

a Very “Different” Messiah



For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

IT IS IRONIC that when the day finally arrives when the Messiah fulfills the role expected by Israel, so few of them will be able to experience or even witness it. In their study and understanding of the Scriptures, ancient Israel did not see the Messiah as the Suffering Servant, as the Lamb of God, but only as an all-powerful, no-nonsense ruler. Their picture of the Messiah was defined by passages such as Psalm 2:9—

You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware.

—instead of passages such as Zechariah 9:9, where He is pictured in humility and gentleness.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Because He did not come in power and might, they rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. He came to this world by means of a grubby, smelly stable—a peasant born in peasant surroundings. His teaching was, for the most part, rural; Jesus trod the dusty roads of Judea, speaking to common people and leading a rather motley, unkempt group of disciples. He did nothing to ingratiate Himself to the power elite; He did nothing to overthrow Roman tyranny; and He died an excruciating, humiliating death. This, in the eyes of Israel's religious leaders, could not possibly have been the promised Messiah or Prophet.

The Old Testament evidence, however, is clear: Jesus was and is the only individual who fulfilled every Messianic prophecy. And those prophecies described a Messiah that would first come as the Suffering Servant, the gentle and sacrificial Lamb of God.

He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.

Isaiah 53:3-6

Then this same Messiah would return in triumph, as King and Ruler—and Judge. In the very first split second of Christ's return for His church, He announces that He is no longer the gentle, humble Messiah of before. Now He is Lord.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

Thus begins the climactic third and final act of God's economy for man. The curtain is just opening and even in the first seconds Jesus the Messiah is already fulfilling His role as Judge: He selects from the earth's graves and environs only those who already know Him, who are His brothers and sisters by faith.

Only from a human perspective is this a very different Messiah; from the perspective of heaven He presents Himself now to humanity what He has been all long. When, on earth, He was revealing Himself as the Suffering Servant, Jesus was also King. In the end times, when He reveals Himself as reigning King and Judge, He remains the gentle, giving Savior.

The essential Son of God has not changed from one thing to another; His personality has not undergone a transformation. The suffering, sacrificial servant was *needed* at the beginning of the second act, just as the reigning King and Judge will be needed in the third.