

Excerpt from the book
The Song of Songs - A Messiah's Confession
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Sh'lomó – Messiah King, Son of David (or How Not to Save the World in Three Easy Steps)

As we recall, the Torah predicts that once settled in the Promised Land the Children of Israel will want a king. The Torah states:

"When you come to the Land which the Lord your God gives you and you inherit it and settle in it, and you say: 'I will place a king over me like all the nations that surround me.' You will surely place over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose; from among your brothers will you place a king over you; you may not place over you a foreign man who is not your brother. However, he may not have too many

horses, so that he doesn't bring the [Israelite] people back to Egypt in order to amass horses, for the Lord told you: 'You will not go back that way ever again.' And he may not have too many wives, so that his heart doesn't turn away; and he may not have exceeding amounts of silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sits on the throne, he will write a copy of this Torah in a book before the Cohanim and the Levites. And it will be with him and he will read it every day of his life, so that he learns to be in awe of the Lord his God in order to keep all the words of this Torah and these laws so that he fulfills them. To prevent his heart from feeling superior to his brothers, and to prevent him from straying from the Commandments to the right or left, so that he lives long over his dominion, he and his sons, among [or "in"] Israel."¹

¹ Deuteronomy 17:14-20

In other words, God gives three positive directives and three prohibitions regarding Israelite kings: the king must be an Israelite, not a foreigner; he must write two copies of the Torah; and he must study the Torah every day of his life to keep him wise and humble. The prohibitions: the king may not own too many horses (which represent military might as opposed to faith in God's power; they are also the symbol of Egypt); have too many wives (18 being the limit, which is how many David had - not including Avishag); or own an extravagant amount of gold and silver (amount unspecified).



An important concept to clarify before we go on with our story is that of Messiah or Messiah son of David. The word Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ, *Mashiah*) in the Hebrew Bible means no more nor less than "the anointed one," i.e. one who is anointed with the sacred Anointing Oil, or balsam oil in the case of kings who are not of the Davidic

dynasty.² The Anointing Oil was made only once, according to a special recipe given to Moshé by God's command, and was used for three purposes: to anoint the vessels of the Tabernacle in the desert; to anoint the High Priests and the Priest officiating at war; and to anoint kings of the Davidic dynasty. With the advent of Jesus (pardon the pun) and Christianity the idea of Messiah morphed into that of a superhuman or Divine savior whose purpose is to save the world and rule over mankind in everlasting peace, or at least until the year 7,000 when the world is purported to come to an end. Although the word Christ comes from the Greek Χριστός (*christos*) meaning "the anointed one," Jesus' "anointment" had nothing to do with the Anointing Oil or kingship; a woman simply poured some fragrant oil on his feet.³

² Exodus 30:22-32; Mishnéh Toráh, Laws of the Temple Vessels 1:10; the non-Davidic kings who were anointed with balsam were anointed from a jug, while the Davidic kings were anointed from a horn – see Radak on Kings II 9:1

³ John 12:3; Luke 7:38; Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:7

Over the centuries the Jews adopted the Christian concept of Messiah as a superhuman savior, and Messianic movements have arisen around charismatic figures such as Shimón Bar Kochbá, Shabtai Zvi and the Lubavitcher Rebbe. This approach is not actually mentioned anywhere in the Hebrew Bible; nine of the ten references in the Bible to "The Lord's Messiah" refer to the very human King Shaúl, while the only mention of Messiah in the Prophets, on which the whole idea of the Redemption is founded, refers to Emperor Cyrus of Persia.⁴ Rambam,⁵ for one, although he lists belief in the Messiah among his 13 Principles of Faith, regards the idea of a superhuman Messiah as dubious and states that although there will be a Messiah King he will not contradict or change the laws of nature:

"Do not imagine that the Messiah King should perform wonders and miracles, and create new things, or resurrect the

⁴ Isaiah 45:1

⁵ Rabbi Moshé ben Maimón, a.k.a. Maimonides, 1138-1204; one of the most prominent rabbinic commentators of all time, author of Mishnéh Toráh, Sefer HaMitzvot, Guide for the Perplexed, etc.

dead, or any of the other things that the fools say...⁶

Fascinatingly, Rambam continues, using as his example what is apparently the first step toward the belief in a Savior Messiah in non-Christian Jewish history:

"...It is not so; for Rabbi Akiva was a great sage, one of the sages of the Mishnah, and he was the arms-bearer of Ben Koziba of whom he said that he was the Messiah King. And he and all the sages of his generation imagined that he was the Messiah King until he was killed for his sins, and when he was killed it became clear that he was not the Messiah, and the sages asked him for neither signs nor miracles."

"Ben Koziba" is a derogatory nickname meaning "false one" applied to Shimón Bar Kochbá, a warrior whom Rabbi Akiva indeed saw as the Messiah King sent by God to save

⁶ Mishnéh Toráh, Laws of Kings and their Wars, 11:6

the Jews from the Romans.⁷ From the year +132 to +135 Bar Kochbá led a revolt in a last-ditch attempt to win back Israel for the Jews. The insurrection was put down and that was the last serious attempt to regain Jewish sovereignty over the land of Israel until the 20th century.

Rambam continues:

"Do not imagine that in the days of the Messiah anything will change in the way the world works. Or that anything about Creation will be new. Rather, the world will function as it always has."⁸

It is a Torah commandment to build a temple as a place where God can dwell: "And they will make Me a temple and I will dwell in it."⁹ This is a standing commandment and there is no indication in the Bible that there has to be a Messiah of any kind present in order to do this.

⁷ Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Ta'ánít 4:24 A

⁸ Mishnéh Toráh, Laws of Kings and their Wars, 12:1

⁹ Exodus 25:8; Rambam, Mishnéh Toráh, Hilchot Beit HaB'hirah 1:1

Nonetheless it is a fundamental principle set forth by the Biblical prophets that there will be a time when there will be a Temple in Jerusalem to which all the nations of the world will come to worship the one God and "My house will be called the House of Prayer for all the nations"¹⁰ and "Nation will not lift up sword against nation and they will study war no more."¹¹ This is commonly called the Messianic Era.

Ordinarily the son of a Davidic king does not have to be anointed unless there is some controversy over his succession to the throne. This was the case with Sh'lomó. Thus Sh'lomó was literally *Mashíah ben Davíd*, Messiah King, son of Davíd. And now back to our story.



Sh'lomó begins his reign by taking care of some of his father's unfinished business: getting rid of a few old enemies and pampering an old

¹⁰ Isaiah 56:7

¹¹ Isaiah 2:4

friend, as well as ordering the execution of his step-brother Adoniyáhu who has the audacity to ask for Avishág the Shunammite for a wife in a foiled attempt to wrest the throne from him.

At the age of sixteen Sh'lomó has his first in a long series of marriages: he marries none other than the daughter of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, for which he is reproached later on as we will see. At about this time Sh'lomó goes to Givón, where the copper altar made by Moshé in the desert is located, to offer sacrifices to God. There God appears to him in a dream and asks:

"What can I give you?"

Sh'lomó asks for:

"...a listening heart to judge Your people and discern between good and evil, for who can judge this weighty nation?"

God is pleased with his answer and replies:

"Since you asked for this and you didn't ask for a long life, and you didn't ask for wealth, and you didn't ask for the lives of your enemies, and you asked for the ability to understand and listen in judgment, I have done as you have asked; here, I have given you a wise, understanding heart the likes of which never existed before you and never will be after you. And since you didn't ask for these things, I have also given you wealth and honor such as no man among kings has ever had, for the rest of your life. And if you walk in My ways and keep My laws and commandments as David your father did, I will grant you a long life."¹²

Then Sh'lomó wakes and realizes it was a dream – but not just a dream – a dream come true; arising from bed he puts his head out the window and suddenly realizes that he can understand the speech of the birds and beasts!¹³

¹² Kings I 3:11-14

¹³ Rashi on Kings I 3:15

Under King Sh'lomó Israel prospers as never before – the well-known prophecy from Micháh (Micah), "Each man under his own grapevine and under his own fig tree" is already a reality¹⁴ – and he governs all the land from the Euphrates River to Egypt and is at peace with all the neighboring countries throughout his reign (almost). His wisdom is legendary. The Bible states:

"God gave Sh'lomó great wisdom and understanding and generosity, like the sand of all the beaches... Sh'lomó's wisdom was greater than that of any man... and he spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs. And he spoke about the trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop growing out of the wall, and he spoke of the beasts and of the birds and the crawling creatures and the fishes. And people came from every nation to

¹⁴ Kings I 5:5

hear Sh'lomó's wisdom, sent by every king who heard about his wisdom."¹⁵

In the fourth year of his reign Sh'lomó begins the greatest task of his life – the construction of the Holy Temple on Mt. Moriáh in Jerusalem. Although the building itself was not particularly large – approximately 30 meters/yards long,¹⁶ 10 meters wide and 15 meters high – its construction and materials were unparalleled in beauty and splendor. Its foundation was a miracle of engineering, centering as it did around the Foundation Stone, considered to be the umbilicus of Earth, the point from which the entire universe expanded at Creation, and where Ya'áqóv once lay his head and had a dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder to Heaven. He called this place "the gateway to Heaven."¹⁷

¹⁵ Kings I 5:9-14

¹⁶ 60 cubits; 1 cubit = approx. 50 cm./1.64 ft.

¹⁷ This is also, according to Islam, the rock from which Mohammed ascended to Heaven, now the site of the Dome of the Rock

The massive amounts of wood for building the Temple and the palace Sh'lomó builds later are provided by Híram, King of Tzor (Tyre, in what was then Phoenicia), an old friend of his father's, from the Forest of Lebanon. The stones which formed the foundation, many of which can be seen to this day, are enormous, each about a meter high and deep and more than a meter long and weighing four to five tons. These stones were quarried elsewhere so that "neither the sound of the hammer and the stone-axe nor any iron tool was ever heard throughout the construction of the Temple."¹⁸ (Imagine the din if it had been heard!) The stone walls of the Temple were then paneled with ornamentally engraved cedar wood so that no stone could be seen, and the entire building, including the floor, was then plated with gold inside and out. Enormous amounts of gold were also used to make the altar, the tables for the showbread, ten huge candelabras which stood on either side of the original *menoráh* made in the desert, two kinds of musical

¹⁸ Kings I 6:7

instruments, and many different tools and vessels for use in the Temple.

In the courtyard of the Temple stood the *yam* or "sea," a massive round pool made of cast metal with embossed lilies all around the rim, about five meters in diameter and two and a half meters high, resting on the backs of twelve metal bulls. Also in the courtyard were copper sinks with faucets ornamented with figures of lions, bulls and cherubs. These waterworks were quite a feat of engineering in themselves, since the Temple stood on Mt. Moriáh, higher than any source of water. The ornamentation is important to note as there is a common misconception that the second of the Ten Commandments "You shall not make graven images..." in Judaism means the same thing as it does in Islam – don't make graven images at all – when the prohibition only refers to making physical representations of God or *worshipping* graven images. In fact, in the Sanctuary itself were two enormous cherubs made of gold-plated olive wood – about five meters tall with five-meter wingspans.

Sh'lomó also builds a wall around Jerusalem about 20 feet high.¹⁹ To carry out these awesome feats of construction, engineering, craftsmanship and artistry, Sh'lomó drafts a workforce of 30,000 laborers from all over Israel in addition to hiring 70,000 porters and 80,000 stone-cutters to quarry the mountains. These laborers are overseen by 3,300 supervisors.²⁰ This is not the place to go into fine detail about the building of the Temple but by now the reader should have some idea of how magnificent it was.

¹⁹ A section of this wall was unearthed in 2010, including a gatehouse, guard tower and adjacent building and confirmed by archeologist and excavator Eilat Mazar to be from the -10th century.

²⁰ Kings I 5:27-29



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Some time during the construction of the Temple, God speaks to Sh'lomó for the second time, this time not in a dream. He says:

"[As for] this house which you are building for Me, if you walk in My ways and uphold My laws and keep all My commandments, I will fulfill my word through you - that which I said to your father David. And I will dwell among

²¹ "Cutting Down Cedars for the Construction of the Temple" - Paul Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

the Children of Israel and I will not abandon My people Israel."²²

After seven years of construction the Temple is completed and Sh'lomó gathers the elders of Israel and the heads of the twelve tribes to witness as the Cohanim (priests, descendants of Moshé's brother Aharón) carry the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the original tablets of the Ten Commandments, from the City of Davíd up to the Temple. On Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year, the first of the month of Tishrei) the entire adult male population of Israel gathers in Jerusalem and offers "innumerable sacrifices."²³ The Cohanim carry the Ark into the Temple and place it in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum of the Temple, built directly over the Foundation Stone. As the Cohanim leave the Holy of Holies, God gives a mighty sign that all the labor was not in vain: God's Cloud of Glory, the indication of His Presence, fills the hall. Then Sh'lomó addresses

²² Kings I 6:11-12

²³ After the Dedication of the Temple Sh'lomó sacrifices another 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep (Kings I 8:63), which while not being "innumerable" are certainly a lot of barbecue.

the masses, kneeling before the altar, raising his arms to Heaven, and beginning his impressive and rather dramatic speech with the words: "The Lord said He would dwell in the fog." In this speech he reaffirms the Israelites' commitment to God and establishes Jerusalem and the Temple as the place to which prayers would be addressed from then on:

"And they will return to You with all their hearts and all their souls in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and they will pray to You through their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You chose, and the house which I built in Your name."²⁴

The celebration continues through the festival of Succot and that year there is no fasting on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.²⁵

²⁴ Kings I 8:48; written "which You built," read "which I built"

²⁵ Kings I 8:65; see Rashi



Finally, in the year 2935/-825, 487 years after the Exodus from Egypt, God has his dwelling-place in Jerusalem, His chosen city; the Cohanim are carrying out their functions; the Israelites live in peace and prosperity; and for the first time ever all 613 Torah Commandments can be fulfilled. All is in place for perfect and permanent peace on Earth – what will eventually be known as the Messianic Era. All it will take is for King Sh'lomó to keep his end of the bargain.



²⁶ "Dedication of Solomon's Temple" woodcut, C. 1700 by Otto Elliger

