

HOPE FILLED FULL

Echoes of Scripture in the New Testament

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PART THREE: THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE HOPES OF THE PSALMS

Introduction

One goal I have in writing this series of essays is to show why a good number of objections about biblical prophecy raised by skeptics are the result of a failure to understand biblical prophecy. Farrell Till, for instance, focuses on New Testament quotations of the Old Testament, claiming that they are arbitrary and manipulative citations. Variations on this claim have existed for a long time, resurfacing recently in Harold Bloom's book *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (2005).

In Part One of this essay, I discussed three institutions and themes arising from the Pentateuch: (1) the expectation of a coming King, (2) dissatisfaction with the Tabernacle (and by extension, Temple) arrangement as a way of mediating the relationship between God and His people, and (3) the provisional nature of the ethical laws given at Sinai. I noted there that the Pentateuch itself looked forward to a change in the relationship between God and Israel. This change, yet future to the composition of the Pentateuch, would fulfill expectations and resolve tensions laid down in Israel's founding document. In addition, I made some foundational observations about the way the Old Testament states its prophetic expectations; they are both broader and deeper than Till perceives. They are not, contrary to Till's claim, dependent on one or two isolated verses here and there; this Jesus and the New Testament writers indeed recognized, whereas Till does not. In fact, most of Till's misunderstandings are the result of his lack of engagement with the Old Testament and how Israel's hopes for a Davidic King were actually expressed literarily; some of his misunderstandings also come from his failure to grasp how literary intertextuality in Scripture truly functions. As for the other two themes – Tabernacle/Temple and Laws – Till demonstrates little to no concern about them but I think it useful to explore those themes regardless, for they are part of the overall Christian claim with which skeptics must contend.

In Part Two, I discussed the prophecy of Isaiah. While I certainly did not do justice to the massive undertaking of Isaiah, I believe I did trace through the major themes of Isaiah's hopes, and considered the way in which the New Testament claims that Jesus inaugurated their fulfillment in quite specific ways. Because of his position in the history of Israel, Isaiah developed the expectation of the coming King to a greater degree and in greater detail than the Pentateuch. The themes of the King entering into Israel's Exile and suffering, bringing Israel out of Exile, restoring Jerusalem, and exerting his reign over the Gentile nations are quite developed in Isaiah. I considered the validity of Isaiah 52 – 53 as a specific prediction of Jesus of Nazareth in light of all these themes, arguing for Jesus as the one about whom the prophet spoke.

Methodologically, while I could continue to take the Old Testament book by book to trace how those three major themes are developed and how the expectations are fulfilled only by Jesus of Nazareth, I think it best to get a bit more quickly to the point. Thus, here in Part Three, I work in the opposite direction – from the New Testament backward into the Old Testament. I focus on Luke's writings in particular to show how Luke connected Jesus to those the expectations for a Davidic King from the Psalms. I thought it best to not try my reader's patience by repeating analysis of the Pentateuch and Isaiah presented the previous Parts, but this material is best read if my readers have an acquaintance with my observations there.

Jesus as King, Heir of David

Each Gospel writer portrays Jesus as the long-expected Messianic heir of David. Historical studies of Second Temple Judaism affirm that Jews in this period expected such a figure and searched their Scriptures for clues about who this person would be. I will first give a high level view of Luke's writings on this theme. Then I will give a more careful reading of Luke's quotations of the Old Testament. Since Luke asserts that Jesus is the heir to the

throne of King David, he does this through two main methods. I will also, where appropriate, comment on Matthew, Mark, and John in their quotations of the Old Testament on the theme of Jesus as Davidic Messianic King.

First and foremost, *Luke connects Jesus to David through the promise – fulfillment arrangement God initiated with David, presenting Jesus as the ultimate heir of David.* Luke begins both of his volumes by referring to Jesus' enthronement on the Davidic throne over Israel. Luke's Gospel begins with Gabriel's announcement of Jesus' future enthronement, 'He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end' (Lk.1:32 – 33). This Messianic expectation about the heir of David has its root in many Old Testament texts, some of which I highlight in my analysis of Isaiah in Part Two, some of which I will highlight below.

Similarly, Acts begins with Jesus' enthronement, this time his actual enthronement by means of his ascension. In Acts 1:1 – 11, Luke uses language from Daniel's vision of the 'Son of Man' coming 'on the clouds' to receive a kingdom that is an 'everlasting dominion' among all nations (Dan.7:13 – 14). Luke does not explicitly identify this phrase as a quote from Daniel, but I believe there is firm basis for exploring the verbal parallel ('on a cloud' in Acts 1:9). In the Old Testament, the angel Gabriel appears only in Daniel and there he appears twice (Dan.8 and 9). Hence the reappearance of Gabriel at the start of Luke's Gospel not only signals Jesus' inevitable enthronement in terms of Daniel's expectations, but also affirms my identification of a literary tie between Acts and Daniel where Acts unfolds the implications of the enthroned Son of Man vision becoming reality through Jesus in the political world of the Roman Empire. In any case, Luke structures Acts in the same way as he does the Gospel, except that Jesus' enthronement, which is anticipated in the Gospel by Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Lk.9:51ff.) to confront the false leaders, is realized in Acts, where the Christian message ripples outward from Jerusalem to the whole world to confront all other political powers with the proclamation that there is 'another king, Jesus' (Acts 17:7). The literary action of Luke's narrative pivots around Jerusalem because of its political and prophetic significance as the capital of the Davidic kings. Much, much more can be said about this, as Luke also sees in Isaiah, Micah, and many other Hebrew prophets a basis for saying that the relationship of David to Jesus is a promise – fulfillment, so my analysis does not hang exclusively on this very cursory analysis of Luke's use of Daniel.¹

Secondly, Luke employs a literary technique to complement the promise – fulfillment relation. *He brings the story of Jesus into close parallel with the story of David.* This is seen through some of the following narrative sections using David as an antecedent to Jesus, who amplifies David's story. The relation is one of *antecedent to amplification*.

1. Luke sees in the birth sequence of Jesus a parallel to the events that led to the rise of Jesus' predecessor, David, as King. Zacharias and Elizabeth are reminiscent of Elkanah and Hannah. Both couples were old and childless; both were longing for a child; both had sons born through divine intervention; both sons became prophets to Israel. The boy Samuel became the prophet who anointed David, the first true king over Israel. The boy John became the prophet who anointed Jesus, the last true king over Israel, as well as the world. The inauguration of the house of David provides the basic themes and structure for the restoration of the house of David.
2. Luke narrates Jesus himself invoking the story of David during his ministry in Galilee. The Pharisees interrogated Jesus and his disciples about why they could pick and eat grain on the Sabbath (Lk.6:1 – 5). At first glance, Jesus' response seems to be a non-sequitur: 'Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?' But Jesus is turning the tables and raising the stakes. The story comes from 1 Samuel 21, where David was fleeing from Saul's henchmen. David went to the priests who were sympathetic to him and got supplies. He ate holy bread from the Tabernacle sanctuary, which was normally not allowed. But it was acceptable because David was the king and also in the presence of God. Jesus' message is: 'Look at the situation. You are pursuing me and my followers just like Saul and his cronies pursued David. I am in the wilderness building up a band of followers like David did. You are in power, but will be overthrown

¹ My study of Isaiah and Luke's use of Isaiah in Part Two supplies examples of Luke seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to David. Furthermore, Simon Peter and Paul both use the Psalms in their leading speeches (in Acts 2:22 – 36 and 13:14 – 41, respectively) to present Jesus as the kingly heir of David and the fulfillment of God's promise to David. See also a brief treatment of Psalm 110 below.

because I am the true king. My disciples can eat on the Sabbath because they are in my presence, like David and his men were in God's presence in the Tabernacle; God is present in me.' By quoting from the David story, Jesus is making strong political claims. He is probably intimating, 'You ask me why I can do this? It's because I'm on my way in. You're on your way out.'

3. Luke narrates Jesus revisiting the story of David in 1 Samuel 21 when he fed the five thousand (Lk.9:11 – 17). When David entered the Tabernacle, twelve loaves of bread were kept there. David took five of them to feed himself and his men. When Jesus feeds the five thousand who were similarly without food after responding to the ministry by the twelve to Israel as a whole, he preserves the numbers but reverses the order in which they appear. Jesus takes five loaves of bread and transforms them into twelve basketfuls of leftover bread. Not only is this a miracle in its own right, it is another allusion to King David. Jesus is David's heir; hence he deals with Davidic numbers. This is even more significant in Mark, but space does not permit me to explore that here. Jesus is also David's lord and the fulfillment of that which David only foreshadowed; hence Jesus reverses the sequence of the numbers, supernaturally going from five to twelve, and raising the stakes by several orders of magnitude.

These three examples demonstrate that the Gospel writers made allusions between the story of Jesus and the story of David in order to develop an understanding of Jesus' vocation.² These three examples also suggest that Messianic expectations were both held and invoked along the lines of an overall *story*, not merely predictions of *details* of that story (my categories 1 and 2 prophecy). Or, in other words, because Messianic expectations were embedded in a story, they were thematic (my category 3 and 4); Jesus as the 'last David' will be like the first David in certain key ways.

Farrell Till believes that every single quotation of the Old Testament by the New that appears as a prophecy must unfold as a straightforward 'prediction – fulfillment.' Indeed, some quotations function this way, but not all. Looking for a 'prediction – fulfillment' equation in every case involves an inadequate translation of the word 'fulfill,' which should really be translated 'filled full,' which is broader and deeper and involves the notion of story and themes. This occurs often in New Testament literature and practice. For example, the Lord's Supper is not a 'fulfillment' of the Jewish Passover meal as if the latter were a 'prediction' of the former. However, the Lord's Supper is built on the Passover meal both in terms of its timing and its content: it memorializes a 'new Exodus' out of sin and death with the sacrifice of a new Passover Lamb, Jesus, who died on the very day memorializing the Passover deliverance from Egypt. The Lord's Supper was not meant to 'displace' the Passover meal because the latter informs the former. In the discipline of English literature, the relation would be 'antecedent – amplification' identified by an allusion. In this case, one biblical writer alludes to a related antecedent story to highlight a greater amplification in the current story, in order to 'fill it full.' That is, some instances of prophetic fulfillment operate primarily as an 'antecedent – amplification' relationship and identify that relation by calling attention to particular details. Till's confusion enters in because he thinks that when the biblical writers call attention to those details, they are always arguing for a 'prediction – fulfillment.' However, they are not always doing so.

These two methods of referring to the story of David will be especially useful in understanding the New Testament's use of the Davidic Psalms.

1. 'Prediction – fulfillment,' stressing how Jesus is *different* from David, as Jesus is the ultimate heir of David. In this case, the biblical writers tell the history from David to Jesus.
2. 'Antecedent – amplification' stressing how Jesus is *like* David, since Jesus is the greater 'David.' In this case, the biblical writers connect motifs and details between the stories. Christian apologists of the previous generation referred to this phenomenon as 'double fulfillment,' where there was a 'local' or 'immediate' fulfillment referring to David and a 'future' fulfillment referring to Jesus. I prefer to avoid that kind of nomenclature because I don't actually think that is how the biblical writers understood it.

The Prayers of David and the Prayers of Jesus

² Other examples include: Jesus' good shepherd discourse in Jn.10 is almost certainly a reference to David's early career and his ideal posture towards the people as a shepherd, also via reference to Ezk.34 and Jer.22 – 23; Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem with two donkeys echoes David's flight from Jerusalem with two donkeys; Jesus' use of Psalm 110 in the Temple concerns David (see below). But these are less evident at first glance and require more explanation.

If Jesus himself made a claim to the throne of David, and if Jesus wanted to communicate that claim in discreet ways – in a way that did not foment a violent revolution as did the other military ‘messianic movements’ in the Galilean wilderness – to his disciples and to Israel as a whole, then he would have indeed alluded to the story of David, especially its early part. The stories are strikingly similar. The true king was hunted in the wilderness by the false king and his henchmen. It is more than likely, then, that Jesus would have reflected on David’s own experience at some length, as we see him do quite explicitly and publicly in Luke 6:1 – 5, and that would include David’s first person laments and cries for vindication from the Psalms. It is quite likely that Jesus shared his own rich life of prayer with his disciples, and that this included praying through many of the Psalms.

The Psalms, while not written entirely by David, are, in shorthand and on the whole, attributed by Jews and Christians to David.³ The plurality of them (73) are attributed to David, but more significantly, even those that are not attributed to David nevertheless involve hopes that are founded upon God’s covenant with David: the restoration of Jerusalem and its vindication as God’s city, an everlasting dynasty that will rule over the Gentiles from Jerusalem, and the restoration of Israel from exile among the nations. This is certainly the perspective of the Book of Chronicles. Perhaps because God’s covenant with David became as foundational to the fabric of Israel’s hope as God’s covenants with Abraham and Moses, the *Midrash Tehillim* says that the Book of Psalms was structured in five parts like the Mosaic Pentateuch – though it is impossible to insist on that theory. As I will demonstrate below, this Messianic Second Temple understanding of the Book of Psalms shaped the New Testament’s understanding and use of this literature. We would expect that Jesus himself related to the Psalms in various ways, and that this interaction would be preserved by the New Testament writers. The Gospel writers in particular are very interested in this material.

So what types of prophecy does the Book of Psalms contain? Psalm 110 is an example of a Psalm that is prophetic in all four categories. It speaks of the ultimate Davidic King, referencing the institution of the kingship, so it is in category 4. It looks forward in its literary entirety to that fulfillment, so it is category 3. It involves God acting on behalf of the Davidic King in ways that Jesus could not intentionally fulfill on his own (‘sit at My right hand,’ etc.), so it is category 2. And it involves or assumes the Davidic King approaching Jerusalem with a claim to rule, something Jesus certainly did intentionally, so it is category 1. Perhaps for these reasons, Psalm 110 is the most oft-quoted Psalm in the New Testament. The Synoptic Gospels record Jesus confronting the Temple leadership opposed to him and quoting Psalm 110:1 to highlight his claim to the Davidic throne (Mt.22:41 – 46; Mk.12:35 – 37; Lk.20:41 – 44). Jesus’ challenge is a riddle; who does David call ‘Lord’ in v.1, ‘The LORD said to my Lord’? And to whom does God subsequently speak in the rest of the Psalm?

What is the likely origin of Psalm 110? The Pentateuch’s promise of a coming King had already made clear that God had to enthrone someone from the tribe of Judah. But why would David in particular expect someone greater than himself whose rule would eclipse his own? Could such a hope have arisen in David himself? I believe it was not only possible, but necessary. David had to interact with seemingly conflicting messages from God: on the one hand, the promise of an everlasting kingdom through his descendants (2 Sam.7:8 – 16), on the other hand, the curse of perpetual warfare on his descendants due to his own sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam.12:7 – 10). David himself became an echo of Adam: a king (of sorts in Adam’s case) over God’s true humanity, who took that which was forbidden, who plunged his people into sorrow and strife. But this theological tension could not last forever in real history; God would have to ultimately vindicate His people Israel, still the sword and bring them peace, and make them a blessing to the Gentile world because of His earlier promises to them (e.g. Gen.49:8 – 12; Dt.32). David,

³ Qumran, in 4QMMT, attributes the Psalms generally to David: ‘[And] we have wr[itten] to you that you should examine the book of Moses, and the words of the Prophets, and Davi[d]...’ (4QMMT C, lines 9 – 10). The rabbinical source *Aboth 6:9* credits David with the authorship of all the Psalms. The New Testament refers to individual Psalms as those of David (e.g. Mk.12:36 for Ps.110; Rom 4:6 for Ps.32), but two extra-biblical literary works exemplify Jewish and Christian attribution of the Psalms in general to David. One is the Jewish vizier of Granada, military commander, and recognized authority on rabbinical law, Samuel Hanagid (993 – 1056), who saw himself as a second David. After leading his forces in triumph, Hanagid composed two victory songs, each with 150 lines, the number of Psalms in the canonical book associated with the first David. Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2000) discusses Hanagid on p.40 – 42. The second is the much earlier Syriac Christian hymnbook *The Odes of Solomon*, which dates to at least the second century AD and possibly the first, which is filled with Johannine language about Jesus. The naming of the *Odes* draws on the identity of Jesus as the greatest ‘Son of David’ and perhaps also the one who brings peace (‘Solomon’ means ‘peace’). Collecting these songs about Jesus under the nomenclature *The Odes of Solomon* marks Jesus out as the fulfillment of *The Psalms of David*. For an example, see the close of this essay, below.

therefore, could only look forward into the future to fathom how God would resolve this situation and bring peace to His people once more. This is the most ostensible reason for why he would compose Psalm 110. Hope in God led David to prophetic prayer. A much greater King needed to emerge, someone from David but greater than David.

Many Psalms are filled with this same hope. It is important to establish, however, that the Psalms can be prophetic in categories 3 and 4 without being prophetic in categories 1 and 2. Psalm 89, for example, looks prophetically towards the resumption of God's favor towards the house of David, but without focusing on any future details of what that will be like. I explore Psalm 89 in order to establish the fact that the Psalms do indeed contain category 3 prophecy, where a whole literature expects fulfillment or resolution, and category 4 prophecy, where an institution like the kingship is expected to reach a fuller, completed form. Farrell Till tends to deny the existence or relevance of these types of prophecy, but they clearly exist.⁴ Psalm 89 can be divided into four discernable sections: introduction (v. 1 – 4); affirmation of God's power (v.5 – 18); reminder of God's promise to establish David's throne (v.19 – 37); a cry for God to be faithful to that promise (v.38 – 52).

- The introduction begins (v.1 – 2) with an affirmation of God's lovingkindness and faithfulness, key concepts in triggering a recollection of the everlasting throne God promised David (v.3 – 4).
- The second section compares God's power to the heavenly host (v.5 – 8) and the swelling sea and its monstrous inhabitants (v.9 – 10). The Psalmist affirms God's power over the heavens and the earth (v.11 – 13) and calls blessed the people of God who trust in God's faithfulness (v.14 – 18).
- The third section focuses on King David and God's promise to the Davidic house (v.19 – 20). 'David' becomes a synonym for his dynasty. God promised to establish and strengthen him (v.21), protect him from his enemies (v.22), crush his adversaries (v.23), to focus his faithfulness and lovingkindness on him (v.24), extend his dominion (v.25), answer him when he cries (v.26), make him the highest of the kings of the earth (v.27), and honor this covenant (v.28 – 29) so long as his descendant honor God's law (v.30 – 31). Their transgressions will be punished (v.32) but God's promise will not be revoked lest God be called a liar to David (v.33 – 37).
- This sets the stage for the fourth section, where the Psalmist laments that, by appearances, God has cast off and rejected the Davidic line (v.38 – 45). He cries, 'How long, O LORD?' (v.46 – 47) and wonders whether an everlasting dynasty can actually be established while death interrupts the individual lives of the Davidic kings (v.48). The Psalm closes with a request that God remember His lovingkindness and faithfulness to David (v.49 – 51) and a blessing on the LORD (v.52).

Several things interest me about this Psalm. First, being prophetic in the sense of category 3 prophecy, the Psalm quotes often from 2 Samuel 7, where God made His promise to King David about an everlasting dynasty originating from him. The whole Psalm yearns for a future in which God's promises to David are fulfilled. The Psalm is very clearly prophetic in its entire form; in hope and appeal, the Psalmist firmly expects God to uphold His promise to David. But he does so without raising any detailed expectations about what that future would look like. Second, this Psalm is not explicitly quoted anywhere in the New Testament, perhaps because it does not hold out any specific details by which an observer could connect God's future act to this particular Psalm, other than the fact that a King had to come from David's house. However, third, the Psalm does ask a very pertinent question in v.48: Can an everlasting dynasty be stabilized while death still holds sway over all mortals? Although it does not resolve that question or answer it with 'the resurrection of one such descendant to everlasting life,' the Psalm does identify one key question that needs apparent resolution. Concerning resurrection and immortality, the Psalmist may be drawing on insights from Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel, but this is uncertain. Or he could be reflecting on the Genesis account, seeing the intrusion of death into God's good creation as a tension that needs resolution. We do know the Septuagint translation of Psalm 16, and it points in the same direction. Regardless of the influences, Psalm 89 reflects a development *within the canon* of biblical Messianic theology one step above and beyond God's original promise to David in 2 Samuel 7.

Now I will take the argument a step further using Psalm 2. Psalm 2 is also focused on the Davidic King and the legacy associated with/promised to the Davidic line: dominion over the world. It was not completely descriptive of

⁴ See my treatment of Psalm 2, below. Other examples include: Psalm 72, where the Psalmist sets forward expectations for a worldwide rule of the King of Israel over the Gentiles (Ps.72:8 – 11, 17); Psalm 78, which traces through God's faithfulness despite Israel's disobedience, and ends with hope in the Davidic line in v.65 – 72; and Psalm 132, which throughout pleads with God to renew His favor on the Davidic house and the Temple.

the time period in which it was written, nor was it ever more than partially true for any of King David's descendants, even Solomon. None of the Davidic kings exercised quite this degree of influence and power over the Gentile nations around them. Yet Psalm 2 clearly anticipates such a time, since God's promise to David involves such conditions. Psalm 2 expresses prophetic hope in categories 3 (whole literature) and 4 (institutional reality), that the New Testament also uses for category 2 (detailed fulfillment, not intentional).

Luke's use of Psalm 2 also gives an example of how Jesus' claim to be the king of Israel was seen prophetically. At the opening portions of the ministries of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, quotations of Psalm 2 appear. This is strategic in a literary composition stressing Jesus' claim to kingly authority. First, following Gabriel's announcement about Jesus' coming enthronement (Lk.1:32 – 33), God Himself quotes from Psalm 2:7 at Jesus' baptism (Lk.3:22). He says, 'You are My Son,' to designate Jesus as the 'Son' anointed king over Israel. Given the history of the use of Psalm 2 within Israel, that it was uttered at the coronation of every Davidic king, this is quite appropriate. Second, in Acts 4, Peter and the disciples quote from Psalm 2 to describe the impact of Jesus' kingship engaging the political powers who oppose Jesus (Acts 4:25 – 26). Third, Luke's final major character, Paul, quotes from Psalm 2 in Acts 13:33ff in his first recorded speech, which is about Jesus' kingship. The fact that each of Luke's major characters – Jesus, Peter, and Paul – begins his ministry by quoting Psalm 2 is telling.

Luke's second major usage of Psalm 2 deserves careful reading. Psalm 2 is a category 3 and 4 type of prophecy, but in Acts 4, we find an instance in which it is also a category 1 or 2 prophecy. Luke records:

^{4:24} And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord...²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,

'Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples devise futile things?

²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand,
and the rulers were gathered together
against the LORD and against His Christ.'

²⁷ For truly in this city there were gathered together
against Your holy servant Jesus ('His Christ'), whom You ('the LORD') anointed,
both Herod ('kings of the earth')
and Pontius Pilate, ('the rulers')
along with the Gentiles ('the nations')
and the peoples of Israel ('the peoples')

Luke's record of Psalm 2 in the mouth of Peter demonstrates the cumulative case I wish to build. Luke sees specific details of Psalm 2 as being prophetically fulfilled by Jesus. In other words, a Psalm that was primarily prophetic in terms of categories 3 and 4 also is identified as prophetic in category 2. This is significant. Specific details of the Psalm ('the kings of the earth,' 'the rulers,' 'the nations,' and 'the people') then become trigger points to recall the Psalm. While opposition to Jesus' kingship would certainly continue in Acts (and the mission of the church), Psalm 2 is now seen as prophetic in a detailed sense that infuses this particular instance as a paradigmatic experience characterizing the rest of the church's mission. Psalm 2 is thereby 'fulfilled' or in the process of 'being fulfilled' in a detailed sense.

Luke's use of Psalm 2 demonstrates the principle I wish to consider carefully. Poetic details of a Psalm can become significant as confirmation of the prophetic hope, even though the particular details may not have been intended to be such by the Psalmist originally. This is not to say that Jesus or the New Testament writers invoke any detail willy-nilly and claim it as prophecy. There is a larger pattern that is established first, a larger thread of prophetic hope that is referenced, and then specific details are evoked for emphasis. Literary and theological discipline is still exercised.

Applying this insight, is it possible for the New Testament writers to take lament Psalms written by the suffering David and quote them in relation to Jesus' suffering? That is, David wrote certain Psalms (Ps.16; 22; 31; 40; 52; 69; 109) while he was rejected and hunted; they describe the unjust suffering of the righteous king. The New Testament

writers also relate those to Jesus.⁵ There are many occasions in which Jesus is said to quote a lament Psalm of David as his own prayer or statement.

Mark 15:34 – 35 and Psalm 22:1 ('My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?')

Also strongly suggested through allusion but not explicitly identified as a quotation:

Mark 14:34 and Psalm 42:6 ('O my God, my soul is in despair')

Mark 15:24 and Psalm 22:16 ('They pierced my hands and my feet.')

Mark 15:24 and Psalm 22:18 ('They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.')

Mark 15:30 – 32 and Psalm 22:7 – 8 ('All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'')

Mark 15:36 and Psalm 22:15 ('My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws')

John 19:23 – 24 and Psalm 22:18 ('They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.')

Hebrews 2:10 – 12 and Psalm 22:22 ('I will proclaim your name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.')

Luke 23:46 and Psalm 31:5 ('Into thy hands I commit my spirit')

John 2:17 and Psalm 69:9a ('Zeal for your house has consumed me')

John 15:24 – 25 and Psalm 69:4a ('They hated me without a cause')

John 19:28 and Psalm 69:21b ('And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink')

Romans 15:3 and Psalm 69:9b ('And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me')

Acts 1:20 and Psalm 69:25 ('May their camp be desolate; may none dwell in their tents')

Romans 15:9 and Psalm 18:49 ('Therefore I will give praise to you among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name.')

Hebrews 10:5 – 7 and Psalm 40:7 – 9 ('Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do Your will, O God.'')

The New Testament writers unmistakably say that Jesus *prayed* these Psalms. Their claim is that the Psalms are not simply *about* Jesus, they are in fact the prayers *of his own voice*. This occurs, for instance, when John (Jn.19:23 – 24) assigns the 'my garments' of Psalm 22:18 to Jesus' garments and when Paul (Rom.15:9) hears the 'I' of Psalm 18:49 to be Jesus himself speaking. These writers say this so easily and without any apologetic that New Testament professor Richard B. Hays of Duke University and many others believe that this was part of a very early tradition

⁵ The foregoing discussion does not solve the questions related to Luke's placement of Psalm 16 in the mouths of Peter and Paul and their discussion of what David meant by 'see the Pit/corruption.' I believe that issue involves the literary peculiarities of the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures, which I will discuss in Part Four.

⁶ I think Psalm 22 should be considered an 'antecedent – amplification' category 2 prophecy of Jesus since the suffering of the righteous one is a first-person description of David's suffering. The New Testament usage of Psalm 22 reflects Jesus' appropriation of the Psalm as his own prayer. I also believe that Psalm 16, when it is quoted in the New Testament, primarily Acts 2, falls into the category 2 type of prophecy, an 'antecedent – amplification,' although that requires a longer discussion of the manuscript variations of the Psalm, especially the Septuagint. However, I believe Psalm 110 is a 'prediction – fulfillment' category 1 prophecy.

⁷ I interpret Psalm 40 historically, as follows: David would have read the prophecy of a particular king from Judah (Gen.49:8 – 12; Num.24:7 – 9) as well as Moses' prediction that a kingship will emerge and his directives for and limitations on that king (Dt.17:14 – 20). Given that the Pentateuch can be dated prior to the Book of Samuel and the life of David, we can say that David knew about these prophetic hopes. Thus, the phrase 'in the scroll of the book it is written of me' does not apply directly to Jesus; it is first and foremost David's recognition of a prophecy about him: God foresaw the institution of the kingship, and that king is spiritually and legally bound within the covenant to uphold the Law. Because the writer to the Hebrews understands Jesus to be the amplification and 'filling full' of David, he can quote Psalm 40 in reference to Jesus reading the Scriptures available to him about his own kingly role. Moreover, I believe that this was not original to the writer of Hebrews, but that Jesus himself appropriated David's prayer as his own.

within the Christian community that helped shape their understanding of Jesus. This naturally leads us to wonder what these Psalms meant in their original context in the life of David. Leander Keck has suggested that these are the prayers of the pre-existent Christ ‘declaring in advance the purpose of his incarnation.’⁸ I suspect that some fundamentalist approaches to the Scriptures would also say this, and that Farrell Till and others rightly find it problematic.

Is it valid for the New Testament to say that Jesus prayed these Psalms? I think so: On a historical level, Jesus almost certainly repeated David’s prayers himself. If he was knowingly walking in his predecessor’s footsteps, it makes perfect sense that he would, at least on some level, pray the prayers that David prayed. His disciples were very likely to observe him doing this, and he probably explicitly taught them to make the correspondence. This explains how the New Testament can relate Jesus’ experience to Psalms that describe David’s experience. On a literary level, the New Testament writers see *the David story* as a category 4 prophecy of Jesus. This happens on a narrative level concerning the motif of rejection, bread, and the numbers five and twelve, as I have described above. The New Testament writers also connect particular aspects of David’s first-hand experience and first-person narration in the Psalms with particular aspects of Jesus’ experience in a way that reads like category 1 and 2 prophecy to readers who are culturally and literarily distant from the conventions of the biblical writers. But it is important to define exactly what is happening. Hence, I agree with Hays against Keck; I do not think these Psalms were written by the pre-incarnate Christ, as that would reduce the agency of David and diminish David’s actual experience in writing the Psalms. I follow Hays in this by preferring a more straightforward explanation involving real history: Jesus prayed these Psalms because he found in them a Davidic voice that expressed the righteous king’s cries for rescue by and vindication from God.

A Case Study: Psalm 69

Farrell Till’s objection to the way John, Paul, and Luke interact with Psalm 69 is worth quoting in its entirety (p.11 – 12 of his essay).

In the New Testament, such distortion was commonplace in the frantic quest for prophecy fulfillment. In a long list of complaints, a psalmist lamenting treatment accorded him by his enemies said that when he was thirsty they gave him vinegar to drink (Psalm 69:21), and centuries later the writer of John’s Gospel would have us believe that Jesus could not die on the cross until this “prophecy” was fulfilled: “... Jesus, knowing that all things are now finished, that the scripture might be accomplished, saith, I thirst” (Jn. 19:28). In response, he was given vinegar from a sponge; then he said, “It is finished,” bowed his head, and died.

Biblical scholars have found no Old Testament references to anyone who was given vinegar to quench his thirst except in the passage above (Psalm 69), so it is considered the scripture that Jesus “fulfilled.” To say the least, however, the problems in accepting the event as fulfillment of a prophecy are enormous. For one thing, a contextual examination of the alleged prophecy indicates that the psalmist was writing about his own personal misery, that he had sunk deep in mire (v:2), that he was weary of crying (v:3), that he was hated by enemies more numerous than the hairs of his head (v:4), that he had borne reproach and shame (v:7), etc., etc., etc. Furthermore, the plaint of this distressed psalmist included also (in the same verse that mentioned the vinegar) a reference to gall that he was given for meat when he was hungry. So if it was necessary for Jesus to be given vinegar on the cross to fulfill this scripture, why did he not have to be given gall too? By what logic is half of the verse prophecy and the other half not?

An even greater problem concerns the character of this psalmist. If he was in any way intended to be a Christ figure, how do we explain the difference in the attitude he displayed toward his enemies and the one that Jesus displayed to his? Everyone knows the famous spirit of forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated before and during his crucifixion, yet this “Christ-figure” psalmist was quite the opposite. He asked God to blind his enemies (v:23), to make their habitation desolate (v:25), to add iniquity to their iniquity (v:27),

⁸ Leander Keck, ‘Christology, Soteriology, and the Praise of God (Romans 15:7 – 13)’, in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John: In Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. R.T. Fortna and B.R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 93. Quoted and discussed in Hays 2005, p.103.

and to blot them out of the book of life (v:28). It seems strange indeed that God would have chosen a person as spiteful and vengeful as this man to serve as a prophetic figure of the forgiving Jesus.

This same psalm provides other examples of the extremes that some New Testament writers resorted to in trying to make prophecies of simple statements that were never intended as prophecies. The disciples of Jesus saw his expulsion of money changers from the temple (Jn. 2:13-17) as fulfillment of verse 9, “Zeal of your house has eaten me up,” and the Apostle Paul considered Jesus’s desire to please not himself a fulfillment of the last part of the same verse, “The reproaches of them that reproached you are fallen upon me” (Romans 15:3). Thus, an act of violence and a spirit of acquiescence were divergently considered fulfillments of a single verse of “prophecy.” The only comment that this deserves is that these prophetic fulfillments existed only in the arbitrary and capricious opinions of the “inspired” New Testament writers who made the original statements prophecies in the first place.

As noted earlier, this remarkably prophetic psalmist, in his distress, entreated God to punish his enemies with various afflictions. “Let their habitation be desolate; let none dwell in their tents,” was one of his vindictive requests (v:25). When the apostles assembled in Jerusalem to select a successor to Judas, Peter referred to this same verse as having been fulfilled when the field that Judas had purchased with “the reward of his iniquity” was left cursed and abandoned: “Let his habitation be made desolate, and let no man dwell therein” (Acts 1:18-20). Suddenly, a statement that the psalmist had made in reference to his “enemies” in general, all of them (plural), was made to appear as if he had referred to only one person. “Their habitation” became “his habitation,” and the adverb therein was substituted for tents as a convenient reference back to habitation. With that kind of license to change scriptures to fit the situation, just about anyone could make any statement into a prophecy. Where, for example, this same psalmist said, “I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother’s children” (v:8), we could make this a prophecy of Jesus’s rejection by his own brothers as recorded in John 7:3-5. “I am weary with my crying” (v:3) was fulfilled (we could say) when Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35), and, of course, when the Apostle Peter struck Ananias and Sapphira dead (Acts 5:1-10), that fulfilled verse 28: “Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous.” These applications would be no more far-fetched than those that “inspired” writers made of other verses in this psalm.

I will deal with each textual example in turn, and then comment on some larger questions involved.

Psalm 69:9 is quoted by both John and Paul. ‘Zeal for your house has consumed me’ is quoted in John 2:17 when Jesus cleanses the Temple. The paired thought, ‘And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me’ is found in Romans 15:3. Till says of this, ‘Thus, an act of violence and a spirit of acquiescence were divergently considered fulfillments of a single verse of ‘prophecy.’ The only comment that this deserves is that these prophetic fulfillments existed only in the arbitrary and capricious opinions of the ‘inspired’ New Testament writers who made the original statements prophecies in the first place.’

Till fails to recognize how an act of violence in relation to God’s house and a spirit of acquiescence in relation to accusers can be actions that find common motivation in one concern: faithfulness to God, and in particular, faithfulness to a pattern of prophetic deliverers who suffer in their vocation to serve God’s people. In his engagement with the existing Temple, Jesus demonstrated the same basic ‘zeal’ for God’s house that many other Second Temple Jews also had. Recall the critical Pharisaic stance towards the Sadducean priests, where, according to Jacob Neusner, the Pharisees sought to emphasize Torah-observance as a new kind of holiness because what one found at the Temple wasn’t quite holy enough. Recall the even more radical stance of Qumran that Jerusalem’s priesthood was illegitimate because of their installation by the Maccabean family and lack of uniform descent from Levi. Recall the general desire among other ‘messianic movements’ to sweep into Jerusalem, get rid of Pilate and the Roman presence, oust Herod and his Idumean descendants, return Jerusalem to proper Jewish rule again, and cleanse the Temple. However, Jesus’ act of cleansing the Temple was a symbolic action, not one that was meant to identify him as the one who would physically cleanse or rebuild Herod’s Temple. And it was one that offered Jesus the occasion to refer to himself as the replacement of that Temple.⁹ Jesus was not, as Till suggests, committing

⁹ As I argued in Part One of this essay, Jesus would return to God’s original ‘Plan A’ of relating to His people face to face rather than through a system of veils. Hence John claimed in the same instance in John 2:12 – 25 that Jesus’ body was the new Temple; that is consistent with John’s (and the other NT writers’) themes. That theme begins with the comment, ‘The Word became flesh

himself to violence as an ideological or pragmatic necessity for the whole of his ministry. Till fails to recognize that here. The Temple incident in John 2 was a specific instance that had much deeper significance as a symbol.

The pattern of deliverers who must first suffer at the hands of the people by enduring reproaches is invoked by 69:9b. The pattern threads throughout the Old Testament. Joseph, Moses, and David were figures of deliverance; each of them suffered reproach and then delivered his people. Joseph was reproached and insulted by his brothers, Moses by his countrymen, and David by his opponents in Saul's camp. But each of the three survived and endured those reproaches to emerge as the one God used to ultimately deliver the people. The prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel also had zeal for God's house, prophesied its destruction through symbolic, parabolic actions often involving violence (Isaiah's nakedness in Isa.20; Jeremiah's smashed pottery in Jer.18; Ezekiel's siege in Ezk.4 – 5), and endured reproach from their countrymen while pointing to God's deliverance. How much more with the ultimate deliverer and prophet, Jesus? Why are these two things so incompatible? Especially when Jesus' action in the Temple was also parabolic; he was interrupting it momentarily, but symbolically as an act of judgment as he told of its destruction (Jn.2:12 – 25). This places Jesus firmly in the pattern of the prophets, who embodied in themselves a zeal for God's house and a desire to bear the reproach associated with that ministry. Till's inability to bridge the cultural distance between himself and the first century seems to impede his ability to understand texts and events from that period.

Psalm 69:4a appears in John 15:24 – 25 on the lips of Jesus. 'They hated me without a cause.' Till passes this remark by without comment. I find this Psalm interesting for three reasons, however. First, the quotation lends credence to the historical likelihood that Jesus' own life of prayer was filled with David's lament Psalms. Second, the quotation indicates that Jesus prayed this prayer in the hearing of his disciples, training them to hear echoes of Psalm 69 at the ultimate point of his lament, his death. Third, the quotation shows that the Gospel writers were amply aware of multiple enemies of Jesus, not just a singular enemy, Judas Iscariot. The significance of these observations will be clear below.

Psalm 69:21b appears in John 19:28 again on the lips of Jesus. 'And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.' Why did Jesus fulfill half of a verse and not the other half? Primarily because in the Psalm itself, some verses are poetic metaphors of a more basic, concrete experience. In 69:21, David was describing the bitter experience of being given something destructive when he desperately needed sustenance and support. David probably did not mean that his enemies literally gave him either gall or vinegar,¹⁰ any more than he meant that he was literally sinking in water in 69:1 – 2. A closer look at that would make the point. David began in 69:1 – 2 by saying that he was being 'un-created' through water:

Save me, O God,
For the waters have threatened my life.
I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me.

David employed the language and concepts of Genesis 1, where God brought life out of a watery chaos, and Genesis 6 – 9, where God judged the old creation and brought a new creation through a watery chaos. David used the language of being encroached upon by water and flood to poetically speak of his potential doom. The concrete threat to his life was 'those who hate me without a cause,' 'powerful' men who are 'wrongfully my enemies' (v.4), but the poetic description of being 'un-created' through watery means was a way of describing that experience using language that was part of Israel's literary and cultural heritage. While it is always possible that David was sinking in muddy quicksand at the time he composed the Psalm, it is unlikely grammatically and logically, and conceptually difficult according to what else we know about David's story. Hence, there is no real problem viewing v.1 – 2 as poetic language for the real experience described in v.4. Similarly, there is no real problem viewing v.21 about gall and vinegar as poetic language for David's real experience in v.20, 'Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.'

and *tabernacled* among us' (Jn.1:14) in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' body has become the new Temple; his followers in the corporate sense, by being invested with his Spirit, have become the extension of the Temple of his body.

¹⁰ Similarly, the *Odes of Solomon*, an ancient Syrian Christian hymnbook, contains a song that uses 'vinegar and bitterness' as poetic expression. Ode 42 places this saying on the lips of Jesus himself: 'Sheol saw me and was shattered, and Death ejected me and many with me. I have been vinegar and bitterness to it, and I went down with it as far as its depth.'

The fact that, in John 19:23 – 24, the Roman centurions gave Jesus vinegar to drink becomes an allusion calling attention to the larger relationship between Jesus and his antecedent, David. Jesus also had the bitter experience of being given something deleterious when he desperately needed sustenance and support. That is the point here. Hence Jesus did not ‘need’ to be given gall for food by his enemies because this is not a case of ‘prediction – fulfillment’ that would land us in category 1 or 2 prophecy. It was not necessary for Jesus to be literally sinking in water either. The second half of 69:21 was alluded to in order to achieve an ‘antecedent – amplification’ relation between David and Jesus, built on the *prior* understanding and conviction *from outside Psalm 69 itself* that Jesus was related to David and that Jesus’ experience was already similar to David’s experience in certain key ways. This is a substantiation of category 4 prophecy, the fulfillment of the kingship in a manner like David yet superior to that of David. This is similar to Psalm 2 being invoked in Acts 4 by the disciples facing political opposition to the Christian message.

Psalm 69:25 draws considerable comment from Till as Luke quotes it in Acts 1:20. *Psalm 69:25* reads, ‘May their camp be desolate; may none dwell in their tents.’ In Acts 1:20, Luke quotes it as, ‘Let his homestead be made desolate, and let no one dwell in it.’ The shift from plural to singular is noteworthy, and the reference back to ‘homestead’ rather than ‘tents’ requires explanation; these two alterations are what Till considers manipulative. He writes, ‘Suddenly, a statement that the psalmist had made in reference to his ‘enemies’ in general, all of them (plural), was made to appear as if he had referred to only one person. ‘Their habitation’ became ‘his habitation,’ and the adverb therein was substituted for tents as a convenient reference back to habitation. With that kind of license to change scriptures to fit the situation, just about anyone could make any statement into a prophecy.’ Complicating the situation, of course, is that Luke reports Peter saying in 1:16 – 17, ‘Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.’ Luke then explains Judas’ death (1:18 – 19) and provides Peter’s citation of both *Psalm 69:25* and *Psalm 109:8* as an explanation for why the eleven apostles appointed a replacement for Judas.

One sympathizes with Till to some degree, as popular Christian apologetics during his generation had no explanation for this phenomenon. At the same time, however, his decision to remain in ignorance of the literary practices involved in this text leads him to kick against the goads. If *Psalm 69* were only a predictor of Jesus, it would not be a description of the experience of David, at least in Luke’s apparent use of it. But clearly it is David’s description of his own experience. Correspondingly, Luke does not see the *Psalm* as a ‘prediction – fulfillment’ type of prophecy. Once again, there is no requirement that Scripture being ‘fulfilled’ means that a ‘prediction’ has now come true. It is, in fact, a ‘filling full’ of an earlier story by Jesus’ story. The principle of allusion means that a connection can be made by an alluding text to an antecedent even if the allusion is not semantically verbatim. Recognized literary critic Robert Alter discusses this at length in his analysis of both biblical and English literature. Says Alter of allusion: ‘Since antecedent texts can neither be ignored nor repeated verbatim, this process of infinite combination and permutation of texts, of “simultaneous activation” of texts, is ineluctable in the making of literature.’¹¹

In that light, I don’t think the shift from the plural ‘their’ to the singular ‘his’ is tremendously significant after all. Jesus had many enemies, and he prayed this *Psalm* at other times, one of them being just before his death, as attested by John 15:24 – 25. There, Jesus quoted from *Psalm 69*, which carried his concern about multiple enemies: ‘*They* hated me without a cause.’ Additionally, John’s reference to *Psalm 69* at Jesus’ moment of crucifixion suggests not a frantic search for prooftexts but Jesus training his disciples to hear echoes of *Psalm 69* at the crucifixion, the climax of Jesus’ lament and the very moment where all those opposed to Jesus were drawn out into the open. Judas was only one of those enemies, but he became the paradigmatic ‘enemy’ who led the other ‘enemies’ to Jesus; recall that he is tellingly identified in Acts 1:16 as the one ‘who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.’ Luke’s reference to Judas as a singular enemy was germane to the discussion at hand in Acts 1, but circumstantially related to *all* the enemies arranged against Jesus. Therefore, in many ways Judas was an amplification and summation of Jesus’ enemies, who were themselves an amplification of David’s enemies. In what ways? First, Jesus died at the hands of his enemies whereas David escaped death, so the judicial–moral consequence of the betrayal was greater. Second, Jesus was the ultimate heir of David, so the theological consequence was greater. Third, Judas gave all the other enemies of Jesus access to him, so the personal–moral consequence was greater. It is not troubling to me,

¹¹ Alter, p.114

therefore, when we see all the data points. The Gospel writers were clearly aware that Psalm 69 included multiple enemies, as shown by the way they quote from the Psalm at other times. For Luke to shift from plural to singular with respect to Judas Iscariot in this particular instance is not only reasonable, but wholly appropriate. Judas was only one enemy about whom Jesus or the disciples were concerned, but he was the pivotal one indeed. He wanted Jesus to take the militaristic option against the Gentiles, so he tried to tip Jesus' hand by placing him in a crisis. From the standpoint of Luke's story of Jesus, this meant taking the satanic route away from the cross, not dealing with the sin of Israel and the world, to easy dominance over the nations. Judas was the betrayer *par excellence*.

Stepping back to observe the wider pattern, we can see that John, Luke, and Paul never claim that Psalm 69 was merely and solely a 'prediction' of Jesus. That consistency is telling. They maintain a link to the Psalm precisely because it was a real experience of David, and because it was connected with an overall story, a story that was to some extent repeated and to some extent expanded by Jesus of Nazareth. It is this conceptual framework that allows Luke to say that the experience of Jesus can allude to the experience of David. This literary pattern is disciplined, and the New Testament writers demonstrate a rigorous consistency in this regard. They do not, for example, connect to Jesus' suffering a Psalm that is not situated in the storyline of David's suffering. Thus, it is not true that they can take any verse whatsoever and turn it arbitrarily into a fulfilled prophecy.

Till's argument also involves the following larger questions:

1. Did Jesus really need to fulfill certain details in the Psalm?
2. Does the intention of the Psalmist matter?
3. Does the cry for vengeance in the Psalm really become part of Jesus' own prayer for his enemies?

Behind at least the first two questions lies a common misconception. Till accuses Luke, John, and Paul of manipulatively turning Psalm 69 into a 'prediction – fulfillment' prophecy because it does not appear to him that Psalm 69 is a 'prediction' of any sort to begin with. He believes that every single quotation that the New Testament flags as a prophecy must have a straightforward 'prediction – fulfillment' relationship with an Old Testament text. But as I said above, the biblical writers use the nomenclature of 'prophecy' to describe an 'antecedent – amplification' relationship identified by an allusion between shared details of the two stories. Because Till fails to take this into account, he effectively sets up a straw man so he can knock it down with impunity. Till accuses the writers of 'distortion...in the frantic quest for prophecy fulfillment.' If he were to simply understand how prophecy actually functions in the Bible, he would see that the New Testament writers were neither frantic nor willing to distort texts. Till is trying to disprove something the biblical writers were not actually trying to prove. They were not trying to prove that Psalm 69 is simply a 'prediction' for which Jesus is the 'fulfillment.' In reality, the biblical writers were (1) *supplementing* their case using the 'antecedent – amplification' relationship and the details that correspond between the two stories, but not actually making their main case depend on the allusions between them; and (2) working within a larger conceptual and literary structure that also involves the fundamental dissimilarity between David and Jesus, where Jesus is the greater of the two by far. This larger structure is what is more meaningful, although in most cases, Till does not evaluate it. For example, Till does not evaluate Isaiah's prophecies of a Messianic king that vindicates Jerusalem, not least Isaiah 52 – 53. Nor does he evaluate Micah's whole prophecy in Micah 4 – 5 of a Messianic king who restores dignity to Jerusalem by sending forth his word from Zion, a contextual reading that makes the issue of the precise translation of Micah 5:2 almost irrelevant. But these are matters that deserve extended treatment elsewhere.

If Till were to correctly perceive the reality of both 'promise – fulfillment' and 'antecedent – amplification' types of prophecy, he would be able to answer these three main questions as I do:

1. *Did Jesus really need to fulfill certain details in the Psalm?*

Yes and no. 'Yes' with respect to the situation of being the rightful but rejected king, and surely some of the details of Jesus' story would be paralleled to David's via allusion. But 'no' in the sense that Jesus' claim to be the Davidic Messiah does not rest on the triggering of specific details, *since Jesus almost certainly triggered some of those connections himself intentionally, in which case nothing is proven simply by these triggers alone*. This is the basic reason why I am not interested in trying to assign probabilities to prophetic fulfillments. Jesus' actions and claims about himself, coupled with his use of Scripture, were vindicated historically by his miracles and his resurrection, but his use of Scripture by itself does not prove that he was the hope of Israel. I am curious why Till simply does not point this out; he feels comfortable attributing 'craftiness' to a Gospel writer, as if the Gospel writers tried to

attach Scripture to Jesus after the fact. But he does not attribute ‘craftiness’ to Jesus himself, even though Jesus lived in the milieu of Second Temple Judaism, would surely have been deeply familiar with any passage remotely regarded as Messianic, and would have acted in a way that invoked those passages in one way or another. Then again, Till prefers to view Jesus as a purely literary invention of the Gospel writers. He does this because he apparently thinks that by discrediting the Gospel writers, he does not have to deal with the quest for the historical Jesus.

By comparison, we know from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Qumranic community believed that they themselves were a faithful remnant of Israel imbued with the Holy Spirit in advance of the rest of the nation, and they probably invoked a few prophetic passages to bolster this claim (perhaps passages from Ezekiel 36 – 37 combined with passages that John the Baptist identified himself with: ‘a voice in the wilderness’ from Isaiah 40 and ‘a messenger before the Lord’ from Malachi 3). But their leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, was not making Messianic claims, so a great many other passages were not or could not be invoked. My point here is that the New Testament’s claim, unlike the Qumranic claim, involves so many other broader biblical themes and details from the Old Testament that the internal coherence is quite impressive – impressive enough to be compelling, and certainly more impressive than any other descendant of Second Temple Judaism, as I argued in Parts One and Two of this essay.

2. *Does the intention of the Psalmist matter?*

Not in the sense that David *always* penned these Psalms with a clear eye to the experience of his Messianic heir. He did in Psalm 110, and arguably a few others. But David’s intention in writing the Psalms as part of his own desperate experience is honored by the ‘antecedent – amplification’ relationship where Jesus also prays through his own desperate experience using these Psalms.

3. *Does the cry for vengeance in the Psalm really become part of Jesus’ own prayer for his enemies?*

This is an intriguing question to consider, though I think the decision can legitimately go either way without affecting the basic New Testament claim about Jesus. Literary critic and scholar Robert Alter, who is an expert in the literary aspects of the Hebrew Scriptures in particular, notes that an allusion could refer to only part of the antecedent text and not all of it.¹² David’s confession of personal guilt, for example, in Psalm 40:12 would certainly not be appropriate for Jesus *per se*, even though Psalm 40:7 – 9 is said to be appropriated by Jesus in Hebrews 10:5 – 7; it is very likely, however, that Jesus could speak of the guilt of others in a personal manner as he entered it and appropriated it to himself in his death. So it is always possible that, literarily, the New Testament writers were in the pattern of alluding to the Davidic Psalms with an implicit understanding that the cries against David’s enemies were cushioned or penultimate. The verses in question are 69:22 – 28.

- ²² May their table before them become a snare;
And when they are in peace, may it become a trap.
²³ May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see,
And make their loins shake continually.
²⁴ Pour out Your indignation on them,
And may Your burning anger overtake them.
²⁵ May their camp be desolate;
May none dwell in their tents.
²⁶ For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have smitten,
And they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded.
²⁷ Add iniquity to their iniquity,
And may they not come into Your righteousness.
²⁸ May they be blotted out of the book of life
And may they not be recorded with the righteous.

While these words can be read with the overtures of ‘eternity,’ particularly with Jesus linked to it, I would caution against that. These words can be read in two ways with regards to David himself. One option would be to see David as wanting to be vindicated in his lifetime in a life and death struggle with his opponents. Vindication in

¹² Robert Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (Norton & Company: New York, NY. 1989, 1996) p.129 – 140.

one's lifetime was the assumption and focus of most, if not all, Psalms like this. Till argues that David was full of spite and vengeance, but this is a hasty generalization that neglects the whole of David's actual activities during the early period of his life. David himself was committed to not harming Saul or his henchmen. Remarkably, for being marked and hunted desperately like an animal, David did not take concrete steps of retaliation, but left his vindication in God's hands, and this is what this Psalm expresses. It is, moreover, very likely that David's enemies would only be stopped by death. So when David prays in v.28 that his enemies would be blotted out of the book of life, and not recorded with the righteous, he is asking that his enemies be overtaken by death because that is the only measure that would stop them. If these were the circumstances, which are quite likely, would it be fair to say that David was only a cruel and vengeful man?

A second option would be to see David as simply being emotionally honest before God and allowing God to shape his actual, final response. Do the imprecatory Psalms function not as a normative *attitude* but as a normative *process* of emotional honesty? This is also an acceptable interpretation of the Psalms. This would again be consistent with the portrayal of David as someone who did not actually take vengeance into his own hands.

What would it mean if Jesus prayed this prayer? Is it consistent with what we know about him? I would say that it can be. Jesus regularly rebuked his opponents and warned them of dire consequences if they kept rejecting him: That generation would be charged with the blood of all the prophets (Lk.11:49 – 52); a cataclysm would soon befall Jerusalem's inhabitants if they persist in their unbelief and commitment to a military uprising against Rome (13:1 – 5); Pharisees must enter the kingdom or face utter rejection (14:15 – 24); and the fires of Hades await those who do not believe (16:19 – 31). While it is true that in none of these cases does Jesus speak of his *desire* for these things to come to pass, nevertheless certainly Jesus would have seen them as manifestations of God's judgment on an unrepentant segment of the nation Israel, and that he, as a prophet, would have ultimately aligned himself with God's will. Furthermore, Jesus said that God will take His vineyard from the wicked tenants and give it to others (20:9 – 19); Jesus also strongly condemned the Temple leaders who devoured widows' houses and focused on their appearances (20:45 – 47). These are hardly the words of a 'meek and mild' Jesus with only vague well-wishes for all. Jesus did in fact have enemies whom he firmly opposed. Jesus verbally castigated Israel's leaders for abusing people under their care. Till's claim that placing this Psalm as a prayer on Jesus' lips makes the portrait of Jesus inconsistent is not well founded. Jesus, like David, did not take concrete steps of retaliation, but it is possible that Jesus prayed that his enemies be held in check in this life by death, or prayed through his own emotions to process them in God's presence. Luke's application of the Psalm towards Judas Iscariot can be understood this way, but not at the expense of also referring to other enemies, like the corrupt Jerusalem and Temple leadership. Multiple enemies are certainly permitted here.

At the same time, moreover, throughout the Gospel narratives Jesus appears to hold together two emotions and postures towards his opponents. Jesus continually invited his opponents to repent and join him. He continued to attend the Pharisees' meals; he endangered himself in public to verbally spar with the Jerusalem authorities; after his resurrection he sent his disciples to witness to the Jerusalem leaders to give them yet more opportunities; etc. So this Psalm need not be regarded as Jesus' only sentiment either.

A Case Study: Psalm 109

A few comments can also be made about Psalm 109:8b. The quote, 'Let another man take his office,' immediately follows the quotation of Psalm 69:25 as a reason for why the eleven apostles sought a replacement for Judas Iscariot. A preliminary note: We would be remiss to think that the disciples suddenly seized upon Psalm 109 as the one and only reason to replace Judas. They were aware that having twelve apostles was deeply significant to Jesus. Twelve is a formulaic number in Scripture, beginning with the twelve sons of Jacob that became the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus chose twelve apostles in Luke 6:12 – 20. He did so after he began his interaction with two synagogues, Nazareth and Capernaum (4:14 – 44), that proved disappointing since the people of Nazareth did not want to extend grace to the Gentiles and the people of Capernaum simply wanted to keep Jesus to themselves. Jesus then began to summon particular disciples, like Simon Peter (5:1 – 11) and Levi (5:27 – 33), eventually reaching the critical number twelve and teaching them (6:21 – 49) to love their enemies, which the people at Nazareth were not ready for, and to follow Jesus into any relationships, which the people at Capernaum were not permitting. The sequence of pericopes from Lk.4:14 – 6:49 is tight and purposeful, resulting in Jesus forming a movement symbolizing a renewed Israel. Jesus did this ostensibly to signify that his movement was representative of Israel, and exerted a

claim on all Israel. In various ways, Jesus reinforced this symbolically; for example, the episode fusing Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman into the same story involves the number twelve (8:40 – 54) and was thus symbolic of raising Israel from the dead and cleansing her. Immediately following this, Jesus sent the twelve out to proclaim the kingdom to Israel (9:1 – 9), calling her into life. Jesus affirmed the number twelve again in the upper room discourse when he told his disciples that they will sit on 'thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (22:30). This would naturally lead to the apostles valuing the symbolic function of the number twelve to the people of Israel. It was an ongoing sign of witness to Israel that represented Jesus' kingly claim on all Israel. So from the story line itself arises an explanation for why the eleven apostles selected a twelfth. Their decision was *substantiated*, not triggered, by Psalm 109.

Psalm 109 is another Psalm of David that was a cry for vindication. David speaks of men who fight and accuse him with wickedness and deceit even though David has repaid their evil with good (v.1 – 5). He prays that God would stop a certain individual among them. David prayed that a judgment would befall this person (v.6 – 7) that results in his death (v.8 – 10) and the ruin of his household and name (v.11 – 15). He says:

- ⁶ Appoint a wicked man over him,
And let an accuser stand at his right hand.
- ⁷ When he is judged, let him come forth guilty,
And let his prayer become sin.
- ⁸ Let his days be few;
Let another take his office.
- ⁹ Let his children be fatherless
And his wife a widow.
- ¹⁰ Let his children wander about and beg;
And let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes.
- ¹¹ Let the creditor seize all that he has,
And let strangers plunder the product of his labor.
- ¹² Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him,
Nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children.
- ¹³ Let his posterity be cut off;
In a following generation let their name be blotted out.
- ¹⁴ Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD,
And do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out.
- ¹⁵ Let them be before the LORD continually,
That He may cut off their memory from the earth;

Whether David was referring to Saul, Doeg the Edomite (cf. Ps.52), or someone else is indeterminate.¹³ There were certainly many reasonable possibilities, and the matter is of little consequence to our analysis here. Regardless of the precise identity of David's assailant, we can note that David prays that evil would turn on itself, as it often does, in the form of another wicked man becoming his accuser (v.6 – 7). He prays that someone else 'would take his office,' or occupy his place in society (v.8). As I mentioned above, these words are best understood as a prayer for God to stop David's enemies in this life by death. I am cautious about reading the Psalm with overtures of 'eternity.' The repeated reference to the material conditions of family, labor, and posterity in v.8 – 14 indicate an emphasis on this life, as does the phrase 'from the earth' in v.15. The sins of the enemy's forefathers and mother (v.14) are visited upon their household by the death of their descendant, the enemy of David. The emphasis there, too, is on this life. David then gives reasons for why this individual should be treated this way: He failed to show lovingkindness, persecuted the afflicted and needy, put to death the despondent in heart, and cursed rather than blessed (v.16 – 18).

How does Luke use the Psalm? At the basic level, he sees Judas as the assailant of Jesus in a way Saul, Doeg the Edomite, or whoever was the assailant of David. Too, Luke sees in Judas' case that evil did turn in on itself, as one or more of the high priests with whom he tried to bargain played the role of the 'wicked man over him' or the

¹³ The Jewish rabbinical tradition suggests that David had ten major enemies: Saul, Doeg the Edomite, Ahitophel, Sheba the son of Bichri, Shimei the son of Gera, Goliath and his three brothers, and the Egyptian whom Benaiah the son of Jehoiada slew. It is considered significant that five were Israelites and five were Gentiles. See *Redak* from *Midrash Psalms 18:8*.

‘accuser’ from v.6. Third, Luke also sees that Judas’ place needed to be filled in order for the apostles’ witness to Israel to retain its symbolic significance. Again, the Psalm itself is not the sole reason for the eleven apostles to select a replacement for Judas. It is merely *substantiation* for that decision. The connection of Psalm 109 to Jesus and Judas is not a category 1 or 2 prophecy, but neither is it arbitrary. It is the amplification of an antecedent. If Jesus was in the habit of praying the lament Psalms of David, including this one, it would be quite natural for the disciples to have this Psalm in mind shortly after the climax of Jesus’ ministry. After all, Jesus’ death represented the height of his lament, and his resurrection/ascension the height of his vindication.

What Does Not Constitute Proof, and What Does

What have I established then? First, I have argued that, except for Psalms 2 and 110,¹⁴ and leaving aside for Part Four the question of Psalm 16, some of the Psalms are not in fact clear ‘predictions’ of Jesus, at least not in the way fundamentalists and skeptics alike want to see them, albeit for entirely different reasons. In most cases, the Davidic lament Psalms are not ‘predictions’ that were waiting to be ‘fulfilled.’ They did in fact have real primary meaning and significance to David as he originally composed them. This will surely feel costly to those who would like to stack the list of ‘predictions – fulfillments’ as high as it can go. However, defining prophecy not simply as ‘fulfilled’ but as ‘filled full’ and accounting for allusions (an exegetical and literary consideration), and accounting for Jesus’ deliberate engagement with David’s lament Psalms (an historical consideration) lowers that stack somewhat.¹⁵ If Jesus and the New Testament writers were primarily making allusions between Jesus’ story and David’s story, this might have had poetic beauty and symmetry to the first century Jewish mind, but as ‘proofs’ of Jesus’ claims by themselves, i.e. apart from Jesus’ resurrection, they lose value. ‘Antecedent – amplification’ relationships connected by allusion do not serve as ‘proof’ of the validity of Jesus’ claims. Allusions between David and Jesus could have originated in any number of ways, not least in Jesus’ own intentions. Hence, *by themselves*, they are only evidence that first century Jews had a high degree of cultural, if not actual, literacy with their great founding stories.

Second, by the same token, skeptics like Farrell Till, who are insufficiently knowledgeable about the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament, lose the ability to cry ‘manipulation’ with regards to the Davidic material. In particular, Till’s understanding of Psalms 69 and 109 has been shown to be deficient, so his complaints about them seem to me to have lost all their force. At least in these matters, he can accuse the New Testament of being neither manipulative and forced on the one hand, nor arbitrary and whimsical on the other. The New Testament’s use of the Davidic lament Psalms is vindicated for what it is. It is both poetic and purposeful, having a literary and theological logic of its own. It is not an airtight case for the Bible being a supernatural book, nor is it an airtight case for Jesus’ claim to the Davidic throne, but neither was it meant to be such things. It is meant to *substantiate* Jesus’ claim to David’s throne, which really arises from other places in the framework of biblical thought. If Jesus was a prophet to a recalcitrant nation, then *of course* his life and ministry would resemble precursors who also experienced rejection initially, namely Joseph, Moses, David, and the prophets.¹⁶ If these Psalms by themselves are not actually ‘predictions’ yearning for fulfillment, but antecedents in David forming the groundwork for later amplifications in Jesus, then Till’s complaints about them evaporate.

Third, in this methodology, passages that *are* actual ‘prediction – fulfillments’ then become greatly clarified as such. Additionally, they are contextualized into larger themes arising from the Hebrew Scriptures and take on even greater weight this way. So in my opinion, what might feel to be loss actually becomes gain to an evangelical inquiring into the nature of biblical prophecy. Once the skeptic’s deficient complaints evaporate, we are left with a rather trustworthy container filling full with hope once more.

¹⁴ And possibly Psalms 16 and 22.

¹⁵ Various Psalms are prophecies of the variety of category 3 and/or 4. For example, the other Royal Psalms besides 2 and 110 (18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 78, 89, 101, 144) still function as expressions of hope for a greater heir of David; Psalm 107 predicts a return from exile; Psalm 119 predicts covenant renewal and a new internalization of God’s commandments; Psalm 130 predicts God redeeming Israel from her sin and guilt.

¹⁶ This is actually part of Stephen’s point in Acts 7. Both Joseph and Moses appeared twice to their people, the first appearance was the occasion of their rejection by Israel and the extension of the nation’s suffering, and the second was the occasion of their acceptance and Israel’s deliverance.

Now a different type of question can be engaged. Throughout the body of this essay, I have made comments about the historical likelihood of Jesus reading the Psalms and so forth. I feel it necessary, in the interest of thoroughness, to trace through the often complex interaction between literature and history in first century Israel because it will present Jesus in a fresh but faithful light. This process of historical inquiry is necessary, and thankfully, fairly basic. I will put them in the form of a series of questions.

- Was the Book of Psalms known as a literary entity by the time of Jesus? Yes.¹⁷
- Would Jesus have known the Psalms? Yes.¹⁸
- Would Jesus have read the Psalms as an exposition of God's promises to David? Yes.
- Would Jesus have read various Psalms as the early experiences of David? Yes.
- Would Jesus have prayed the Psalms because of the similarities between himself and David? Yes.
- Would Jesus have intentionally paralleled himself to David's early career in other ways? Yes.
- Would the disciples have noticed Jesus' tendency to do this? Yes.
- Would the disciples have noted the similarities between Jesus and David? Yes.
- Would this have contributed to their understanding of Jesus as the Messianic 'Son of David'? Yes.
- Would they have written this to portray Jesus as the Messianic 'Son of David'? Yes.¹⁹

The criteria of historicity is therefore satisfied, and quite nicely. The implications of this are immediate. Did the New Testament writers simply fabricate this portrait of Jesus as an amplification of David? I argue no: It is much more likely that Jesus did so himself, leaving his biographers plenty of raw material to place into literary form. After all, it is arbitrary for skeptics to attribute to the New Testament writers what they deny to Jesus. No one would attribute the majestic and subtle music of Johann Sebastian Bach to his four composing sons, Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, Johann Christoph Friedrich, and Johann Christian. And yet that is exactly what some do with Jesus and the four Gospel writers.²⁰ There is no good reason, I repeat, to dismiss the Gospel writers as merely fabricating Jesus or his use of Davidic symbolism. Even without the presupposition of inerrancy, the four Gospels, if anything, are clearly the result of sustained contact with a much more original and powerful mind.

Thus, a slightly more thorough historical treatment of Jesus and his Messiahship are in order. Hence I will examine the first century CE Jewish understanding of Messiah. Then I will examine the early Christian understanding of Jesus as Messiah to compare the two. From that point, I will offer some conclusions.

The First Century Jewish Understanding

Of course, Jewish Messianic hope became much more concrete when David established his throne in Israel. Israelites could then look to a tangible person, family, and institution. However, the Exilic period beginning with Babylon and continuing with its subsequent Babylons (Persia, Greece, Rome) confused the picture and threw the monarchy into disarray. As a result, various revolutionary messianic and quasi-messianic movements flared up constantly in Second Temple Judaism. Here is a list of them from the Maccabean revolt in 163 BC through the fateful Jewish resistance atop Masada in 135 AD.

- 163 BCE: Judas Maccabeus recaptures Jerusalem and cleanses the Temple, providing the model for a resistance tradition
- 40 BCE: Hezekiah leads revolts and skirmishes. He was put down by Herod the Great. Samaia the Pharisee objects to this.
- 4 BCE: Young men, as Herod lay dying in 4 BCE, pull down Roman eagles from Jerusalem, who were then killed on Herod's orders. They were supported by the teachers Judas ben Sariphaeus and Matthias ben Margalothus (War 1.648-55; Ant. 17.149-66). The young men who were egged on by the teachers Judas and Matthias to pull down Roman eagles from Jerusalem, who were then killed on Herod's orders (War 1.648-55; Ant. 17.149-66).

¹⁷ The final compilation of the Book of Psalms is attributed by Jewish tradition to Ezra. The Greek Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures, dating back to the early 2nd century BCE, contained the 150 Psalms as well.

¹⁸ Various other apocryphal books dating from the 2nd century BCE (e.g. Tobit) were arguably familiar with the Psalms. Luke demonstrates in Lk.1 – 2 that Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon were very familiar with the Psalms.

¹⁹ See Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Fortress Press, 1991) and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1999).

²⁰ N.T. Wright uses this argument in *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1999), p.479.

- 3BCE: Another violent revolt the following Passover, which was renewed at Pentecost (War 2.1-13; 39-50; Ant. 17.206-18; 250-64). Josephus says that it involved ‘a countless multitude’ from all over Palestine, especially Judea itself. They laid siege to the Romans, fought them, and besieged the commander himself in the palace. At this, anarchy broke out in Palestine (War 2.55; Ant. 17.269, referring to ‘continuous and countless new tumults’), including a revolt by Herod’s veterans and one by Judas, son of Hezekiah.
- 6 CE: Then there is Judas the Galilean (War 2.118, also probably ‘Theudas’ mentioned in Acts 5:37), whether or not he is the same person as Judas the son of Hezekiah the bandit leader (see NTPG 180).²¹ Judas, together with Zadok, a Pharisee, headed a large number of Zealots and offered strenuous resistance. Judas proclaimed the Jewish state as a republic recognizing God alone as king and ruler and His laws as supreme. The revolt continued to spread, and in some places serious conflicts ensued.
- An individual called the ‘Samaritan’ led a group of armed followers and ended up in guerilla warfare.
- The unnamed prophets of War 2.258-60/Antiquities 20.167b-8 are subsumed under the general brigandage noted in Antiquities 20.167a.
- The ‘Egyptian’, according to War 2.262, intended to force entry to Jerusalem, overpower the Roman garrison, and set himself up as a tyrant.
- The unnamed prophet of Antiquities 20.188 appeared in the context of widespread brigandry (‘prophets’ and their followers entertained dreams of violent revolution).
- Jonathan the Weaver (War 7.437-50) had, according to Life 424f., aroused an uprising in Galilee.
- ~28 CE: The upstart Galileans who Pontius Pilate crushed, mingling their blood with their sacrifices (Lk.13:1)
- 30 CE: There is Barabbas, and the revolt in which he took part (Lk.23.19; in John 18.40 Barabbas is described as a lestes, ‘brigand’). Presumably the two lestai crucified alongside Jesus count as well.
- 40’s CE: The sons of Judas the Galilean, Jacob/James and Simon (Ant. 20.102), continued their father’s insurrection. They were crucified in the late 40s by Roman governor Tiberius Julius Alexander.
- Then there are all the ‘common people’ who were punished along with Eleazar ben Deinaeus; in War 2.253, Josephus says the number of them was ‘incalculable’.
- Jesus ben Ananias enters Jerusalem on the Feast of Sukkot and decries the Temple; the governor interrogates him but later releases him.
- Then there are the further outbreaks of brigandage reported in War 2.264f.; these may be the same ones who are mentioned in 2.271, but in the earlier passage it appears that the revolutionary fervor was far more widespread than a small group.
- 66 CE: Then there are the Sicarii, the ‘dagger men,’ led by Menahem, another son or grandson of Judas the Galilean (War 4.198, Ant. 20.186f., etc.). The Sicarii forced their way into the Temple and then burned the houses of Ananias, Agrippa, and Bernice, and the Record Office with the records of debt. Menahem broke into the armory at Masada, distributed arms, and returned to Jerusalem as ‘king’ over the revolutionary forces.
- 66 – 70 CE: Simon bar Giora is captured after the revolt of 66 – 70 and brought to Rome. He is executed in Rome in 71.
- 67 – 70 CE: John of Gischala and his followers (refs. in NTPG 177 n. 54).
- 73 CE: Eleazar ben Yair, possibly the same person as Eleazar ben Simon, leads a Sicarii rebellion at Masada. The size and scope of the group is disputed, as is the manner of their death; possibly it was mass suicide.
- 132 – 135 CE: Finally, there is Bar-Kochba and the Jewish uprising of 135 AD which was crushed at Masada.

The following comes from a website which I find lacking,²² but the way the author writes these paragraphs is attractively accurate. Messianic hope was derived, and uniquely so, from Jewish monotheism²³:

²¹ This is a quotation from a discussion among the Jewish leaders about Jesus. We know that both Jesus and Theudas, together with Judas’ (grand)son Menahem, were called Messiahs, and this makes it extremely likely that this title was given to Judas too. An additional argument is that Judas made a bid for national independence, something that was expected from the Messiah.

²² <http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/maccoby.htm>

²³ Jewish monotheism was itself a unique phenomenon which has little to no sociological explanation. But this is not the place and time to discuss that.

If the longing for the Messiah had been no more than a desire for political independence it would not have had the power to inspire such extraordinary resistance. In other countries patriotism had produced great heroism against Rome but nothing so prolonged and determined as the Jewish efforts which by this obstinacy and courage aroused the wonder, fear, and hatred of Roman historians. The Messianic ideal arose from the whole 'weltanschauung' of the Jewish people which was unique in the ancient world. The Messianic ideal arose out of monotheism.

Monotheism unified human history into a single process tending towards one final aim, the fulfilling of the purposes of God in creating the world. The idea of a Messianic age providing the dénouement of the cosmic drama is inherent in monotheism. Polytheism, on the other hand, provided no such cosmic drama. Each nation had its own gods and there was no overriding purpose for mankind. History, in polytheistic cultures, was regarded as cyclic. Nations like individuals had their life-cycles of youth, maturity, and decline. Even the gods had these life-cycles; and above both gods and men was an inexorable, indifferent Fate. Only the Jews claimed to be in contact with this supreme immortal Fate, claiming also that it was not indifferent to mankind but a loving Father who molded the process of history.

As well as being a source of unquenchable optimism, Monotheism was unable to acknowledge defeat. Polytheistic nations could admit that their gods had proved weaker than those of Rome; or could succumb to Roman syncretism by which the undefeated gods were identified with the gods of Rome (e.g., Jupiter/Zeus/Ammon). The Jewish God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, could not submit to such annexation.... When the Jews were in fact defeated it meant not that God had been defeated but that God's people had failed in their mission and must re-dedicate themselves by repentance. This is the meaning of the campaigns of repentance ... which accompanied a Messianic movement.... Monotheism began as the religion of a band of runaway slaves; and it expressed their determination not to submit to any oppressive individual or class again.

N.T. Wright develops a deeper historical understanding of Jewish messianic belief during this period:

There were, to be sure, several variations on Jewish messianic belief in this period. *None of them envisaged a Messiah who would die at the hands of the pagans.* On the contrary, where Jewish expectations of a Messiah did exist, they regularly possessed a dual focus. In a line of tradition stretching from David to Bar-Kochba, including the Maccabees [who cleansed the Temple after Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated it] and Herod [who tried to legitimize his dynasty by expanding and refurbishing the Temple], we find that the king would have to defeat the pagans, and that he would have to rebuild (or at least to cleanse) the Temple. The two actions would, of course, go together: as long as the pagans remained undefeated, YHWH had not returned to Zion, presumably because his house was not ready. If a messiah was killed by the pagans, especially if he had not rebuilt the Temple or liberated Israel, that was the surest sign that he was another in the long line of false messiahs.²⁴

It is clear what follows. If the messiah you had been following was killed by the pagans, you were faced with a choice between two courses of action. You could give up on the whole idea of revolution and abandon the dream of liberation. Some went that route, such as the rabbinic movement as a whole after 135 AD. Or you could find yourself a new messiah, if possible from the same family as the late lamented one. Some went that route: witness the continuing movement that ran from Judas the Galilean in 6 AD to his sons or grandsons in the 50s; to another descendant, Menahem, during the war of 66 – 70; and to another descendant, Eleazor, who was the leader of the ill-fated Sicarii on Masada in 73.

If, after the death of Simon bar-Giora in Titus's triumph in Rome, or if, after the death of Simeon ben-Kosiba in 135, you had claimed that Simon, or Simeon, really was the Messiah, you would invite a fairly sharp response from the average first-century Jew. If, by way of explanation, you said that you had had a strong sense of Simon, or Simeon, as still being with you, still supporting and leading you, the kindest response you might expect would be that their angel or spirit was still communicating with you, but not that

²⁴ N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem* (Originally published in *Sewanee Theological Review* 41.2, 1998. Reproduced at http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Historical_Problem.htm by permission of the author.)

he had been raised from the dead. So far as we know, the followers of the first-century messianic or quasi-messianic movements were fanatically committed to the cause. They, if anybody, might be expected to suffer from cognitive dissonance after the death of their great leader. In no other case, however, right across the century before Jesus and the century after him, do we hear of any Jewish group saying that their executed leader had been raised again from the dead.

The salient points in Wright's summary are

1. Messianic King and Temple were inextricably bound together, which recalls my study of the Pentateuch and informs e.g. Jesus' use of Psalm 118 concerning the 'chief cornerstone';
2. Messianic hope ran particularly strong in at least the family of Judas the Galilean, suggesting that Messianic hope could coalesce around a family, not just an individual, if one identified the right Davidic family; this family-centeredness is what we would expect in Jewish Messianic hope in the first century;
3. Bodily resurrection was not an idea or motif associated with any other Jewish messianic movement, nor did it belong in the same structure of thought, precisely because all the other Jewish messianic movements *failed*; 'resurrection' as a concept was associated with Israel's return from exile, the kingdom of God on earth, the Messiah coming to shepherd the nation over against the pagans; notice that 'bodily resurrection' as a general Jewish doctrine was held by the Pharisees, who leaned more towards the radical, nationalistic side of the spectrum than the Sadducees, who denied the doctrine because of their desire to maintain peace with Rome and their own position as powerbrokers; a failed messianic movement would not have been transferred *into* 'resurrection' language, but *out* of it.

The Early Christian Understanding

If we grant that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as a rebel king, which his manner of death indicates, then it becomes highly unusual that the early Christians insisted that he was the Messiah. They had, after all, the two normal Jewish options open to them. They could simply have gone back to their fishing, glad to have escaped Jerusalem with their lives. That is, they could have switched to a different tack, given up on messianic hope (as did the post-135 rabbis), and gone in for some form of private religion instead, whether of intensified Torah-observance, private gnosis, or something else. They clearly did not do that. Instead, they started going around both Israel and the pagan world declaring Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Anything less like a private religion would be hard to imagine.

Equally, and perhaps even more interestingly, they could have found themselves a new Messiah from among Jesus' blood relatives. This is quite an underappreciated point that deserves more consideration. We know from various sources that Jesus' relatives were important and well-known within the early church. One of the closest, his brother James, though not part of the movement during Jesus' lifetime, actually appears to have become the anchorman in Jerusalem while Peter, John, Paul, and others traveled around the world (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal.1:19; 2:9). James was widely regarded in the early church as the person at the center, geographically and theologically. Yet nobody in the early Christian community ever suggested saying that James was the Messiah. Nothing would have been more natural, especially on the analogy of the family of Judas the Galilean. Yet James was simply known as 'the Lord's brother' (Gal. 1:19; cf. Mark 6:3).²⁵

We must therefore ask again the historical question: Why did Christianity even begin, let alone continue, as a messianic movement, when its Messiah suffered a fate which ought to have showed conclusively that he could not possibly have been Israel's anointed? Why did this group of first-century Jews, who had cherished messianic hopes and focused them on Jesus of Nazareth, not only continue to believe that he was the Messiah despite his execution, but actively announce him as such in the pagan as well as the Jewish world? Why did they not simply transfer their political and military hopes to someone else, when other violent revolutionaries were so readily available? Why did they not anoint Jesus' brother James to carry the movement on? Why did they claim to be themselves the new Temple when the current Temple in Jerusalem still stood and was still the socio-political focal point for the rest of Israel? Their answer, consistently throughout the evidence we possess, was that Jesus, following his execution on a charge of being a would-be Messiah, had been raised from the dead. This, for them, constituted the unique vindication of Jesus' identity, vocation, and teaching. And *everything* about him, they claimed, was supported by their Scriptures, not *just* details of Jesus' death and his general vocation to be a suffering deliverer in the manner of Joseph and Moses and David and the prophets, but also his embodying YHWH's return to Zion, his exaltation to the throne of his father David, his restoration of Israel out of Exile and sin, his inauguration of covenant renewal, his

²⁵ these thoughts are summarized from N.T. Wright's article, above

building of a new Temple, and his enfolding the Gentiles into his reign. The Scriptures anticipated *all* of this, not least in the Psalms.

We can even entertain an historical question related to the entire Book of Psalms. What manner of fulfillment did the early Christians think Jesus enacted with regards to the whole book of Psalms, not just individual Psalms? Is it possible to say? The question is important because the Book of Psalms was central to the everyday liturgical life of Israel, and thus had to be seen in a new, Christian, light. I will offer a basic sketch here. At a high level, scholars have found no linear sequence to the Psalms. Its bookends (Ps.1 – 2 and 145 – 150) seem to be significant in their content and position: Israel is the people, uniquely possessing God's word (Ps.1) and the Davidic king (Ps.2), which spreads the praise of God among the nations (Ps.145 – 150). In between, however, the Psalms seem to be cyclical. Recurrences of the basic pattern of Israel's existence happen in the collection: puzzling over Israel's sin and then hoping for God's redemption, despairing over her captivity and then longing for God's restoration, undergoing suffering and then vindication, persecution and then deliverance from death, waiting in hope and then singing to the nations the faithfulness of God.

In order for a full blown Jewish Messianic movement to have been launched in the name of Jesus, it is likely that the early Christians understood that Jesus did *more* than fulfilling individual Psalms, although he certainly did not do *less* than that. Also, the early Christians must have understood that Jesus did *more* than just enter the routine pattern of Israel's existence described in the Psalms (repentance – relief, suffering – vindication, persecution – deliverance, waiting – praising, death – life). Rather, he overcame that cyclical pattern decisively to move Israel to the climax of her role in the world: drawing the praise of God from among the nations. Historically speaking, the early Christians believed that Jesus must have brought the cycles of the Psalms to a resolution. For no longer would there also be the puzzling over sin and then pleading for God's redemption, the despairing over her captivity and then longing for God's restoration. The early Christians must have believed that Jesus entered the Psalms in an amplified way, in a decisive way, entering the absolute nadir of sin and suffering but also the zenith of vindication, in a way that was consonant with the patterns of the Psalms but also providing the way out of that cycle once and for all to the other side, the end goal. Once again, the necessary condition for that kind of belief would be Jesus' bodily resurrection.

The last historical data point I offer here lends perspective to this. Early on, Christians continued to use the Psalms in worship but also developed their own liturgical worship material and poems highlighting distinctively Christian ideas, not least Jesus' resurrection. One collection merits discussion at this point. Probably during the second half of the first century, and not later than the mid-second century, *The Odes of Solomon* had been composed. This collection is so called because other ancient writings refer to it that way.²⁶ The naming of the *Odes* draws on the identity of Jesus as the greatest 'Son of David' and perhaps also the one who brings peace, since 'Solomon' means 'peace.' Collecting these songs about Jesus under the nomenclature *The Odes of Solomon* suggests an understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of *The Psalms of David*. The *Odes* are in the same style as the Psalms but are filled with the same language about Jesus as the apostle John's writings,²⁷ though they are clearly aware of stories and language from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.²⁸

Most scholars acknowledge that the *Odes* were written and used by an early Jewish Christian community because some *Odes* sometimes describe Gentiles in unattractive terms, a rhetorical carry-over.²⁹ I believe that the formation

²⁶ The 11th Ode was found among the Bodmer Papyri in a 3d-century Greek manuscript (no. 11). Five were translated into Coptic in the 4th century and used to illustrate the Pistis Sophia (Odes Sol. 1, 5, 6, 22, and 25). Also in the 4th century Ode 19 was quoted by Lactantius (Div. Inst. 4.12.3). In the 10th century a scribe copied the *Odes* in Syriac, but only Odes Sol. 17:7-42:20 are preserved (British Museum ms. Add. 14538). In the 15th century another scribe copied them into Syriac, but again the beginning is lost (John Rylands Library Cod. Syr. 9 contains only Odes Sol. 3.1b-42:20). The entire collection has been reconstructed from manuscripts in the British Museum, John Rylands Library and Bibliothèque Bodmer.

²⁷ The two most convincing parallels are their references to the 'Word' and 'Living Water.' Salvation is understood as knowing and loving God, which is developed without ethical clarification. The *Odes* stress the saving significance of the incarnation and resurrection, not primarily the crucifixion, and thus they, like John's writings, are firmly anchored in the Jewish doctrine of creation as good, death as evil. They share the same notion of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete. And they share John's cosmic dualism of two worlds/ages in conflict.

²⁸ Ode 19 refers to the virgin birth of Jesus, Ode 24 refers to Jesus' baptism and Ode 39 to his walking on water. Ode 42, which I quote here, refers to blind Bartimaeus' cry to Jesus at the gate, 'Son of God, have pity on us...'

²⁹ Odes 10:5; 23:15; 29:8 portray the Gentiles in unattractive terms, like Mt.10:5. Also, the *Odes* are believed to have originated in either Antioch or Edessa and were originally written in Syriac, though the extant manuscripts are in Aramaic, which in either

of early Jewish Christian communal and liturgical worship is evidence of the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus from a very early date, attesting again that an empty tomb and the bodily resurrection of Jesus were not ‘later additions’ or ‘embellishments’ to early Christian proclamation. Rather, they were quite central from the outset to the Jewish Christian community, giving both shape and substance to the claim of Jesus being Messiah and Lord. Moreover, the easy acknowledgement and apparent acceptance of the *Odes* by all significant parts of the church – Greek, Latin, Syriac/Nestorian, and Egyptian/Coptic³⁰ – testifies to the global church’s early and widespread convictions about Jesus’ bodily resurrection. The *Odes* did not surprise anyone or cause controversy in that regard. Therefore, the entire collection is poetically and historically moving because of its sustained attention to very central theological themes. To think that it sustained and nourished the communal spiritual life of at least one significant Jewish Christian community (and probably others) for generations is astounding. As an example, then, here is an early Jewish Christian poet, sometime during the first century CE, writing these words on the resurrection of Jesus, remarkably, from Jesus’ first person perspective:

I was not rejected although I was considered to be so,
and I did not perish although they thought it of me.
Sheol saw me and was shattered,
and Death ejected me and many with me.
I have been vinegar and bitterness to it,
and I went down with it as far as its depth.
Then the feet and the head it released,
because it was not able to endure my face.
And I made a congregation of living among his dead;
and I spoke with them by living lips;
in order that my word may not be unprofitable.
And those who had died ran towards me;
and they cried out and said, ‘Son of God, have pity on us.
And deal with us according to Your kindness,
and bring us out from the bonds of darkness.
And open for us the door by which we may come out to You;
for we perceive that our death does not touch You.
May we also be saved with You,
because You are our Savior.’
Then I heard their voice,
and placed their faith in my heart.
And I placed my name upon their head,
because they are free and they are mine.
Hallelujah.

Odes of Solomon 42:10 – 20

case places them culturally close to or within Palestinian Judaism. It is noteworthy, however, that Paul writes to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus to no longer walk as the Gentiles do (Eph.4:17), so one cannot say firmly that the rhetorical device would have been appropriate for Jewish Christians alone.

³⁰ See footnote 27, above.