), Justin says. “And again,” he adds, “His name is ‘Rising’ Zechariah says” (Zech. 6:12; *Dialogue* 121.2). Justin, or his source, has made two major adjustments to the text of Psalm 72:17 as it appears in the Septuagint. First, he has substituted the preposition “above” for the preposition “before,” which stands in the Septuagint text. Second, he has used the verb “to rise,” which appears in the Septuagint text of Zechariah 6:12, rather than the verb “to continue,” which appears in the Septuagint text of Psalm 72:17. Both adjustments appear to have been made to bring the verse into closer alignment with the name “Rising,” which stands in the text of Zechariah 6:12 in the Septuagint. The verb and noun in Zechariah 6:12 both come from the same root in Greek, and the preposition “above” was thought, perhaps, more appropriate to the concept of “rising.”

There is a similar relationship between the key noun and verb in the Hebrew text of Zechariah 6:12, but here the Hebrew words present

24. *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms, Psalms 1–72*, trans. Robert C. Hill, FC 101 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 413.

an agricultural image. The Hebrew text refers to the man's name as "Sprout" (translated "Branch" in the NRSV) and says he will "sprout up." The Greek verb and noun (rising) used in the Septuagint can also be used of plant growth, but they are much more commonly used to refer to heavenly bodies, which are seen to rise in the sky. Greek readers of the text, such as Justin, who had no knowledge of the Hebrew text, naturally understood the term in an astronomical rather than an agricultural sense. The first-century AD Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who wrote in Greek and read the biblical text in the Septuagint, also understood the term in its astronomical sense. Because of his dependence on the Septuagint, he noted, much like the Christians, that the text could not refer to someone of bodily nature but must refer to the bodiless one who is an exact reflection of the divine image (*Confusion of Tongues* 4.45). The rabbis, of course, understood the term in its agricultural sense.

The messianic understanding of the name "Shoot" ("Branch") appears in Jewish literature as early as the Qumran texts, which predate the Christian era. The immediate connection of the term there, however, appears to be with Jeremiah 23:5, "the righteous shoot of David," rather than with Zechariah 6:12 (4Q174 1.1.11; 4Q252 5.3-4). The later rabbis joined Zechariah 6:12 with Jeremiah 23:5 and understood both to refer to the Messiah. "Behold, a man whose name is the shoot, and who shall shoot up. . . . This refers to the Messiah, of whom it also says *I will raise unto David a righteous shoot and he shall reign as king and prosper, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land*" (Korach 18.21).²⁵

Rabbinic interpretations of Zechariah 6:12, while messianic, did not relate the verse to the concepts of preexistence or of deity, as Justin did in his association of the verse with Psalm 72:17 cited above. The difference may have lain in the versions of the Scriptures used: the astronomical association of the key terms in Zechariah 6:12 was understood by Justin, who was reading the Greek of the Septuagint, while the earthy, plant-related understanding of those terms was highlighted by the rabbis, who were reading the Hebrew text. Justin's astronomical understanding of the verse is made clear in a later citation in which he joins the verse in Zechariah with Numbers 24:17. Here Justin says, "Moses insinuated that he would rise like a star when he said, 'A star shall rise from Jacob and a leader from Israel.' And another Scripture also says, 'Behold a man, his name is Rising'" (*Dialogue* 106.4; cf. 126.1).

The astronomical understanding of the term "rising" continued in the Greek- and Latin-speaking churches of the third and fourth centuries as

25. Judah J. Slotki, trans., *Numbers*, vol. 6 of *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. Freedman and Simon, 734.

they applied Zechariah 6:12 to Jesus.²⁶ While both Jews and Christians understood Zechariah to refer to the Messiah, the kind of Messiah they understood the verse to suggest differed significantly. Readers of the Hebrew Bible read of a man who was to come whose name would be "Sprout" or "Branch," and they expected a human descendant of David. Readers of the Septuagint, who saw the astronomical term "Rising" applied to the one who was to come, could not understand this person to be merely human and concluded that he was divine and preexistent. These divergent understandings of the Messiah rested on the different images conveyed by the vocabulary in the two biblical texts being read. The differing views of the Messiah derived from the same biblical passage underline how important it is for us, as we look back at these early exegetical debates, to know what the biblical text that an ancient interpreter was reading actually said.

PSALM 110

Psalm 110 was another significant prophetic text used by the early Christians to prove the preexistence and deity of the Christ. The first and fourth verses were often cited in the New Testament; the third verse began to be applied to Christ, so far as the extant literature reveals, in Justin in the middle of the second century.

Psalm 110 is the most frequently cited Old Testament passage in the New Testament.²⁷ The Synoptic Gospels show Jesus himself confounding the Pharisees concerning the Messiah by using Psalm 110:1 (Matt. 22:41-46 and par.). It would appear from this passage in Matthew that the psalm was a text commonly considered to be messianic by the Jews. No pre-Christian messianic interpretation of this psalm can be found in Jewish literature, however. It has been suggested that the rabbis may have censored the messianic use of Psalm 110 among the Jews after the Christians began to use it so extensively of the Messiah.²⁸ The Jews took offense at the concept of the Messiah seated at God's right hand in heaven. This fit very well with the Christian understanding of a divine Messiah but ran counter to the Jewish understanding of the Messiah as merely a descendant of David, as Jesus's debate with the Pharisees noted above shows.

26. See Origen, *HomJud* 8.1, *HomLev* 9.10; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 2.5; Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.15.5; Ambrose, *ExpPs118* 12.2.3, *The Mysteries* 2.7.

27. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* 4.1, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956), 452; David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 18 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 15.

28. Beskow, *Rex Gloriam*, 133, following Billerbeck.

Rabbi Akiba was involved in an early-second-century debate with other rabbis concerning the Messiah "sitting" in heaven, which is what Psalm 110:1 would imply if it refers to the Messiah. Rabbi Akiba cited the reference to the use of the plural term "thrones" in heaven mentioned in Daniel 7:9 and said that this refers to a throne for God and one for the Messiah. His opponents thought this profaned the deity (*b. Sanhedrin* 38b). This debate shows that the rabbis were opposed to the idea of the Messiah exalted beside God in heaven, but it also shows that some rabbis of the second century did consider the idea.²⁹ The normal Jewish understanding of this psalm applied it to David. Some, on the basis of verse 4, understood it to apply to Abraham³⁰ and, according to Justin (*Dialogue* 33, 83) and Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 5.9.7-9), some also understood it to be about Hezekiah. Nothing is known in Jewish literature of the application to Hezekiah.

Justin argues that the psalm cannot refer to Hezekiah because verse 4 cannot be applied to Hezekiah in any way (*Dialogue* 33). Later, Justin carries this argument further, arguing that in addition to not being a priest after the order of Melchizedek, Hezekiah also was not the redeemer of Jerusalem, did not send a rod of power into Jerusalem, and did not rule in the midst of his enemies, all things asserted of the referent in Psalm 110. These assertions, Justin says, can all be made of Jesus. Furthermore, he asserts, the statement made in Psalm 110:3 (as it stands in the Septuagint), "I have begotten you from the womb before the morning star," refers to Christ (*Dialogue* 83).

At the end of the second century, Irenaeus uses Psalm 110:3 to prove that the Son of God was born before the creation of the world (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 43, 48). This understanding of the verse is simply assumed by Origen in the early third century. He argues that the saints of the Old Testament had already been instructed by Christ because prior to the incarnation he had "existed before the morning star" (*ComIn* 6.18). In the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem cites Psalm 110:1 as proof that Christ was Lord with the Father even before the incarnation (*Catechetical Lectures* 10.9) and Psalm 110:3 as proof that he has existed "before all ages" (*Catechetical Lectures* 11.5).

Psalm 110 became an important text in the third- and fourth-century controversies between Christians concerning Christ and his relationship to the Father. Tertullian, in his argument against Praxeas, who denied that there was any distinction between the Father and the Son, argues that the term "Lord" is applied to two divine beings in Psalm 110:1: the Father and the Son (*Against Praxeas* 13.3). Novatian uses the same verse

29. Beskow, *Rex Gloriam*, 134.

30. Levey, *Targum*, 122; cf. Hay, *Glory*, 27-30.

against the followers of Sabellius, who held a view of the Father and Son like that of Praxeas, to argue that the Son is a second being after the Father (*On the Trinity* 26.6). In the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea uses Psalm 110:1 to show the error of the Arian view that the Son is inferior to the Father. "On the right hand" does not indicate a lower position, as they think," Basil argues, "but an equal relationship" (*On the Holy Spirit* 6.15).

Rowan Greer has pointed out that Psalm 110:1 is used in two ways in the New Testament. In the Synoptic Gospels it is used by Jesus, as I noted above, to prove that the Messiah is David's Lord. This application of the verse supports the argument that the Christ is divine and preexistent, an argument we have discussed in this section. Acts and Hebrews use this verse as proof of Jesus's resurrection,³¹ as do the church fathers. We will return, therefore, to Psalm 110:1 when we discuss the resurrection of Jesus.

The Incarnation of Christ

Several subjects were connected with the incarnation of Christ in the early Christian mind. Each of these subjects was based on one or more prophetic passages in the Old Testament. The time of Christ's appearance was discussed in relation to Genesis 49:10 and connected with a star on the basis of Numbers 24:17. The place of his birth was proved from Micah 5:2, his Davidic ancestry from Isaiah 11:1, and his birth from a virgin from Isaiah 7:14. Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17, Micah 5:2, and Isaiah 11:1 are all texts used in common by Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian to speak of the incarnation.³² Genesis 49:10f., Micah 5:1-4, and Isaiah 11:1-4 are also three of the seven messianic prophecies cited most frequently in the Talmud.³³

GENESIS 49:10, NUMBERS 24:17, AND ISAIAH 11:1

The Old Testament texts applied to Christ are often discussed in clusters rather than in isolation. Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17, and Isaiah 11:1 compose one such cluster. None of these texts, however, is important in the New Testament. They are never quoted, and they are rarely alluded to.³⁴ In contrast to this relative neglect in the New Testament,

31. Rowan Greer, "The Christian Bible and Its Interpretation," in James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 131-32.

32. Ungern-Sternberg, *Schriftbeweis*, 142.

33. Briere-Narbonne, *Exégèse Talmudique I*, 34-35.

34. Gen. 49:10 is alluded to in Heb. 7:14 and Rev. 5:5. In the latter text an allusion to Isa. 11:1 is joined with it. A similar allusion to Isa. 11:1 appears in Rev. 22:16 along with a loose allusion to Num. 24:17. The latter passage also probably stands behind the statement

two of these texts are frequently cited as messianic texts by the Jews, and all three are major messianic texts to which the church fathers appeal.³⁵ We will note the use of these texts in conjunction with one another later in this section. We must begin, however, by discussing a significant difference in the wording of Genesis 49:10 in the ancient texts read by the Christians and the Jews.

The wording of the text of Genesis 49:10 differs as reported by various church fathers, all of whom were reading the Septuagint. This difference is rooted in a variation in the wording of the Hebrew text of Genesis 49:10 itself. The majority of the ancient copies of the Hebrew text have the word *shiloh* in the third clause of the verse. This was treated as the name "Shiloh" by later Jewish interpreters. Some copies of the Hebrew text, however, have *shelō*, which can mean either "he to whom it belongs" or "that which belongs to him."³⁶ The first stresses the person and the second stresses the "belongings." In my translations of Genesis 49:10 from the Hebrew text and the Septuagint that follow, I have italicized the clause in question. The Hebrew text, as we have it today, reads: "A scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a commander from between his feet *until Shiloh comes and the obedience of the peoples is his.*" What "Shiloh" means puzzled the ancient interpreters and translators as much as it does us today. The Septuagint text that we have reads: "A ruler shall not depart from Judah and a leader from his thighs *until the things which have been stored up come to him and he is the expectation of the nations*" (i.e., the Gentiles).³⁷ It would appear that the translators of the Septua-

about the "star" in Matt. 2:2. The Hebrew word for a "shoot" (*nēzer*) in Isa. 11:1 is probably the basis for the statement in Matt. 2:23 that Jesus would be called "a Nazarene."

35. Skarsaune notes that there is a minimal correspondence between Briere-Narbonne's list of the seven messianic texts cited most frequently in the Talmud and the most important messianic texts used in the New Testament. He suggests that this disparity can be explained by assuming that the first Christians had to explain those things about the Messiah that were not part of the normal Jewish messianic expectations, such as his death, resurrection, and ascension, and that they called on Old Testament texts that would support these explanations. Later Christians, he surmises, who were still in contact with Jewish messianic views, attempted to fill out their dossier of proof texts by including the traditional Jewish messianic texts (*Proof from Prophecy*, 260–61).

36. These are the two meanings given for the construction by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 1010.

37. Jerome, in his fourth-century Latin translation of Genesis in the Vulgate, claims in his "Preface to the Pentateuch" that his translation is based on the Hebrew rather than the Septuagint text, though he notes that he has carefully studied Origen's *Hexapla*, which contained a critical text of the Septuagint. Jerome's rendering of Gen. 49:10 reads: "A scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a leader from his thighs *until he who is to be sent comes, and he will be the expectation of the nations.*" The Syriac Peshitta, which was perhaps translated in the third century AD, renders the clause in question to mean "until the one to whom it . . . belongs" comes (as cited in Ludwig Köhler and Walter

gint had a Hebrew text that contained *shelō* and that they understood the expression to mean "the things which belong to him."

The *Targum Onqelos*, a Jewish interpretative translation of the Pentateuch into Aramaic made in Palestine in the late first or early second century AD, renders the phrase, "until the Messiah comes, to whom the Kingdom belongs, and whom nations shall obey."³⁸ This rendering of the phrase as "the Messiah" suggests that the targum, like the Septuagint, depended on a Hebrew text containing the word *shelō* understood to refer to the *person* who was to come. This way of understanding Genesis 49:10 is very close to the way Justin claims the correct text of the Septuagint reads, as we will see in the following paragraphs.³⁹ Justin was born in Samaria in the early second century and must have spent some of his early life there. We can only wonder if this was the common way of understanding Genesis 49:10 in Palestine at that time.

Justin reports two different readings of the Greek text of Genesis 49:10. One, which he says the Jew Trypho relates, means, "until the things which have been stored up come to him." This is the reading of the Septuagint text that we possess (see above). But Justin asserts that this is not the true text of the Septuagint. He claims that the correct text of the Septuagint reads, "until he comes for whom it has been stored up" (*Dialogue* 120.4), and this is the way he understands the verse. Origen, who was the greatest scholar in the early Christian centuries and who worked intensely on the text of the Septuagint, has the text both ways in different writings.⁴⁰

It does make a difference which way the text is read, and Justin was aware of this. The reading Trypho accepts puts the emphasis on "the things which have been stored up," and, as Justin points out, on the tribe of Judah as the recipient of these things; the reading Justin accepts puts the emphasis on the person who is to come (*Dialogue* 120.4–5). The reading that Justin claims is the correct one makes the verse more easily understandable as a prophecy of the Christ than the reading that stands in the Septuagint today. Justin's reading was widely accepted in the early church.⁴¹ Some think, however, that the text Justin claims is correct was never the text of the Septuagint but originated as a way of interpreting Genesis 49:10 by a Christian in a collection of prophetic texts belonging to the testimonies

Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 4 [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 1478–79).

38. Levey, *Targum*, 7.

39. See Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 27.

40. See *La Bible d'Alexandrie LXX 1: La Genèse*, trans., intro., and notes by M. Heugle (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986), 308–9.

41. List in Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 29, compiled by Smit Sibinga.

tradition I discussed at the beginning of this chapter.⁴² I am inclined to leave the question open given the limited nature of our knowledge of the text of the Septuagint in the first and second centuries AD.

The church fathers believed that Genesis 49:10 proved that Jesus was the one anticipated in the prophecy because there were no Jewish rulers from the tribe of Judah after the time of Jesus.⁴³ The problem with this interpretation was that rulers descending from Judah had ceased before the coming of Jesus. Herod the Great was an Idumean. He had received his crown to rule over Judea from the Romans. The Jews also felt this tension between history and the words of Genesis 49:10 because they too, though not regarding Jesus of Nazareth to have been its fulfillment, believed the verse to be messianic.⁴⁴ The Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that the Jewish messianic understanding of the verse was pre-Christian.⁴⁵ They believed that the Messiah promised in Genesis 49:10 had not yet come but they were faced with the historical fact that rulers from Judah had ceased. They solved the problem by a creative exegesis of the second clause in the verse that is usually rendered, “nor a leader from his thighs.” Since the Hebrew word translated “leader” here is related to the word that means “law” or “statute,” the *Targum Onqelos* understood the word to refer to a teacher of the law and rendered the clause in Genesis 49:10 as “nor the scribe from his children’s children, forever, until the Messiah comes” (italics mine).⁴⁶ This interpretation, which transferred the idea of rule from the political to the spiritual leadership of Israel, was frequently used in later Jewish interpretations of the verse.⁴⁷ The midrash *Genesis Rabbah*, parts of which at least date from the third century AD, interprets the “scepter” of the first clause of Genesis 49:10 as an allusion to the “Exilarchs in Babylon who chastise the people of Israel with the staff,” and takes the “lawgiver” of the second clause to refer to “the Patriarchs of the House of Rabbi” who teach the Torah in the land of Israel.⁴⁸

42. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 29.

43. See Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 57; cf. *Against Heresies* 4.10.2; Justin, *I Apology* 32.1–3.

44. Skarsaune (*Proof from Prophecy*, 264) asserts that there was “an unanimous exegetical tradition in Jewish sources” that regarded the verse as messianic.

45. Text in Joseph L. Trafton, “Commentary on Genesis A (4Q252 = 4QCommGen A = 4QBless),” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 6B, *Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents*, ed. James H. Charlesworth et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 217.

46. See Moses Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onqelos on Genesis 49: Translation and Analytical Commentary*, Society of Biblical Literature Aramaic Studies 1 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 13.

47. See Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 262–63.

48. H. Freedman, trans., *Genesis*, vol. 2 of *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. Freedman and Simon 906–7.

Origen is familiar with a Jewish interpretation similar to that described above concerning the exilarchs and patriarchs continuing the line of rulers from Judah. He refers to those who attempt to solve the difficulty in Genesis 49:10 by arguing that “the ethnarch, who is from the tribe of Judah, rules the people, and that his descendants will not cease until the advent of the Christ they imagine.” Origen annuls this interpretation with two arguments. First, he appeals to Hosea 3:4, which speaks of the cessation of kings, sacrifices, priesthood, and oracles in Israel, and says that if this has been fulfilled, which he asserts is true, then “a ruler has ceased from Israel.” Second, he appeals to the final clause in Genesis 49:10 about the coming of one who will be “the expectation of the Gentiles” and says it is clear that he has come because of the large number of Gentiles who have turned to God through Christ (*First Principles* 4.1.3).

It is the fourth-century historian Eusebius, however, who goes into great detail trying to reconcile Genesis 49:10 with actual history. He argues that because people who were not directly descended from the man Judah ruled over the Jews both before the Davidic dynasty and after the return from exile, the reference in Genesis 49:10 cannot be to Judah, the individual, or to his descendants. The tribe of Judah, he argues, enjoyed perpetual prominence so long as the nation existed. This prominence ended, Eusebius says, in the time of Augustus Caesar, when Christ appeared on earth and “the whole nation became subject to Rome.” “And then,” he continues, “instead of their ancestral and constitutional rulers they were ruled first by Herod, a foreigner, and next by the Emperor Augustus” (*Proof of the Gospel* 8.1; *Ecclesiastical History* 1.6.1–8).⁴⁹ Eusebius solves the disparity concerning the cessation of rulers from Judah and the beginning of the reign of Herod by noting that Christ was born during the reign of the first non-Jewish ruler of the people and, therefore, fulfilled the prophecy of appearing at the time that the hegemony of Judah ceased. Although Genesis 49:10 is not a significant prophecy applied to Christ in the New Testament, it clearly became such in the debates about Jesus the Christ in the succeeding centuries of early Christian history.

Numbers 24:17 and Isaiah 11:1, which the early Christians often joined with Genesis 49:10, are the oldest Jewish proof texts we know that Christians borrowed to prove Jesus was the Messiah.⁵⁰ Numbers 24:17 appears in a collection of Jewish messianic proof texts found at Qumran (4Q175).⁵¹ The Qumran documents known as *The Damascus Document* (4Q265–73

49. Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. W. J. Ferrar (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 102.

50. Beskow, *Rex Gloriarum*, 94.

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7.18–21), *The War Scroll* (1QM 11.6–7), and *The Book of Blessings* (1Q28b 5.27–28) also apply Numbers 24:17 to the Messiah.⁵² The latter text blends Isaiah 11:4 and Numbers 24:17 with words from the blessing of Judah in Genesis 49:9. The *Targum Onqelos*, which we noted above as originating in Palestine in the late first or early second century, makes an explicit identification of Numbers 24:17 with the Messiah when it translates, “[A] king shall arise out of Jacob and be anointed the Messiah out of Israel.”⁵³

In the early second century AD, Bar Kozeva, the leader of the Jewish revolt against Rome, changed his name to Bar Kokhba, “Son of the Star,” surely intending a connection with the prophecy in Numbers 24:17. The Palestinian Talmud relates that the early second-century Rabbi Akiba identified Bar Kokhba with the star of Numbers 24:17 and that when he saw Bar Kokhba he cried out, “That is the King, the Messiah” (y. *Ta’anith* 4:5).⁵⁴ The midrash on Lamentations reports, however, that Akiba was rebuked by Rabbi Johanan ben Torta for identifying the Messiah with Bar Kokhba. Rabbi ben Torta replied, “Akiba, grass will grow in your cheeks and he will still not have come.”⁵⁵ The messianic usage of Numbers 24:17 is not found, however, in the Babylonian Talmud. This may have been the result of the association of the prophecy with Bar Kokhba, whose revolt against Rome had catastrophic results for the Jews.⁵⁶

A portion of Jewish commentary on Isaiah 11:1–6 found at Qumran, while fragmentary, clearly suggests that the Qumran community understood Isaiah 11:1 to speak of the coming Messiah.⁵⁷ The fragments of *The Book of Blessings* found at Qumran also contain a messianic interpretation of the early verses of Isaiah 11 (1Q28b 5.21ff.). The *Targum Jonathan* makes explicit in its translation the understanding that the shoot from Jesse’s roots is the Messiah.⁵⁸

The church fathers often bring Numbers 24:17 and Isaiah 11:1 into close connection with Genesis 49:10. Justin blends Numbers 24:17 with Isaiah 11:1 and 11:10 and attributes the whole to Isaiah: “a star will arise from Jacob, and a blossom will come up from the root of Jesse, and the Gentiles will put their hope in his arm” (*I Apology* 32.12).⁵⁹ This cita-

52. *La Bible d’Alexandrie LXX 4: Les Nombres*, trans., intro., and notes by Gilles Dorival (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 451–53. The same texts are cited by Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 265.

53. Levey, *Targum*, 21.

54. As quoted in Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, 1:76.

55. Cohen, *Lamentations*, vol. 7 of *Midrash Rabbah*, 157.

56. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 265.

57. Maurya P. Horgan, “Isaiah Peshar 4 (4Q161 = 4QpIsa^a),” in Charlesworth et al., *Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 6B, 95–97; cf. 4Q285 fr. 5.

58. Levey, *Targum*, 49.

59. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 143, thinks the third clause comes from Isa. 51:5. Harris (*Testimonies*, 1:8) considers erroneous ascriptions of authorship to be an indica-

tion follows immediately on Justin’s interpretation of Genesis 49:10–11, which he used to establish the cessation of Jewish rule at the time of the appearance of Jesus.

Hippolytus sees a reference to the virgin birth in a combination of Isaiah 11 and Genesis 49. He thinks the statement in Genesis 49:9 that Judah will “go up from a shoot as the Septuagint reads,” suggests that the one who descended from Judah and David according to the flesh was conceived by the Holy Spirit and came forth as “a holy shoot from the earth.” He then quotes Isaiah 11:1 and says, “what Isaiah called a blossom Jacob called a shoot” (*Christ and the Antichrist* 1.7–8).

Irenaeus also treats Isaiah 11:1 as a testimony to the virgin birth of Christ, connecting Mary, rather than Joseph, with the lineage of Jesse. He follows Hippolytus in believing that Genesis 49 both identifies the time of Christ’s appearing and suggests his virgin birth. Numbers 24 shows that Christ descended from the race of Jacob and that he came down from heaven. The star of Numbers 24:17 is linked with the star of Matthew 2, which guided the magi to Jesus (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 57–59). Tertullian also sees the connection between Jesus and David to be through Mary rather than Joseph. He asserts that Isaiah 11:1 shows that the virgin from whom Christ was to be born must descend from David’s seed (*Answer to the Jews* 9.26; cf. *Resurrection of the Flesh* 21.5). In the fourth century, Hilary blends Genesis 49:9 with Isaiah 11:1 and also identifies Mary with the tribe of Judah, saying that she “was the mother of our Lord according to the flesh.”⁶⁰

The fathers usually applied the “rod” in Isaiah 11:1 to Christ himself, however. Origen uses the verse to prove that the gifts promised in Isaiah 11:2–3 cannot be applied to just anyone but are specifically to rest on the “rod which proceeds from the root of Jesse” (*HomNum* 6.3). Eusebius says that even the Jews agree that Isaiah 11:1 can refer to none other than the Christ (*ComIs* 1.62–65).

In the mid-third century AD, Cyprian, who was bishop of Carthage, used Isaiah 11:1, 2 Samuel 7:12–16, and Psalm 132:11 to prove the Davidic ancestry of Christ (*Testimonies against the Jews* 2.11), and Isaiah 11:1 and Numbers 24:17 to prove that his nature was composed of both humanity and deity. The “star” of Numbers 24:17, it was thought, pointed to the divine nature. The proof of humanity in the prophecy depended on the reading of the Septuagint; where the Septuagint says “a man will arise from Israel,” the Hebrew text states “a scepter will arise” (my

tion that such texts were drawn from a Testimony book rather than directly from the Old Testament itself.

60. *Tractates on the Psalms* 131.8, in S. Hilarii Episcopi Pictaviensis *Tractatus super Psalmos*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 22, ed. A. Zingerle (Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1891), 668.

italics; *Testimonies against the Jews* 2.11, 10). Origen applies the same two parts of the prophecy to the two natures of Christ in his *Homilies on Numbers* (18.4; cf. *Against Celsus* 1.59–60), which appeared around the same time as Cyprian's treatise. In the fourth century, Eusebius continues this interpretation of the "star" and the "man" (*Proof of the Gospel* 9.1). Ambrose identifies the star seen by the magi with the star of Numbers 24:17 and says that they "recognized that this was the star which makes known the man and God" (*ComLk* 2.48).

ISAIAH 7:14 AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

The virgin birth of Christ and his death on the cross were the two things the Jews found most offensive in the Christian message.⁶¹ Justin devotes a lengthy section of his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* to each of these questions. He introduces the discussion of the virgin birth by noting the two points on which the Jews disagreed with the Christians on the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. First, he says, the Jews argue that Isaiah 7:14 does not say "the *virgin* will conceive, but the *young woman* will conceive and bear a son." Second, he says, the Jews understand the prophecy to refer to Hezekiah, who was king in the time of Isaiah (*Dialogue* 43.7). The first argument involves the language of the text and the second its referent.

The Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:14 uses the word *almah* of the woman who will conceive. The Septuagint translated this Hebrew word with the Greek word that means virgin. The later translations of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek by the Jews Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion all translated the Hebrew word *almah* with the Greek word that means young woman.⁶² The Jews of Justin's time and later insisted that this was the proper understanding of Isaiah 7:14 and that the verse said nothing about a birth from a virgin. Later church fathers develop arguments, which we will consider below, against this Jewish interpretation based on the use of language. Justin argues against the Jewish interpretation but does not employ any significant arguments involving the language itself.

The application of Isaiah 7:14 to Hezekiah is widely attested in Jewish literature. Some thought Hezekiah had been the Messiah and that the messianic times were past, while others thought he would return as the Messiah. In the fourth century, Rabbi Hillel said, "There is no

61. Ungern-Sternberg, *Schriftbeweis*, 23.

62. Symmachus was a Jewish Christian who belonged to a group known as the Ebionites. The Ebionites did not consider Christ divine by birth, but a normal man who was given divine power at his baptism. See Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, trans. D. R. A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 61–62.

more Messiah for Israel, for they have already enjoyed him in the days of Hezekiah."⁶³ In contrast, the important late-first-century AD Rabbi of Jamnia, Johanan ben Zakkai, believed that Hezekiah was about to come and rule over Judah.⁶⁴

Justin advances two arguments against Trypho's insistence that the text of Isaiah 7:14 does not refer to a virgin but only to a young woman. His first argument stresses that the term "virgin" was the word chosen by the authoritative Jewish translators of the Old Testament who produced the Septuagint in the pre-Christian period when Ptolemy was king of Egypt. When Trypho and the Jewish teachers say that Isaiah 7:14 does not refer to a virgin conceiving, they are asserting that the conclusion of their own seventy Jewish elders who produced the Septuagint was wrong (*Dialogue* 68.8; 84.3; 71.1). The point of this aspect of Justin's argument is to emphasize that the term "virgin" stands in that Jewish translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that might be referred to in our terminology as "the authorized version of the Bible."

Justin's other argument that Isaiah 7:14 must refer to a virgin and not to a young woman lies in the logic of the birth being a sign. How, he asks, could the conception and birth of a child be a sign if the conception were the result of natural sexual reproduction? All women who give birth conceive in this way (*Dialogue* 84; cf. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.13.4–5). He then suggests that a virgin birth should not be thought impossible, for God had caused the barren mothers of Samuel, Isaac, and John the Baptist to give birth.

Justin's argument against Isaiah 7:14 referring to Hezekiah depends on Isaiah 8:4, which in the text that Justin claims to be quoting from the Septuagint stands between Isaiah 7:16a and 7:16b. Justin quotes the text as follows, beginning at Isaiah 7:14:

Behold the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel. He will eat butter and honey. Before he either knows or prefers evil he will choose the good. For before the child knows evil or good he rejects evil to choose the good. *For before the child knows how to say father or mother he will receive the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria before the king of Assyria.* And the land will be deserted. (*Dialogue* 66.2–3; the italicized words are Isa. 8:4)

Justin quoted this passage with the same addition of Isaiah 8:4 earlier when he first introduced the issue of Isaiah 7:14 and the virgin birth (*Dialogue* 43.5–6). He never indicates that the text he quotes does not stand in the Septuagint exactly as he quotes it. It may be that Justin

63. B. *Sanhedrin* 99a, cited in Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, 1:31.

64. B. *Berakhot* 28b, quoted in Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, 396.

knew the quoted words from a testimony book and that Isaiah 8:4 had been added to the text by a Christian.⁶⁵

Justin argues from the above text that Trypho cannot prove that Hezekiah or any other Jew ever waged war against Damascus and Samaria in the presence of the king of Assyria and overcame them while he was still a child too young to call out "father" or "mother." But, he asserts, this can be said of Christ. Magi came from Arabia to worship him when he was born, and this took place in the time of Herod. Scripture here refers to Herod as the king of Assyria, Justin claims, because of his wicked character. The power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria refer to the power of the evil demon who lived there. That the magi from Arabia came to worship Christ at his birth shows that Christ overcame the demonic power when he was born. The magi, who had previously been under the power of the demon, were set free from its control and demonstrated this by their pilgrimage to Bethlehem to worship the Christ child. Trypho, however, did not think Justin's exposition any more convincing than we probably do (*Dialogue* 77–79).

Origen does not make the same argument that Justin does, but he is familiar with a similar understanding of the connection of the magi with the demonic powers and the affect that the birth of Christ had on them. His purpose is to explain why the magi of Matthew's Gospel followed the star to Bethlehem. Origen notes that magi in general depended on communion with demons for the power to perform their works. He proposes that at the birth of Jesus the divine power that visited the earth, both in the persons of the angelic host Luke reports and in the person of the infant Jesus himself, overthrew the power of the demons. The magi then found that their sorcery no longer worked. Seeking to discover why, they noticed the sign in the heavens. Origen thinks they probably knew Balaam's prophecies.⁶⁶ They must have surmised that the person connected with the star in Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:17 had arrived and that he was superior to the demonic powers. Therefore, they set out to find and worship him (*Against Celsus* 1.60). While Origen's account does not vindicate Justin's arguments, it does show that Justin is working within the framework of generally accepted assumptions of the contemporary worldview.

Eusebius attempts to set Justin's general argument on a historical basis. Emmanuel, he argues, can refer only to God, whom Abraham had seen earlier in human form. The name cannot be given to Hezekiah because he was not "God with us," and there was no indication of a divine nature in him. Furthermore, Hezekiah had already been born prior to the giving

65. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 32–34.

66. See the discussion of Num. 24:17 above.

of this prophecy, so Isaiah's reference to a future birth could not refer to Hezekiah's birth.⁶⁷ Eusebius then turns to the histories of Damascus and Judah and argues that Emmanuel should be born at the time when these two kingdoms were deprived of their kings. Both countries continued to have kings, he argues, until the appearance of Jesus. He bases his argument concerning Damascus on Paul's reference to Aretas, king of Damascus (2 Cor. 11:32), and says that the Jews also continued to have kings, though "irregular" and not of David's line, through Herod and his successors in the time of Jesus. But after the appearance of Jesus, Roman rule removed all local authorities from all states. This marked the literal fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (*Proof of the Gospel* 7.1).

It has been pointed out that the fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries use a new argument based on the language of Isaiah 7:14. They argue that the Greek word meaning young woman, which the other translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek used to render the Hebrew word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14, can mean the same as the word "virgin," which the translators of the Septuagint had used. Consequently, the use of the word "young woman" to translate Isaiah 7:14 does not mean that the young woman is not a virgin. The fathers based this argument on Deuteronomy 22:23–29, which discusses the rape of betrothed and unbetrothed virgins. There, they argue, the words "young woman" and "virgin" are used interchangeably. The fathers then apply this evidence to Isaiah 7:14 to show that the use of "young woman" does not cancel the understanding that the sign involved a virgin birth. This argument is based on the Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures and takes no account of the Hebrew text.⁶⁸

Jerome, who knew Hebrew better than any other church father, advances the argument concerning the language of Isaiah 7:14 on the basis of the Hebrew text. He agrees with the Jews that the Hebrew word *almah* is not the normal word used of a virgin but, he insists, it is also not the normal word used of a young woman as they wish to understand it. He uses an etymological approach to argue that while the Hebrew word *almah* does not explicitly mean virgin, it does mean a young woman who is protected from the public eye by her family so that by necessit

67. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 12.22, offers the same argument against the prophecy referring to Hezekiah.

68. Adam Kamesar, "The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14. The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century," *JTS* (1990): 52–57. Kamesar notes that Origen seems to have known this same argument in the third century. He was one of the few church fathers who had some knowledge of the Hebrew language. Origen transfers the argument to the Hebrew text and asserts that the Hebrew word *almah*, which appears in Isa. 7:14, is used of a virgin in Deut. 22:23–26 (*Against Celsus* 1.34). This is not, however, the case. The Hebrew word for virgin in these verses is the word *bethula* (Kamesar, "Virgin," 58–60).

69. Kamesar, "Virgin," 62–63.

the term implies that the young woman is a virgin. He also asserts that *almah* is never used in Scripture of any woman other than a virgin, and he challenges the Jews to show him one place in the Hebrew Scriptures where the word is used of “a young woman already married” (*Quaestiones hebraicae in Genesim* 24.43).⁷⁰

MICAH 5:2 AND THE TOWN OF CHRIST’S BIRTH

Micah 5:2 (5:1 LXX) is a verse used in common by Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian in their proof from prophecy arguments.⁷¹ It was an important Christian messianic proof text as early as the New Testament evangelist Matthew (2:5–6). The evangelist John (7:41–42) indicates that the Jews already understood it to indicate the birthplace of the Messiah, and later Jewish literature bears this out. In the *Targum Jonathan*, Micah 5:1 (5:2 NRSV) is translated, “And you, O Bethlehem Ephrath, you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the house of Judah, from you shall come forth before Me the Messiah, to exercise dominion over Israel, he whose name was mentioned before, from the days of creation.”⁷²

The Palestinian Talmud relates a story, repeated and expanded in the midrash on Lamentations, that claims that a son of Hezekiah named Menahem, or “the Comforter,” was the Messiah. When the question of the place of his birth is posed, the response is that he is from “the royal village of Bethlehem in Judea” (*y. Berakhot* 5a).⁷³ This is a clear reference to Micah 5:2 and indicates that it was commonly understood in the Jewish community that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

The Micah prophecy was important to the church fathers because of its geographic specificity. Tertullian begins the argument he bases on Micah 5:2 by assuming the Jewish understanding of it. He states that the Christ had to be born in Bethlehem because of the prophecy in Micah. He then assumes the Jewish denial that Jesus of Nazareth was the expected Messiah and asks what the fulfillment of this prophecy might be, then, since Bethlehem had been bereft of Jewish people since the Roman edict forbidding Jews to live in the district.⁷⁴ How can the

70. *Saint Jerome’s Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, trans. with intro. and commentary by C. T. R. Hayward, OECS (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 58.

71. Ungern-Sternberg, *Schriftbeweis*, 142. See Justin, *1 Apology* 34.1, *Dialogue with Trypho* 78; Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 63; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.33.11; Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews* 13.2.

72. Levey, *Targum*, 93.

73. Brierre-Narbonne, *Exégèse Talmudique I*, 41; Cohen, *Lamentations*, vol. 7 of *Midrash Rabbah*, 137.

74. Tertullian is here referring to the Roman edict that prohibited Jews from living in the entire neighborhood of Jerusalem after the Jewish rebellion led by Bar Kochba, which was put down in AD 135.

Christ come from Bethlehem now, Tertullian asks, when there is no one of the house of Israel there from whose stock he could be born? This, he argues, is a proof that the Christ promised in Micah 5:2 has already come in Jesus of Nazareth (*Answer to the Jews* 13.1–8).

Origen uses the Micah passage to refute Celsus’s assertion that the Old Testament prophecies used by Christians could fit any number of people who wander about living off others and claiming to have descended to earth from God. Micah 5:2, Origen insists, would not fit just any claimant of divinity, for the person mentioned in this prophecy must have been born in Bethlehem. To strengthen the Christian claim that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy, Origen calls attention to what appears to have already become a sort of tourist attraction at Bethlehem. He says that in Bethlehem there is a cave containing a manger that is pointed out as the place where Jesus was born, adding that this site was famous in the locality even among non-Christians (*Against Celsus* 1.50–51).

Eusebius, in the fourth century, also stresses the specificity of the Micah passage and argues that only two famous men had been born in Bethlehem, David and Jesus. David, however, lived and died before this prophecy had been uttered. Furthermore, the latter part of the prophecy could not refer to David for it speaks of the person born in Bethlehem being from eternity. Micah 5:2, therefore, can refer only to Jesus. Like Origen, Eusebius also notes that the local inhabitants of Bethlehem “to this day” show visitors the cave where the virgin lay her infant (*Proof of the Gospel* 7.2.2). In another passage in the same work, Eusebius says that in his day Bethlehem was so famous for being the place of Jesus’s birth that people came from the ends of the earth to see it (*Proof of the Gospel* 1.1.2).

The Healing Ministry of Christ

Jesus’s ministry of healing the sick and raising the dead appears to be considered an important messianic indicator by the earliest Christians. Two passages from Isaiah (35:5–6 and 61:1–2), which sometimes were not carefully distinguished, were seen as prophetic proof texts pointing to this messianic ministry. Luke uses Isaiah 61:1–2 to introduce Jesus’s ministry (Luke 4:18–21) and, again, to answer the question of John the Baptist concerning Jesus’s messiahship (Luke 7:22; cf. Matt. 11:5). Mark appears to have Isaiah 35:5–6 in mind when he records the multitude’s response to Jesus causing a deaf mute to hear and speak (7:37). Isaiah 35:6 also appears to lie behind Luke’s narrative in Acts 3:8, in which the lame man healed by Peter enters the temple “walking and leaping” (*italics mine*). In the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem also viewed Peter’s heal-

ing of the lame man as a fulfillment of Isaiah 35:6 (*Catechetical Lectures* 17.21). Luke also suggests that an argument for understanding Jesus as the Messiah based on these prophecies of healing was part of the earliest Christian preaching. In Acts 2:22, he records Peter referring to Jesus's "mighty works, wonders, and signs" in his address at Pentecost, and in Acts 10:38, he records Peter's conversation with Cornelius in which Peter again refers to Jesus's ministry of healing.

While there was a Jewish belief in a general resurrection of Israelites in the time of the Messiah (2 *Bar.* 30:1–5), ancient Jewish literature does not suggest the anticipation of a Messiah who would heal the infirm and raise the dead. The time of the Messiah was identified with the age to come. The Mishnah relates that the sages said the phrase "all the days of thy life" includes "the Days of the Messiah" and does not refer to "this world only" (*m. Berakhot* 1:5).⁷⁵ Rabbi Phineas ben Jair, of the last half of the second century AD, also appears to locate the resurrection in the messianic era. The resurrection, he says, "shall come through Elijah of blessed memory" (*m. Sotah* 9:15).⁷⁶

There is, however, a fragment found at Qumran (4Q521) that describes the Messiah as one "who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind," and "straightens the b[ent]." He is further praised as one who "will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor."⁷⁷ The last statement clearly echoes Isaiah 61:1, which, as we noted above, was an important messianic text for the earliest Christians, and may allude also to Isaiah 26:19.⁷⁸ The previous statement about the Messiah appears to be drawn from Psalm 146:7–8.

It was Isaiah 35:3–6—which speaks of God coming to save with the consequent actions of healing the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the dumb—to which the church fathers turned especially in their search for Christ in the prophets. Isaiah 35:3–6 heads the list of a number of prophetic passages that Cyprian cites in his *Book of Testimonies* to show that the promised Savior of humanity had come (*Testimonies against the Jews* 2.7). Irenaeus joins Isaiah 35:3–6 with Isaiah 53:4, 29:18, and 26:19 to show that Christ's healings and raising of the dead substantiate that he is the Son of God (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 67). He brings the same constellation of passages together again, but without Isaiah 29:18,

75. *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 3.

76. *Ibid.*, 307.

77. Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 391–92.

78. Suggested by Craig A. Evans, "Qumran's Messiah: How Important Is He?" in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 139.

as passages that proclaim the works of healing done by Christ (*Against Heresies* 4.33.11).

Justin cites Isaiah 35:5–6 as proof that it had been prophesied that Christ would "heal all diseases and raise the dead" (*1 Apology* 48.1–2). He also suggests that the pagan mythmakers read the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Christ and invented the various mythological gods to correspond to the things they learned there, specifically about who Christ was or what Christ was to do. They created the healing god Asclepius after they read the prophecy in Isaiah 35 that the Christ would "heal every disease and raise the dead" (*1 Apology* 54.10; cf. 22.6–23.3). Justin incorporates the Asclepius argument into his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* but gives it a new twist. He quotes the entirety of Isaiah 35:1–7 and refers to it as "one" Scripture that prophesies that Christ would raise the dead and heal all diseases. He understands the "thirsty wilderness" of Isaiah 35:1 to be the Gentiles, who had been destitute of knowledge of God but had now received it through Christ.⁷⁹ This Christ, Justin says, appeared among the Jews, where he performed the healings and restorations to life referred to in the Isaiah passage. The response of the Jews to his mighty works, however, was to label him a magician and a deceiver. Nevertheless, there were some among the Jews who believed because of his works. And now, Justin continues, anyone with a physical infirmity who holds to the teachings given by Christ will be raised with a sound body at the second advent (*Dialogue* 69.3–7).

Tertullian considers the Rule of Faith to be the touchstone for testing all interpretation of Scripture. In the Rule of Faith, the ministry of Christ is summed up in two activities: preaching the new law and performing mighty works (*Prescription against Heretics* 13.4). Tertullian alludes to these two points of the Rule in his treatise *Against the Jews* and turns to the prophecy of Isaiah to confirm that it had been predicted that the Christ would perform each of these activities. Isaiah 58:1–2 confirms the Christ's preaching ministry and Isaiah 35:4–6 shows that he was to do miraculous works. Tertullian adds that the Jews cannot deny that Christ performed miraculous works, for they attacked him not for the works but for doing them on the Sabbath (*Answer to the Jews* 9.29–31; cf. Jn. 5:1–18). In his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, Tertullian argues that Isaiah 35:5–6 speaks of Christ in direct, nonfigurative language. "Were not the eyes of the blind opened?" he asks. "Did not the tongues of the speechless speak distinctly? Did not shriveled hands and weak knees regain their strength? Did not the lame leap like the hart?" (*Resurrection of the Flesh* 20.6).

79. Eusebius also identifies this wilderness with the church of the Gentiles (*Proof of the Gospel* 6.21).

Origen gave Isaiah 35:5–6 both a literal and a figurative meaning. The philosopher Celsus attacks Christians, saying that they considered Jesus to be Son of God because he healed the lame and the blind. Origen replies that this is true and that this belief is grounded in the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5–6. In other words, it is the prophecy that interprets the meaning of the miracles and shows Jesus to be the Son of God because he performs them. Origen concludes his argument by asserting that Jesus's disciples have outdone even his physical miracles by healing those blind and deaf in their souls and lame in the inner person so that they now see and hear about God and tread on the powers of evil in their new walk (*Against Celsus* 2.48).⁸⁰

In the mid-third century AD, Novatian of Rome employs Isaiah 35:3–6 to prove the deity of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 35:4 speaks of God himself coming to save. This is followed immediately by a list of healings that will take place at that time. Novatian argues that since these healing miracles are to be the sign of God's coming, and since such healings were performed by Christ, one must either acknowledge that he is the Son of God or, in agreement with the heretical group known as the Monarchians, who denied any distinction between God the Father and the Son, say that Jesus Christ is God the Father himself. One or the other of these conclusions is necessary, Novatian asserts, because the signs Christ performed fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 35:3–6, which announces the advent of deity (*On the Trinity* 12).

In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea also uses Isaiah 35:3–6 to argue for the deity of Christ. He understands the passage to state that these healing activities were the work of God and, because Christ performed them, it shows that he is divine (*Proof of the Gospel* 9.13). Athanasius quotes Isaiah 35:3–6 and takes it to mean that God will come when these signs of his advent appear. There is no time in Israel's history, he argues, when these signs were manifest "except when the Word of God himself came in the body" (*On the Incarnation* 38).⁸¹

The Suffering and Death of Christ

The apostle Paul declared that the Christian message of Christ crucified was "a stumbling block to Jews" (1 Cor. 1:23 NRSV). Justin's dialogue partner Trypho tells him that all Jews expect the Messiah but they do not think that expectation was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth because they cannot believe that "the Christ should be so dishonorably crucified, for the

80. Origen makes a similar double application of Isa. 35:5–6 in his discussion of Jesus's healings recorded in Matt. 15:29–31 (*ComMt* 11.18).

81. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. R. W. Thomson, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 229.

law says that one who has been crucified is accursed" (*Dialogue* 89.1–2; Deut. 21:23). A graffito discovered in 1856 in the servants' quarters of the Imperial Palace on the Palatine hill in Rome depicts someone named Alexamenos gesturing with his right hand toward a cross on which a man with a donkey's head is crucified. The graffito reads, "Alexamenos, worship God." It is an ancient graffito, but a fixed date cannot be given for it. It shows, nevertheless, the derogatory nature of the mocking heaped on the Christian message of the crucified one.

PSALM 22 AND ISAIAH 53

Because the crucifixion was so central to early Christian preaching it was absolutely essential that the early church be able to show that it was part of the divine plan. Justin's response to Trypho's objection, that a crucified man could not be the Messiah, makes this clear:

The statement in the law that everyone hanged on a tree is accursed accentuates our hope which depends on the crucified Christ. This hope does not rest in the fact that the crucified one has been accursed by God, but in the fact that God announced in advance the things which you and all those like you were to do because you did not understand that he is the one who exists before all things, even the eternal priest of God, the king, and Christ. (*Dialogue* 96.1)

The early Christians turned especially to Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 to support what Justin asserts. After quoting a large portion of Isaiah 53 in connection with the passion of the Messiah, Irenaeus comments that clearly it was the Father's will that these things should happen to the Christ (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 68–69).

There is a long and unsettled debate among scholars whether pre-Christian Judaism ever entertained the idea of a Messiah who would suffer. There are a few references to the Messiah suffering in one way or another in later rabbinic Judaism but none, it appears, to him dying so shameful a death as crucifixion.⁸² The late *Targum Jonathan*, for example, understands the servant referred to in Isaiah 52:13 to be the Messiah. The translation of Isaiah 53, however, reworks the text in such a way that the resulting picture is not that of a suffering servant but a triumphant Messiah who overpowers the enemies of Israel.⁸³

In *Against Celsus*, which was Origen's last written work, Origen says that he remembers having a discussion once with some rabbis in which he appealed to the prophecy of Isaiah 53. The rabbinic response to his

82. Schürer, *History*, rev., 2:547–48.

83. Levey, *Targum*, 63–67.

argument, he says, was to assert that Isaiah 53 speaks of the Jewish people as a whole and refers to their suffering in the dispersion (*Against Celsus* 1.55). The much later *Midrash Rabbah* on Numbers continues this Jewish understanding when it applies Isaiah 53:12 to the people of Israel, whose souls, it says, were “exposed . . . to death in exile.”⁸⁴ Origen claims that the most effective argument he advanced against this Jewish view in his discussion with the rabbis was based on the statement in Isaiah 53:8: “He was led to death because of the lawless deeds of my people.” “For if, as they took it,” Origen argued, “the prophecy had reference to the people, how were the people said to be led ‘to death because of the lawless deeds of the people’ of God if these same people were the people of God?” (*Against Celsus* 1.55).

It also appears that Psalm 22 was never associated with the Messiah in Jewish tradition. Justin says to the Jews he was addressing concerning Psalm 22, “You say that this Psalm does not refer to the Christ. You are blind in all respects and do not understand that no one of your race called ‘king’ or ‘Christ’ was ever pierced in feet or hands while alive and died in this mysterious way, that is by crucifixion, except this Jesus” (*Dialogue* 97.4). In the fourth century, Theodoret of Cyrus says that the Jews refer Psalm 22 to David.⁸⁵ The fourth-century Syrian father Aphraat indicates that some Jews also referred Psalm 22 to Saul (*Demonstrations* 17.10).

Isaiah 53 was a crucial passage for the early-Christian understanding of the passion of Christ, probably going back to traditions associated with Jesus himself in the Gospels. It is most likely that Isaiah 53 should be understood as a major part of the teaching Jesus is said to have given the disciples about his passion. Each of the synoptic Gospels relates that immediately after Peter’s confession identifying Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus began to teach the disciples that he must suffer and be killed (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). In the final chapter of his Gospel, Luke narrates two occasions on which the risen Jesus instructed his disciples about the prophetic texts that predicted the messianic sufferings. The first occasion refers to the instruction being from “Moses and the prophets,” and the second adds “the psalms” to the list of texts (Luke 24:25–27, 44–46). Luke further shows that Isaiah 53 was a central text for the earliest Christians’ understanding of what happened to Jesus when he relates that Philip “preached Jesus” to the Ethiopian treasurer from the text of Isaiah 53:7–8 (Acts 8:32–35).

Psalm 22 was so much a part of the earliest Christian understanding of the passion that statements, phrases, and terminology drawn from the psalm are woven into the texture of the story of the crucifixion related

84. Slotki, *Numbers*, vol. 6 of *Midrash Rabbah*, 501.

85. On Ps. 22:30–31, in Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms*, 154.

by the Synoptic Gospels without any explicit indication that Scripture is being cited. The division of Jesus’s garments and the casting of lots for them, for example, are related in the words of Psalm 22:18, but no indication is given that the words come from Scripture (Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34).⁸⁶ The same is true of the use of Psalm 22:7–8 to relate the actions and words of the bystanders at the cross (Matt. 27:39, 43; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35), and of Jesus’s cry of dereliction, which quotes Psalm 22:1 (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Justin assumed that the Christian understanding of the prophetic texts that related to Christ’s passion was derived from Christ himself. He asserts that Christ “revealed to us everything which we, through his grace, have discerned from the Scriptures” (*Dialogue* 100.2). In this statement, which appears in his application of Psalm 22 to Christ, Justin is not claiming a supernatural intervention that gives himself and others special powers of discernment. He is claiming that Christ taught the apostles how to understand the Old Testament texts that prove his messiahship and that the apostles passed this understanding on to the Christian community.⁸⁷ In another context, Justin clearly associates Isaiah 53 with the teaching about messianic sufferings that Luke 24 says Christ gave his disciples after the resurrection (*1 Apology* 50). Even earlier than Justin, Clement of Rome, who wrote in the last decade of the first century AD, understands both Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 to be written about Christ. He cites both to demonstrate the humility in which Christ visited the earth (*1 Clement* 16).

Marcion, a heretical Christian but a Christian nonetheless, had argued that Jesus of Nazareth could not have been the expected Messiah because the Jews had rejected and killed him. Tertullian replies that this happened because two advents of the Christ are prophesied. The first, which was to take place in humility, was prophesied figuratively in parables. Because of this, Tertullian argues, the Jews failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The second advent, which is to be in power and majesty, was clearly prophesied in passages such as Daniel 7:13–14 and Psalm 45:2–9. These were the prophecies, he asserts, on which the Jews had based their messianic expectations. Tertullian’s description of the first advent of the Messiah is saturated with the language of Isaiah 53. He also draws on a few other Old Testament texts, including Psalm 22:6 (*Against Marcion* 3.6.9–7.2). Justin, using the same language of parable,⁸⁸

86. John 19:24, in contrast, states that the soldiers cast lots for Jesus’s tunic, and then it quotes Ps. 22:18 as the “Scripture” that this action fulfilled.

87. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 12.

88. Tertullian may have borrowed this concept from Justin, as he may have borrowed the whole idea of the two advents of the Messiah, for Justin uses this argument against Trypho much as Tertullian uses it against Marcion.

asserts that Psalm 22 is a “mysterious parable” of the passion and the cross of Christ (*Dialogue* 97.3). He then quotes nearly the entire psalm and provides a lengthy christological commentary on it showing how it was fulfilled in the sufferings of Christ (*Dialogue* 98–106). Eusebius, likewise, shows how Psalm 22 was written about Christ by providing a commentary on the whole of the psalm. He begins by noting Jesus quoted the first verse of this psalm on the cross (Matt. 27:46) and argues that this shows that “the Psalm refers to Him and no one else” (*Proof of the Gospel* 10.8).⁸⁹

Lactantius, writing in the early fourth century, shows that the crucifixion of Jesus was still a scandal in his lifetime. He asserts that Christians are often reproached for the passion and charged with worshiping a man who experienced a terrible punishment. Lactantius responds to this reproach by appealing to the prophecies of the Old Testament to show that the passion was part of the “divine plan.” Like Tertullian and Justin, Lactantius claims that the Jews had based their messianic expectations on those prophecies that spoke of the Messiah coming in power and glory. They were ignorant, he says, of the fact that two advents of the Messiah are actually proclaimed by the prophets and that the first was to occur in humility. Isaiah 53:1–6 is quoted as the primary testimony for the advent of the Messiah in humility (*Divine Institutes* 4.16).

ISAIAH 53 AND THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST

In addition to functioning as proof that the sufferings of the Christ were part of the divine plan, Isaiah 53 also serves to substantiate the redemptive significance of Christ’s death on the cross. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, written probably in the first third of the second century, uses Isaiah 53:5 and 7 as proof that the Lord “delivered his flesh to corruption” to sanctify us by the forgiveness of sins (5.1–2). In *Dialogue* 13 Justin states that the death of Christ occurred to effect the removal of sins through faith in his blood. He then quotes Isaiah 52:10–54:6 as proof of this assertion. He also understands Isaiah 53:7 to link Jesus with the paschal lamb. In a statement that recalls Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 5:7, Justin says, “The paschal lamb was Christ, who was later sacrificed, even as Isaiah said, ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.’” Justin then compares the delivery from death that the blood of Christ offers to those who believe with the deliverance of the Israelites in Egypt provided by the blood of the paschal lamb (*Dialogue* 111.3). Melito of Sardis, in

89. *The Proof of the Gospel: Eusebius*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. W. J. Ferrar (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 216. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references appear in the text and are to this translation.

his paschal homily delivered near the end of the second century, read the story of the Passover lamb and the crucifixion of Jesus as type and reality via Isaiah 53:7. He begins with the story of the Passover, “how the sheep was sacrificed, and how the people was saved.” Isaiah’s simile about a person who suffers like a sheep being slaughtered then enters Melito’s account and guides the Passover story to the story of Jesus who, “though led to the slaughter like a sheep, . . . was no sheep,” and “though speechless as a lamb,” was not “a lamb.”

For instead of the lamb there was a son,
and instead of the sheep a man. . . .
For he was born a son,
and led as a lamb,
and slaughtered as a sheep,
and buried as a man,
and rose from the dead as God. (*On Pascha* 1–8)⁹⁰

Eusebius refers to the Jewish sacrificial system, in which animals were offered as the ransom for individual lives, as the imperfect precursor to the sacrifice that Christ offered when he was “sacrificed like sheep for the whole human race” (*Proof of the Gospel* 1.10). Isaiah 53: is then cited, followed by verses 4–9, as prophetic proof for the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death. It is Origen, however, who makes the most forceful statement about Christ’s sacrificial death for humanity on the basis of Isaiah 53. He notes that there were numerous stories circulating among the Greeks about heroes who ended plagues or famines by offering themselves as sacrifices to the offended deities. But it has never been related, he says, that someone took up the burden of purifying the whole universe. “Jesus alone has been able to take up into himself on the cross the burden of the sin of all on behalf of the whole universe. Origen then makes his way through numerous verses from Isaiah 53, but verse 7 is central: “The Father delivered this Jesus for our sins, and because of them, ‘he was led as a sheep to slaughter, and was dumb, a lamb before its shearer’” (*ComJn* 28.160–170).⁹¹ Athanasius adds, on the same note, that by Jesus’s “death salvation was effected for all and all creation was saved.” The basis for the assertion is an echo of Isaiah 53:7. Jesus, “like a sheep[,] delivered his own body to death as a ransom for the salvation of all” (*On the Incarnation* 37).⁹²

90. *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha*, trans. Alistair Stewart-Sykes (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 37–39.

91. *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 13–32*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, FC 89 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 325–27.

92. Athanasius, “*Contra Gentes*” and “*De Incarnatione*,” trans. Thomson, 227.

The Resurrection and Glorification of Christ

The apostle Paul's statement to the Corinthians that his gospel contained the assertion that Christ had been raised on the third day in fulfillment of the Scriptures is our earliest reference to the application of Old Testament prophecies to the resurrection of Christ. Paul does not indicate, however, what those Scriptures were that he used to prove this (1 Cor. 15:1–4). Matthew appears to relate Jesus's citation of the "sign of Jonah" to his resurrection (Matt. 12:39–40). John suggests that there was Scripture that, as the disciples later learned, proved the necessity of the resurrection, but he does not specify any (20:9). It is Luke who gives the most detailed example of the earliest Christian appeal to prophecy in regard to the resurrection. At the conclusion of his Gospel he indicates that Christ included Old Testament prophecies about the resurrection in his postresurrection instructions to his disciples, but no specific prophecies are mentioned (Luke 24:46). Then, in his report of Peter's Pentecost sermon, Luke cites Psalm 16:8–11 as central to Peter's argument about the resurrection. The crucial verse is verse 10, which says that the Lord did not abandon "my soul to Hades" or let his "Holy One see corruption." Peter argues that David could not have been speaking of himself because his tomb was still in Jerusalem. But both statements can apply to Jesus, he continues, because "God raised him up" (Acts 2:25–32). Luke cites the same verse with the same general argument later in Acts in a sermon by Paul (13:35–37).⁹³ In this same context Luke also cites Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 55:3 in relation to the resurrection (Acts 13:33–34).

PSALM 16

Of these prophetic texts cited in the New Testament concerning the resurrection, only Psalm 16 plays a role in the church fathers' discussions of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus, and its role is rather checkered. Psalm 16:10 does not appear as a prophecy of the resurrection in the Christian literature of the second century. Its only appearance in this literature is not a direct citation but as part of Irenaeus's quotation of Peter's address in Acts 2 (*Against Heresies* 3.12.2). Tertullian, in the early third century, makes a loose allusion to Psalm 16:10 but not in a context concerning the resurrection (*Against Marcion* 4.7.11). The verse appears once in Cyprian's writings as a text proving that the Christ would not be overcome by death (*Testimonies against the Jews* 2.24), and once in a treatise falsely attributed to Cyprian where it forms part of a prayer that Christ prays (*Against the Jews* 3).

93. In the early fourth century, Lactantius cites Ps. 16:10 as prophetic proof that the Christ was to rise on the third day (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 47).

Only Origen, it appears, makes rather extensive use of Psalm 16:10 in the third century. He cites it twice in his apology against Celsus as one of what he implies were numerous prophecies of the resurrection (*Against Celsus* 2.62; 3.32). The majority of his uses of the verse, however, are doctrinal rather than apologetic. In his *Dialogue with Heraclides* he uses the first clause of the verse as proof that Christ's soul was in Hades (*Heraclides* 7). He uses the same clause in a similar way in his *Commentary on John*, where he uses John the Baptist's reference to the "sandals" of Jesus to point to two sojourns of the Son of God: the first being the taking of flesh and the second the descent into Hades (*Commentary on John* 6.175; cf. 1.220, *ComRom* 1.5). In the *Commentary on Matthew* it is also used to support the view that after his death Christ descended to Hades and preached to the spirits who were imprisoned there. It also shows that Christ did not remain in Hades, but ascended on high to his rightful Father where he says to death, "Where, O death, is your sting?" (*Commentary on Matthew* ser. 132; cf. 138). In another passage in the *Commentary on Matthew*, the first clause of Psalm 16:10 is used in conjunction with Origen's emphasis that it was the soul of Jesus, not his spirit or body, that was given as "ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Jesus's soul did not remain, however, with the one to whom it was given as a ransom, Origen continues, as Psalm 16:10 demonstrates (*ComMt* 16.8). Origen takes the final clause of Psalm 16:9, "my flesh will rest in hope," to show that Christ ascended to heaven with his body of flesh. He says that these words of the psalm are spoken by Christ for his was the first flesh to rest in hope. After the resurrection, Christ "ascended to heaven and lifted up his earthly body along with himself." Origen then adds Isaiah 63:1 to his interpretation of the ascension of the risen Christ. It is the sight of flesh ascending to heaven that causes the heavenly powers to call out the words of Isaiah: "'Who is this that comes from Edom,' that is from the earth? 'His garments are red from Bozrah.' For they saw in his body the vestiges of the wounds from Bozrah, that is, the wounds received in his flesh." Origen clearly understands Psalm 16:9–10 to speak of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus.

In the early fourth century, Lactantius and Eusebius again take up the apologetic use of the verse as proof of the resurrection, as does the Syrian father Aphraat. Lactantius twice uses Psalm 16:10 as proof that the Christ was to rise from the dead (*Divine Institutes* 4.19; *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 47), and Eusebius understands this verse to be David prophesying about Christ's resurrection as if Christ himself were speaking (*Proof of the Gospel* 3.2). Aphraat cites Psalm 16:10 as word

94. These comments of Origen on Ps. 16:9 are preserved in *The Apology of Pamphilus the Martyr for Origen* 7 (PG 17:599D–600B).

that could be appropriately used only of Christ (*Demonstrations* 17.10). Athanasius uses the verse in relation to the resurrection (*On the Incarnation* 21) and says in his commentary on this psalm that it is as though Christ were singing the words. Interestingly, he adds that Peter, in Acts 2, taught us to think this way about the psalm.⁹⁵

PSALM 110:1

Psalm 110:1 is the one text that is important both in the New Testament and in the church fathers in speaking of the glorification of Jesus. In the discussion of Psalm 110:1 in the section on the preexistence of the Christ above, I noted Rowan Greer's observation that this verse is used in two ways in the New Testament. One is in reference to Christ's preexistence with God and the other relates to his glorification after his death. Luke cites it in the latter sense in Peter's Pentecost sermon in conjunction with his argument from Psalm 16 (Acts 2:33–35), and alludes to it in a later speech by Peter (Acts 5:31), and again in Stephen's speech (Acts 7:55–56). In the book of Hebrews, this verse is an important testimony to Christ's exaltation (Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2). The Pauline epistles employ Psalm 110:1 in conjunction with Christ's resurrection, ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God (Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:25–27; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1), and in 1 Peter it is used in reference to Christ's exaltation and the subordination of the heavenly powers to him (3:22).

The earliest application of Psalm 110:1 to the exalted Christ after the New Testament appears in *1 Clement* 36.5–6, where it is quoted in a context reminiscent of Hebrews 1. Polycarp, who wrote sometime in the first half of the second century, alludes to Psalm 110:1 in connection with the resurrection and ascension of Christ, who, he says, has been given "glory and a throne at" God's "right hand" (*Epistle to the Philippians* 2.1). Justin uses Psalm 110:1 to show that God took Christ to heaven after raising him from the dead (*1 Apology* 45.1). Tertullian understands Psalm 110:1 to refer to the exalted state of the Son after his resurrection (*Against Praxeas* 30.4–5). Irenaeus believes the statement that Jesus "was taken up into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God" in Mark 16:19 confirms the prophetic word in Psalm 110:1 (*Against Heresies* 3.10.6). He also identifies the "enemies" of Psalm 110:1, who are to be subjected to the glorified Christ, as rebellious heavenly beings (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 85).⁹⁶ Hippolytus joins Psalm 110:1 with the statement about the child caught up to the throne of God in Revelation 12:5 and uses the two together to show that Christ was a heavenly, rather than

95. PG 27:100.

96. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. and annotated by Joseph P. Smith, ACW 16 (New York: Newman Press, 1952), 100.

an earthly, king (*Christ and the Antichrist* 61.2). Lactantius quotes Psalm 110:1 as proof that Christ would ascend to the Father after his passion and resurrection (*Divine Institutes* 4.12.17). Both Cyprian (*Testimonies against the Jews* 2.26) and Novatian (*On the Trinity* 9.8) cite the verse to show the exaltation of Christ.

It is obvious that Psalm 110:1 had a tremendous influence on the Christian doctrine of the exalted Christ. Its language became a part of all the creeds of the church that speak of "Christ's 'sitting at the right hand' of the Father."⁹⁷ These include the Apostles' Creed and the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople, the most widely used creeds of the church today.

PSALM 24

Although not used in the New Testament in relation to the glorification of the Christ, Psalm 24:7–10 vies with Psalm 110:1 in the importance given it in this respect by the fathers. This psalm was also important to the Jews. The Mishnah indicates that it had been sung in the temple by the Levites every first day of the week (*m. Tamid* 7:4). The inscription of the psalm in the Septuagint, "A psalm for David on the first day of the week," reflects this.⁹⁸

PSALM 24:7–10 APPLIED TO SOLOMON AND JESUS

Justin says that the Jews applied these verses to Solomon when he took the ark into the temple (*Dialogue* 36.2).⁹⁹ The application to Solomon was rather common in later Jewish literature. The Babylonian Talmud says that when Solomon had built the temple and wished to take the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies, the gates of the temple refused to open. After Solomon prayed and repeated the words of Psalm 24:7, "Lift up your heads, O gates . . .," the gates rushed at him in a threatening manner, demanding, "Who is the King of glory?" Solomon then repeated the words of Psalm 24:9–10. Still the gates would not open. It was only after he added the words of 2 Chronicles 6:42, "Lord God turn not away the face of your anointed one [i.e., Messiah]," that the gates opened (*b. Shabbat* 33a). This story is repeated several times in the *Midrash Rabbah* in slightly modified versions.¹⁰⁰

97. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, vol. 1 of *The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, trans. John A. Baker (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1964), 258.

98. Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy*, 267.

99. In *Dialogue with Trypho* 85.1 Justin says that some Jews applied the verses to Hezekiah and others to Solomon. I have not found the application to Hezekiah in later Jewish literature.

100. Slotki, *Numbers*, vol. 6 of *Midrash Rabbah*, 570–71, 654; Cohen, *Lamentations* vol. 7 of *Midrash Rabbah*, 176.

The early Christians seem to have known the Jewish interpretation that connected the words of this psalm with Solomon approaching the gates of the temple. They, however, adapted it to the risen Christ approaching the gates of heaven. Justin, for example, in a blend of Psalm 24:7–9 with Psalm 110:1, says the words of the psalm are addressed to the heavenly rulers who are commanded to open the gates of heaven to the risen Christ when he ascends to sit at the Father's right hand until his enemies are made his footstool. The rulers of heaven, however, did not recognize the ascending Christ because his form still lacked glory. They ask, therefore, "Who is this King of glory?" The Holy Spirit answers, "The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory." Justin concludes that no one who had charge of the gates of the temple in Jerusalem would have dared refer to Solomon as "King of glory" (*Dialogue* 36.3–6).

PSALM 24 AND THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST IN THE FLESH

These verses were used by the early Christians to show that it was Christ in the flesh who ascended into heaven. This was due partly, no doubt, to confirm that he had been raised from the dead in the flesh. Tertullian, however, knows Psalm 24 as a psalm that speaks of the ascension of Christ but says nothing about the heavenly powers not recognizing Christ as he ascends (*Flight in Persecution* 12.2; *Scorpiace* 10.7; *Against Marcion* 5.17.5). Consequently, he says nothing of the ascent of the body of Christ, though he certainly believed that Christ arose from the dead in the flesh.

The dialogue in Psalm 24:7–10 is understood by the majority of the fathers as follows: Those commanded to open the gates are the heavenly powers. They respond by questioning the identity of the one approaching because they do not recognize the body of flesh. The one approaching is then identified as "the King of glory" to whom the gates should be opened. This theme is repeated by several of the fathers with minor modifications.¹⁰¹

Irenaeus sets the dialogue in the context of resurrection, ascension, and the sitting at the father's right hand announced in Psalm 110:1. Christ had escaped the notice of the heavenly powers, he says, when he descended from heaven to earth because he had been invisible. Now, however, after his incarnation, he is visible and the powers do not recognize him. This occasioned the dialogue between the angels in the higher heavens, who had charge of the gates, and the angels below, who had already seen and recognized the ascending Christ and who demanded that the gates be opened. Irenaeus closes out this entire sequence with the words of Psalm 110:1. The Christ who has risen and has ascended now waits at the Father's right hand until the judgment, when all his

101. See Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, 259–63.

enemies will be made subject to him (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 83–85; cf. *Against Heresies* 3.16.8).

THE BLENDING OF PSALM 24:7–10 WITH ISAIAH 63:1–3 TO DESCRIBE CHRIST'S ASCENSION

Origen makes the ascension scene more complex by blending Isaiah 63:1–3 with Psalm 24:7–10.¹⁰² After Christ destroyed his enemies by his passion and took up our infirmities, diseases, and sins, his garment were stained with the blood of battle. He must therefore ascend to the Father and be cleansed in a kind of baptism, Origen argues, before he can descend and distribute gifts to humanity (cf. Eph. 4:8–11). As Christ with his escort, approaches heaven, the powers ask in the words of Isaiah 63:1, "Who is this that is coming from Edom, with scarlet garments from Bosra, so beautiful?" And those escorting him say to those stationed at the gates of heaven, "Lift up your gates, and the king of glory will come in." The gatekeepers, however, hesitate because of the visible blood and ask further, in the words of Isaiah 62:2, "Why is your apparel red and your garments like the residue of a full wine-vat which has been trampled down?" Christ answers in a paraphrase of Isaiah 63:3 "I have crushed them in pieces" (*ComJn* 6.287–292; cf. *ComMt* 16.19).¹⁰³ In this dialogue it is the bloody wounds of the passion in the body of the ascending one that raise questions among the powers in heaven. This implies, of course, that it is the body of flesh that is ascending, as in the accounts of Irenaeus and Justin, which we noted above.

Origen was admired and read by many fathers in both East and West in the fourth century, and like him these fathers use Psalm 24:7–10 in either explicit or implicit conjunction with Isaiah 63:1–3 to emphasize the ascension of the body to heaven. Jerome, who is certainly dependent on Origen, uses these passages to interpret Ephesians 3:10–11 in his *Commentary on Ephesians*. He states Origen's doctrine that Christ's passion was for the angels and heavenly powers as well as for humans. The passion, he thinks, was that part of God's wisdom the heavenly beings had not known. "Accordingly," Jerome says, "they are amazed at God returning to heaven with a body and say, 'Who is this who come from Edom with scarlet garments from Bosra, so beautiful in his bright robe?' (Isa. 63:1). And in another passage, 'Who is this king of glory? The Lord of the powers, he is the king of glory' (Ps. 23[24]:8)."¹⁰⁴

102. We have already seen Origen blend Isa. 63:1 with Ps. 16:10 concerning the ascension. See n. 94 above.

103. Origen: *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 1–10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, FC 80 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 246–47.

104. Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, OPCS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 150.

Ambrose, another fourth-century Latin-speaking admirer of Origen, blends Isaiah 63 and Psalm 24 in his presentation of the ascension in his treatise *On the Mystery*. The sight of flesh ascending into heaven causes the powers to have doubts about Christ's identity, so they ask, "Who is this king of glory?" When some wanted to admit him and said, "Lift up your gates," others responded with the question of Isaiah 63:1: "Who is this that comes up from Edom, in garments red from Bosor?" (*On the Mystery* 7.36). In his treatise *On the Faith*, in which he argues against the Arians, who considered Christ less than God, Ambrose places a somewhat different emphasis on Psalm 24. In this context it is the glory of the ascending one and the numerous trophies he brings with him as conqueror of death that, Ambrose says, causes astonishment among the heavenly powers. Consequently, the angelic host seeks a more lofty entrance for Christ on his return than the gates through which he had departed. They cry out, therefore, that the gates be "lifted up." Some among the heavenly host, however, are still so overcome with amazement at the sight that they ask, "Who is the King of glory?" Other angels, who had been present at the resurrection and know who he is, reply, "It is the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." The cry goes out again to "lift up the gates," but the objectors repeat their question, "Who is the king of glory?" They ask, Ambrose explains, because they had seen him in his humiliation and cannot associate that with the glorious being they see before them. The first group replies to their question, "The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory." The Son, Ambrose then remarks, is the Lord of Hosts of Psalm 24:7–10. But "Lord of Hosts" is an appellation of the Father in the Old Testament. How, then, he concludes, can the Arians say the Son is less than the Father (*On the Faith* 4.1.5–14)? Isaiah 63 is not cited in this treatment of Psalm 24, because the use made of it in the Origenist tradition to highlight the ascension of the wounded flesh of Jesus would have detracted from the point Ambrose wants to make. Ambrose needs to emphasize the glorious nature of the Christ, not his humiliation, against the Arians.

Gregory of Nyssa, an ardent admirer of Origen in the East, repeats Origen's blend of Isaiah 63:1–2 with Psalm 24:7–10. Gregory emphasizes that the ascending Christ was unrecognized by the heavenly powers because he was wearing "the dirty robe of our life" and his garments were red "from the wine-vat of human evil."¹⁰⁵ Gregory of Nyssa's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, uses this same Origenist blend to discuss the ascension in his "Second Oration on Easter." He joins the emphasis on the ascension of the body to that on the exalted nature of the ascending

105. "In Ascensionem Christi," in *Sermones Pars I*, Gregorii Nysseni Opera 9, ed. G. Heil, A. van Heck, E. Gebhardt, and A. Spira (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 326.

one, which we noted above in Ambrose. On the one hand, Gregory of Nazianzus says that the gates should be "lifted up" or "made higher" to "receive him, exalted after his passion." This implies, as it did in Ambrose, that the gates are not adequate to receive the one approaching them. On the other hand, some of the heavenly beings doubt his identity because he "brings his body up with him along with the tokens of his passion, neither of which he had when he descended. These doubters who ask "Who is this King of glory?" are to be answered with the words of Psalm 24:8. If they also ask in Isaiah's words, "Who is this that comes from Edom?" they are to be told of the "beauty" of "the body that suffered and adorned by the passion, and made splendid by the Godhead" (*Oratio* 45.25).¹⁰⁶ According to the fathers, Isaiah's questions apply more explicitly to the suffering of the passion and the ascension of the flesh than do those of Psalm 24.

PSALM 24:7 AND THE OPENING OF HEAVEN FOR HUMANITY

Athanasius, another fourth-century Eastern father, uses Psalm 24:7 to speak of the ascension of the body of the Lord, but with a rather different emphasis. He argues that the Lord said, "Lift up your gates, you rulers, and be lifted up eternal gates" to open the gates of heaven for humanity. He did not need the gates to be opened for himself, Athanasius says, for he is "Lord of all" and "nothing of creation has been closed to the creator." Just as his body was delivered to death for humanity, so he now "paved the way of the ascent into heaven with it" (*On the Incarnation* 25).

The Calling of the Gentiles

The conversion of non-Jews to Christ was seen as an important validation of the early Christian claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah God had promised. This followed logically from the claim of his exaltation to the "right hand of God," where he sits until his enemies are made his subjects.¹⁰⁷ Psalm 2:7–8 is the most important Old Testament testimony the fathers use to prove Christ's universal kingship.¹⁰⁸ It is sometimes used in conjunction with either Isaiah 42:6–7 or Isaiah 49:6–7, both of which refer to the addressed person as "a light to the Gentiles."¹⁰⁹ Psalm 2:7–8 was especially important because it combines a statement understood to refer to the exaltation of Jesus, "The Lord said

106. *NPNF* 2 7, Sage Digital Library (Albany, OR: Sage Software, 1996), 83 modified.

107. See *1 Clement* 36.4–6, where Ps. 2:7–8 and Ps. 110:1 are cited in conjunction.

108. Beskow, *Rex Gloriorum*, 97.

109. These latter two texts appear together in a messianic argument in *Epistle of Barnabas* 14.7–8 without the addition of Ps. 2:7–8.

to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'" (see Acts 13:33), with a statement that makes the calling of the Gentiles the consequence of this exaltation, "Ask from me, and I will give you the nations (Gentiles) as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession." That the Gentiles, who were scattered to the ends of the earth, were turning to faith in Christ confirmed the Christian belief that Jesus of Nazareth had been the one indicated in Psalm 2:7–8.

JUSTIN: THE MESSIAH WILL INHERIT THE NATIONS

Justin begins his examination of the conversion of the Gentiles with the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 that "all the tribes of the earth" would be blessed in him. He focuses on the promise, however, as it is repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:4) and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). In the latter two passages the promise is made that "all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth" (26:4) or "tribes of the earth" (28:14) would be blessed "in your seed." In this context, Justin also cites Genesis 49:10, specifically the statement about the coming of a descendant of Judah who will "be the expectation of the nations." These words must be understood of Christ, he argues, for we who are Gentiles expect Jesus. A citation of Psalm 72:17, "All the nations (Gentiles)¹¹⁰ will be blessed in him," brings Justin back to the discussion of Abraham's seed with which he began. Here his point is that David no longer speaks of "seed" as the source of blessing for all the nations, but rather he speaks of a person, "him." "Now if," Justin argues, "all the nations are blessed in the Christ, and we, who come from all the nations, believe on him, then it follows that he is the Christ and we are those who are blessed through him."

"We are the ones," Justin continues, "who have received the gift of hearing, understanding, and being saved through this Christ." Justin's argument proceeds by linking key phrases repeated in the prophecies he cites: "a light for the nations," "a covenant for the race," and an "inheritance." Isaiah 49:6 points to the salvation of the Gentiles, Justin claims, because God says to Christ, "I have made you a light for the nations (Gentiles), that you might be their salvation to the farthest part of the earth." Justin insists to his Jewish opponents that these words refer to those Gentiles "who have been enlightened through Jesus." The words of Isaiah 42:6, which refer to one who has been appointed as "a covenant for the race" and who will be "a light for the Gentiles," are then cited and applied to Christ and the nations, who have been enlightened by him. This citation is followed closely by Isaiah 49:8, which also refers to the person addressed by God as a "covenant for the race" and which

110. Justin's text has "nations"; the text of the Septuagint (Ps. 71:17), as we have it today, has "tribes." The text of the Hebrew Bible has "nations."

says that this person will be given "the deserted as" his "inheritance." This provides the introduction for the testimony of Psalm 2:7–8, which serves as the lynchpin of Justin's argument. "What is Christ's inheritance?" Justin asks. "Is it not the nations? What is the covenant of God? Is it not the Christ? He says as much elsewhere: 'You are my son, I have begotten you today. Ask from me and I will give you the nations (Gentiles) as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession'" (*Dialogue* 119.4–122.6).¹¹¹

TERTULLIAN: HAS THE MESSIAH WHO INHERITS THE NATIONS COME?

While Tertullian follows the main lines of Justin's argument, he provides a more vivid and forceful form of it. The argument appears most fully in his treatise *Against the Jews*, where it shapes a large portion of the work, with a briefer version also appearing in *Against Marcion* 3.20. That the Christ was to come, Tertullian argues, is not at issue. Both Jews and Christians agree that the Christ is promised in the Old Testament. The point at issue is whether the Christ who was promised to come has actually come. Tertullian begins his argument by appealing to the evidence of the conversion of the Gentiles. Unfortunately, the first text to which he appeals is faulty in the version he uses. He cites Isaiah 45:1 from a text based on a Greek reading that has "Lord" (*kyriō*) instead of Cyrus (*kyrō*) in the opening clause and thus translates this verse, "Thus says the LORD God to Christ my Lord."¹¹² For Tertullian, this establishes that the verse is about the Christ. He concludes that the remaining words of the verse, which speak of nations hearing the Christ and cities being opened to him, refer to the acceptance of the gospel by the Gentiles. He then applies Psalm 19:4 to the preaching of the apostles as they go forth to the ends of the earth. A similar application of Psalm 19:4 was made by the apostle Paul in an argument that draws on several Old Testament texts to explain the Jewish rejection of the gospel (Rom. 10:18).

Tertullian next provides a list of nations into which the gospel has penetrated to prove that the Gentiles have turned to Christ in great

111. Irenaeus has a much briefer argument than Justin for the testimonial power of the conversion of the Gentiles. He does argue, however, that Ps. 2:8 must be understood of Christ and not of David, for only the former has dominion over the nations (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 49; cf. *Against Heresies* 4.21.3). Eusebius devotes book 2 of his *Demonstration of the Gospel* to the subject of the conversion of the Gentiles and ransacks the Old Testament for texts that can be applied to the subject. He finds far more texts than have been included in our discussion. All the key texts used by Justin, however, make their appearance in Eusebius's argument (*Proof of the Gospel* 2.2).

112. Isa. 45:1 is cited in the same way in the earlier Greek text of *Epistle of Barnabas* 12.11.

numbers. He begins with a list that depends on Acts 2:9–10 but supplements this with people from the North African regions of Gaetulia and Mauretania, western Europeans from the regions of Spain and Gaul (France), inhabitants of Great Britain, Slavic people of Sarmatia (modern Russia), Dacians from the regions around Transylvania, Germans of central Europe, and nomadic tribes of northern Europe and Asia known as Scythians. There are people bearing the name of Christ in all these places, Tertullian asserts, and therefore it can be said that Christ is reigning over all nations. This could be said of no previous king in human history, whether a Hebrew or a pagan king (*Answer to the Jews* 7.1–8). “The name of Christ,” Tertullian claims, “is spread everywhere, is believed everywhere, is revered in all the nations previously listed, rules everywhere, is worshiped everywhere” (*Answer to the Jews* 7.9).

At this point in his argument Tertullian runs through a series of prophetic texts concerning the Christ, many of which we have considered earlier in this chapter (*Answer to the Jews* 8–14). In the middle of this discussion, Tertullian returns to the argument of the conversion of the Gentiles and anchors it in Psalm 2:7–8: “You are my son; I have begotten you today. Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your possession.” The “son” mentioned here, he argues, cannot refer to David because of the promise of ruling the “ends of the earth.” David ruled only Judea. This must be understood of the Christ, who has “now taken the entire world as his possession by faith in his gospel.” Tertullian then cites Isaiah 42:6–7 with a midrashic explanation of its phrases to confirm this understanding.

“Behold, I have given you as a covenant for my race, a light for the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind,” that is of the erring, “to release the bonds of those bound,” that is to free them from transgressions, “and those held in prison,” meaning death, “who sit in darkness,” referring, of course, to ignorance.

If, Tertullian argues, all these things have been accomplished through Christ, then no other should be expected as the referent of these prophecies (*Answer to the Jews* 12).

Tertullian then returns to further prophecies of the Christ concerning topics that I have discussed already in this chapter—his birth, his passion, and his glorification. At the conclusion of this treatise, Tertullian returns once more to Psalm 2:7–8 and the topic of the conversion of the Gentiles. Whole nations, Tertullian argues, are rising up from the depth of human error to the creator and his Christ. The words of Psalm 2:7–8 prevent anyone from denying that such action by the nations had been prophesied. Nor can anyone argue that the words of these verses apply

to anyone other than Christ, “who has illuminated the entire world with the rays of his gospel” (*Answer to the Jews* 14.12–13). While Tertullian mines most of the proof from prophecy in this treatise, his overall argument is unique in the stress he puts on the proof related to the conversion of the Gentiles. This is clearly the argument that he believes carries the most weight. He begins with it, as noted above, inserts it again in the middle of the treatise, and concludes with it. It is this argument on which he hangs the burden of his claim that the Christ who has come is the Christ who was to come. “You cannot maintain that to be future” he says, “which you see occurring” (*Answer to the Jews* 14.13).

Mortar and Bricks

The prophetic texts that have been considered in this chapter, and others like them, shaped the early Christians’ understanding of Jesus. They identified him as the promised one sent by God for the salvation of humanity. It was the understanding of Jesus derived from these texts that caused the early Christians to spread the message that the promised one had come and that salvation was now available through his name. It was the image of Jesus shaped by these texts that was expressed in the later doctrines known as Christology and soteriology.

It might be said that the prophetic texts of the Old Testament served as the mortar for the church’s construction of its understanding of Christ. Mortar is not the primary material in the edifice. Bricks are the primary material. The primary material in the church’s understanding of Christ is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Mortar, however, is essential to the edifice, enabling it to take form and hold together. Without the prophetic texts of the Old Testament, the early Christians would not have drawn the conclusions that they did concerning Jesus. The ancient Jewish prophetic texts that the early Christians read and wrestled with in their attempt to understand who Jesus of Nazareth had been and what his life meant for their lives lie close at hand in the Christian Bible. The early Christians were the first to make their way through these texts from a specifically Christian viewpoint. This gives them the right to a voice in all subsequent discussions of how Christians read these texts.