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**Fall Term 2024**

**Sacred Texts 250 - Course Syllabus**

**“The One Who Is To Come”:**

**Exploring the Concept of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible – and Beyond**

**Huron University College Land Acknowledgment**

Huron is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron, and Lenape peoples, whose sharing and stewardship of the land has been governed by the Dish with One Spoon treaty since time immemorial. We are guided by this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. Huron University College acknowledges its past role in perpetuating colonial and exclusionary relations. Because religious and ecclesial institutions were instrumental in such relations, we consider it our particular responsibility as a Faculty of Theology to work towards justice and reconciliation.

**Course Dates:** From September 5th, 2024 – October 24th, 2024

**Time:** [Thursdays] from 7 – 9 P.M. (CT); 8 – 10 P.M. (ET)

**Delivery:** Hosted via Zoom

**Instructor:** Dr. Murray Watson, SSL (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome), Ph.D. (Trinity College, Dublin)

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**Course Description**

Because the concept of the Messiah [=Christ] is foundational for Christianity, it has been the subject of discussion and debate between Jews and Christians for nearly 2000 years. How did Judaism think about the Messiah before, during, and after Jesus’ time? How does Christianity’s “messianic lens” impact its reading of many portions of the Hebrew Scriptures? Why do Jews and Christians disagree so passionately about the presence (or absence) of messianic references in the sacred texts they share?

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes**

This course will offer a historical overview of the development of messianic ideas in Judaism, will examine key Biblical passages and terminology linked to the Messiah in both Jewish and Christian thinking, and will help us to understand the ways that Jewish and Christian expectations of the Messiah overlap—and diverge—*and why.* As well as deepening our understanding of the layers of potential meaning in key Biblical passages, this course will enable students to engage in contemporary interreligious conversations with greater sensitivity, nuance and knowledge, and to appreciate the rich, complex relationships that link Judaism and Christianity, rooted in the Scriptures they share.

**Required Texts**

Course learning materials will be made available digitally, online, throughout the course.

**Course Outline / Learning Plan**

**WEEK 1**

Pre-Class Reading: Michael Hilton’s article “Messiah” from the *Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* ([https://shorturl.at/ABysf](about:blank) )

Welcome and Course Introduction – Overview of Class Assignments and Expectations

Differing ideas about the Messiah: The major area of difference and debate between Jews and Christians for 1900 years, since “the partings of the ways.”

Neither Jews nor Christians approach the Bible “neutrally,” without presuppositions: What are some of the different interpretive “lenses” we bring to our reading of our shared Scriptures?

For most Christians: a general lack of familiarity with Judaism (ancient, medieval, or contemporary), apart from the Bible (especially the Gospels and St. Paul)

Traditional Christian perceptions of Judaism as “lacking” or “deficient”: the Advent hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and the (inaccurate) idea that Judaism is defined by its *lack* of belief in Jesus.

How essential is the Messiah for Jews (in the past and today)? The broad diversity/ pluralism of Jewish thought on this question, both then and now – some quotes to illustrate this.

A sampling of some key “milestones” in the evolution of Jewish messianisms

The noun “messiah” [Heb *mashiach* מָשִׁיח], the verb *mashach* [מָשַׁח], and their meanings and occurrences in the Bible – different *categories* of “anointed ones” in the Hebrew Bible.

**WEEK 2**

Suggested Pre-Class Reading: “Messiah” from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica:* [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IRQYsvnjWtnPVK44H61Irj9BgCjDlo9U/view?usp=sharing](about:blank)   
Chief Rabbi Riccardo di Segni’s comments on the concept of the Messiah: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rp8OcGdjuVtURptFi\_UqWbyZfAbbit5h/view?usp=sharing](about:blank)

Messianism: a sub-category of Jewish (and Christian) eschatology (= theological thinking about what will occur in the “End Times”; *eschatos* = “final, end” in Greek)

David and Solomon’s United Kingdom (930-920 BC) and the breakup and decline of the Davidic monarchy (continued in the Southern Kingdom of Judah until at least its conquest by the Babylonians in 587/85 BC)—and the beginning seeds of Jewish messianism, which would morph and evolve in later centuries.

Messianism as a “theology of absence”—matched with the conviction of God’s unshakeable faithfulness to God’s promises in Scripture.

The theological and political pluralism of Second Temple [=516 BC to AD 70] Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, Qumran, Herodians, etc.), and their varying messianism**s**

There was not a single, universally-accepted “checklist” of passages that were considered “messianic” by all Jews of that period; each different group had their own conceptions about the Messiah, and their own Biblical passages that they looked to as “messianic.”

Appendix 9 in Alfred Edersheim’s *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883 and after)*:* a total of 456 Biblical passages applied messianically in rabbinic sources (75 from the Pentateuch, 243 from the Prophets, 138 from the Writings [including the Psalms])

**WEEK 3**

Recommended Pre-Class Reading:

David Stern, “Midrash and Jewish Biblical Interpretation” (from the *Jewish Study Bible):* [https://shorturl.at/ht8lh](about:blank)

Pauline Viviano OP, “The Senses of Scripture”: [https://shorturl.at/2wNba](about:blank)

Understanding Traditional Jewish and Christian Hermeneutical (Interpretive) Methods

In their traditional forms, neither Judaism nor Christianity is “fundamentalist” (in the sense of accepting only a univocal literal/historical/scientific reading of the text of the Bible); this is a *much more recent* phenomenon (late 19th/early 20th centuries).

**Jewish Approaches:** “Scripture speaks with 70 voices” (= there is no single “right” interpretation); “Both these and those are the words of the living God”

*Pirqe Avot:* “Ben Bag-Bag used to say: ‘Turn it [the Scripture] and turn it again, for everything is contained in it”: There are many ways of looking at the Bible, and the Bible ultimately holds the answer to every important question, when approached in the right way.

Scripture speaks to, and is applicable to, every generation; it is never “frozen in time”; it is eternally relevant, and each generation needs to think about what is says to them and their situation (i.e., the questions raised by the invention of electricity, or the Internet, etc.).

Because it is all divinely inspired, any part of the Hebrew Bible can be brought into relationship with any other part, to throw light on the meaning of words and expressions

Analogy: similar wording in different locations means that those verses can/should be viewed in light of each other - *Gezerah shavah.*

Nothing in the Bible is *accidental;* every detail (including unusual spellings or rare/strange forms) is an invitation from God to delve more deeply, and to better understand the intention of the Divine Author, which only reveals itself to those who devote themselves to its study.

Flexibility/Playfulness with regard to the order of letters, the proper vowels, the ways words should be broken up or spelled.

The moral applicability of Scripture: what does it say about *how God wants us to live our lives?* i.e., Biblical interpretation is never merely theoretical; it always has a goal, which is to live a life in keeping with God’s covenant.

*PaRDeS: Peshat, Remez, D’rash, Sod* (Acronym for the four levels of interpretation) – the foundational importance of the “obvious” (grammatical) meaning.

**Christian Approaches:**

Many assumptions in common with (and inherited from) Jewish interpreters. In addition:

The Christological Lens: Everything must be viewed in relation to Jesus—pointing to Him, or throwing light upon His life and character.

The “Four Senses” of Scripture (Literal, Allegorical/Symbolic, Moral, Anagogical) – the *“quadriga”* (=Roman chariot pulled by four horses).

Some Biblical passages that *both Jewish and Christian interpreters* have (sometimes) looked to as messianic:

Psalm 72

Zechariah 9:9-10

**WEEK 4**

Exploring some Biblical passages that are significant in traditional Jewish discussions of the Messiah (Part 1)

Genesis 49:10: Jacob’s Blessing of His Son Judah / The Mystery of “Shiloh”

Lexham English Bible: The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff between his feet, **until Shiloh comes.** And to him shall be the obedience of nations.

NRSV: The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, **until tribute comes to him;** and the obedience of the peoples is his.

RSV: The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, **until he comes to whom it belongs;** and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Numbers 24:17: The “Star” Prophecy of Balaam

**WEEK 5**

Exploring some Biblical passages that are significant in traditional Jewish discussions of the Messiah (Part 2)

Isaiah 11:1-9: The “Branch” from the Stump of Jesse (and the importance of “Branch” imagery, especially in some of the Targums)

Hosea 3:4-5: The Reconversion of the Israelites in the Time of David’s Descendant

**WEEK 6**

Exploring some Biblical passages that are significant in Christian discussions of the Messiah (Part 1)

New Testament citations/allusions to the Hebrew Bible

Psalm 2

Psalm 110

**WEEK 7**

Exploring some Biblical passages that are significant in Christian discussions of the Messiah (Part 2)

Isaiah 53: The Suffering Servant of the Lord (and Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” texts more generally)

**WEEK 8**

Suggested Pre-Class Reading: David Novak, “Supersessionism Hard and Soft,” in *First Things* magazine (February 2019); online at: [https://shorturl.at/6W7j6](about:blank) or downloadable at: [https://shorturl.at/Y5X7b](about:blank)

Christian Messianism and Its Traditional Relationship to Supersessionism / “Replacement Theology”

Moving beyond the traditional Christian dismissal of Judaism as “lacking” or “deliberately refusing to believe”—appreciation for Judaism’s unique approach to the Bible—and how it is distinct from many Christian approaches.

A return to “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”: How do we remain faithful to Christian understandings—while also demonstrating respect and sensitivity for our Jewish sisters and brothers?

Wrap-Up and concluding reflections/questions

**Method of Evaluation and Criteria for Grading**

(only for students choosing to be evaluated for full course credit)

**Course Assignments:**

1. Read the two chapters from Grant & Tracy’s introductory history of the interpretation of the Bible, on the early Christian use of the Hebrew Bible ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bSY9SrDzZ2aQVV-x5vrVnCpoGNpPRgor/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) ). In roughly one single-spaced typed page (±500 words), share what you found intriguing, interesting, or new in the ways early Christians read and employed the Bible they had inherited from Judaism. Are there aspects of those methods of interpretation that you think are still helpful/relevant today—and why? **(30%) (Due between our Week 2 and Week 3 classes)**
2. Read Chapter 6 of David Klinghoffer’s 2005 book, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History* ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a02nyd8kFrbwdfbNMs6ZHzKm7nCMcj-7/view?usp=sharing](about:blank) )*.* In this chapter, Klinghoffer examines the medieval situation between Jews and Christians, including the theological disputations organized between their respective scholars. In roughly one single-spaced typed page (±500 words), share with me: What parts of this history were new to you, and how did you feel as you learned about it? If you had been a Jewish person raised in this period, how do you think you would have felt about Christianity and its arguments? Why? Was there anything else in this chapter that you found interesting or thought-provoking—and why? **(30%) (Due between our Week 5 and Week 6 classes)**
3. Read Erwin Rosenthal’s article ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x\_fQiUpgPzPo8DZlKnvsihIkzIBXBFjk/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) ) on the reading and study of the Bible by Jews in the Middle Ages **(warning: parts of this article are a bit dense, and should be read slowly, perhaps with a dictionary or Google close at hand!).** In two single-spaced typed pages (1000 words, more or less), share with me 3 or 4 points (or significant interpreters) that were new for you in this article, and why you found them worthwhile or interesting. **(40%) (Due within the week following our final class)**

**GLOSSARY OF SOME KEY TERMS (developed with the assistance of ChatGPT)**

**Exegesis:** The critical explanation or interpretation of biblical texts, aiming to uncover the original meaning intended by the authors.

**Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of scriptural texts, encompassing various approaches and techniques.

**Septuagint:** a collection of Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible, produced *circa* 200 BC (from the Greek word for 70, since ancient legends speak of 70 or 72 Jewish translators producing a miraculously uniform Greek translation)

**Supersessionism**: the longstanding Christian belief that Christianity is both the fulfillment of Biblical Judaism and, in a certain sense, its “replacement” as God’s covenant people. This often implies that Judaism no longer has a purpose in God’s plan of salvation.

**For Judaism:**

**Mishnah**: The first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions, forming the basis of the Talmud. Compiled around 200 CE by Rabbi Judah the Prince.

**Gemara:** A component of the Talmud, it is a rabbinical analysis and commentary on the Mishnah, elaborating on its teachings and resolving questions.

**Talmud**: A central text of Rabbinic Judaism, consisting of the Mishnah and the Gemara, it is a comprehensive written version of the Jewish oral law and its subsequent commentaries.

**Targum**: Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible that were used to help Jews understand the scriptures during and after the Babylonian exile.

**Peshat**: The plain, straightforward, or literal interpretation of a biblical text. It seeks to understand the text based on its simple, direct meaning.

**Remez**: The allegorical or ‘hinted’ meaning of the text, seeking deeper insights that are not immediately obvious from the plain text.

**D’rash**: A method of interpreting biblical texts that goes beyond the literal meaning to explore deeper, often homiletical or moral, lessons.

**Sod**: The mystical or secret level of biblical interpretation, often associated with Kabbalah and the esoteric meanings of the text.

**Midrash:** A genre of rabbinic literature that provides commentary on the Hebrew scriptures, often using storytelling to explain and elaborate on biblical narratives.

**Halakhah:** The collective body of Jewish religious laws derived from the Written and Oral Torah, governing all aspects of Jewish life.

**Aggadah/Haggadah:** Rabbinic literature on non-legal topics, including stories, ethics, theology, and folklore found in the Talmud and Midrash.

**Torah:** The central reference of the religious Judaic tradition, comprising the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally believed to be authored by Moses.

**Pesher:** A method of biblical interpretation used in the Dead Sea Scrolls (and, to a certain degree, in Christianity as well), where biblical prophecies are explained as referring to the contemporary events and figures of the interpreters' own time.

**Rashi:** Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, an 11th-century French rabbi and author of comprehensive commentaries on the Talmud and the Hebrew Bible. His works are foundational in Jewish study.

**Masoretic Text:** The authoritative Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible, meticulously compiled and preserved by Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes.

**For Christianity:**

**Patristic Interpretation:** The study of how the early Church Fathers (major church writers before about AD 800) interpreted the Bible, often emphasizing allegorical and typological readings.

**Quadriga:** A method of biblical interpretation that identifies four senses of Scripture: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical (based on a type of Roman chariot pulled by 4 horses)

**Literal Sense:** The straightforward, direct meaning of the text, focusing on the actual events, persons, and things described.

**Allegorical Sense**: Interpretation that seeks deeper, symbolic meanings within biblical narratives, often finding representations of Christ and the Church.

**Allegory:** A literary device used in biblical interpretation where characters and events represent abstract ideas or spiritual truths.

**Moral Sense (Tropological):** Reading the Bible to discern ethical lessons and how one should live according to Christian virtues and moral teachings.

**Anagogical Sense:** Interpretation that looks forward to the ultimate destiny of humans and the eternal significance of biblical texts, often associated with eschatology.

**Typology:** A method of interpretation where events, persons, or institutions in the Old Testament are seen as prefigurations (‘types’) of events, persons, or institutions in the New Testament.

**Church Fathers:** Influential theologians and writers of the early Christian Church (up to the 8th century), whose works are foundational for Christian theology and biblical interpretation.

**Vulgate:** The Latin translation of the Bible completed by St. Jerome in the late 4th century, which became the standard Bible for the Western Church.

***Sensus Plenior:*** The "fuller sense" of scripture, where texts have deeper meanings intended by God but not necessarily known by the human authors.

**Some suggested resources to explore this topic in more depth:**

There is a truly massive scholarly literature on these topics, by both Jewish and Christian scholars. For some good overviews of this topic:

Patai, Raphael. *The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends of Three Thousand Years*. Wayne State University Press, 1979.

Collins, John J. *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls.* Second ed. Eerdmans, 2010.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The One Who Is to Come*. Eerdmans, 2007.

Klausner, Joseph. *The Messianic Idea in Israel, from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah.* George Allen and Unwin, 1956.

Mowinckel, Sigmund. *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*. Abingdon Press, 1954.

Lenowitz, Harris. *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Neusner, Jacob*, et al.* *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Silver, Abba Hillel. *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel: From the First Through the Seventeenth Centuries.* Beacon Press, 1959.

Maccoby, Hyam, *et al. Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages.* Vallentine Mitchell, 1993.

Buchanan, George Wesley*. Jewish Messianic Movements From AD 70 to AD 1300: Documents from the Fall of Jerusalem to the End of the Crusades.* Wipf and Stock Pub, 2003.

Also: relevant articles in Christian and Jewish reference sources, such as the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd edn.)

**Huron Grade Descriptors**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| A+ | 90-100 | One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level |
| A | 80-89 | Superior work which is clearly above average |
| B | 70-79 | Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory |
| C | 60-69 | Competent work, meeting requirements |
| D | 50-59 | Fair work, minimally acceptable |
| F | below 50 | Fail |

**Student Code of Conduct**

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work, and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails.

While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at: [https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf](about:blank).

**Statement on the Recording of Class Activities**

Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student’s own private use.

Online courses within the Licentiate in Theology Program are recorded for student engagement purposes. These recording are only used by the registered students of the class and made available through a restricted video hosting site to respect both privacy and intellectual property. Should a student be uncomfortable with this practice, they can contact the course instructor or the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca

**Support Services**

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should contact the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at [grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca](mailto:grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca).

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THIS COURSE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HURON’S FACULTY OF THEOLOGY COMMITTEE

FOR THE FALL TERM OF THE LTH PROGRAM, 2024.