



From Atheist to Theist (Part 25)

New Testament Support?

By

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Two Messengers

John the Baptist claimed to be the promised “messenger” who would “prepare the way of the Lord” –

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.’” Isaiah 40:3

It’s interesting to note that the Isaiah reference speaks of the voice of the one in the wilderness preparing the way of the “Lord” and making straight in the desert a highway for “our God.”

Here’s the Malachi reference Mark used –

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight.

Behold, He is coming,’ Says the Lord of hosts.”

Malachi 3:1

The Gospel writers referred to John the Baptist as being the “messenger” of God who would prepare the way before God, and someone else called “the Messenger of the covenant.”

Malachi, believed to be the last of the Old Testament prophets, prophesied that God would send two messengers to Israel at a future time. One would prepare the way for the other.

The Gospel writers claimed that John the Baptist was the first messenger who prepared the way for the second Messenger, Jesus of Nazareth.

Broad View

Investigative reporting looks at a story from both broad and narrow views. Here are some examples of what I saw as I looked at reports about the two messengers –

- First messenger, Old Testament – “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.”
- First messenger, New Testament – “As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”
- Second Messenger, Old Testament – “And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple,

Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, ‘Says the Lord of hosts.’

- Second Messenger, New Testament – “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

Narrow View

- Second Messenger, Old Testament – “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.” Malachi 3:2-3
- Second Messenger, New Testament – “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Both views, broad and narrow, are seen in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the first and second messengers.

Messenger Exchange

John the Baptist appears prominently at the beginning of all four Gospel accounts, but soon disappears from view. Why? As John said – “It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”

John the Baptist was arrested and placed in prison sometime after baptizing Jesus and said these words concerning his relationship with Him –

“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly

and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:28-36

The Messiah

John the Baptist said that he was not “the Christ.” What or who was “the Christ”?

That question became prominent during my investigation of the New Testament. The word “Christ” is used hundreds of times in the New Testament. The English word “Christ” comes from the Greek word Christós (Χριστός), meaning “anointed.” The Greek word was the translation of the Hebrew word mashiach (מֶשֶׁיחַ), also meaning “anointed.” The English version of the Hebrew word is “Messiah.”

The Hebrew word is found almost 40 times in the Old Testament and several of them are well known as prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah (Christ) to Israel. One of the most prominent is found in the prophecy of Daniel –

“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. ‘And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,

Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate.” Daniel 9:24-27

The first Old Testament verse that seemed to point to an “anointed one” of God is Genesis 3:15 where God said these words to the serpent (Satan) –

“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed; He shall
bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Other Old Testament references that I looked at as possibly referring to a Messiah included –

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”
Genesis 49:10

“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.” Numbers 24:17

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” Deuteronomy 18:15

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another.” Job 19:25-27

“Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;

The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: ‘Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.’ ‘I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” Psalm 2

“They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, Throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, Like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles Will bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba Will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him. For He will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, And will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight. And He shall live; And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; Prayer also will be made for Him continually,

And daily He shall be praised. There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, On the top of the mountains; Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; And those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.” Psalm 72:5-19

“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The Lord has sworn And will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.' The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head." Psalm 110

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into

pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:2-4

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.” Isaiah 7:14-17

“Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. For every warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Isaiah 9:1-7

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And
faithfulness the belt of His waist.” Isaiah 11:1-5

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be
exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as
many were astonished at you, So His visage was
marred more than any man, And His form more
than the sons of men; So shall He sprinkle many
nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For
what had not been told them they shall see, And
what they had not heard they shall consider.” Isaiah
52:13-15

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the
arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow
up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out
of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And
when we see Him, There is no beauty that we
should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by
men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was

any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53

Other Old Testament chapters you can check include: Jeremiah 23; Jeremiah 30; Ezekiel 17; Ezekiel 21; Hosea 1; Hosea 6; Joel 3; Amos 9; Micah 2; Micah 4; Micah 5; Zephaniah 3; Haggai 2; Zechariah 2; Zechariah 3; Zechariah 6; Zechariah 8; Zechariah 9; Zechariah 11; Zechariah 12; Zechariah 13; and Zechariah 14.

‘Christ’ in the New Testament

The New Testament refers to Jesus of Nazareth as “the Christ” hundreds of times. Here are several examples from the Gospels –

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:18

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11

“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” Matthew 16:16

“Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” John 4:42

“And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’ John 7:31

“She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’ John 11:27

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” John 20:30-31

Next Time

Did Jesus of Nazareth believe He was the Messiah of Israel? Did He make that claim or was it only others who thought that?

I'll share what I learned during my investigation in the next part of this series — *From Atheist to Theist*.