Messiah[1] – (Hebrew: מָשִׁיחַ, Greek: χριστός) Any person given special powers by God, especially those set aside as priest or king through anointment, are called Messiah in 1st Century Judaism. The title of Messiah, which means anointed, develops into the word Christ in the New Testament. In the New Testament King James AV translations, Messiah is used when the Greek has a definite article and Christ when there is no article. The absolute form without the definite article denoting Christ was not found in early Judaism; but, the idea of a leader set aside, anointed and placed in position with special powers by God is identified in the Intertestamental period.[2]

Levitic Messiah[3] - Some long for a Messiah that originates from the tribe of Levi during the Intertestamental period and this Levitic Messiah is expected to be at a higher rank over the political Davidic Messiah.[4] However, for most religious Jews there is no need for a messiah as long as the altar is effective; there is absolutely nothing a religious messiah could do that the altar could not accomplish.[5] So while the promise of eternal priesthood as reward for Phinehas’ zealousness for God (Num. 25:10-13) is considered by the Jews to be a matter of fact, the Levitic Messiah was more a high priest concept that conducts proper sacrifice at the altar.

Son of Man[6] - Daniel 7:13-14, 2 Esdras, and 1 Enoch (37-71) all mention a son of man that has attributes so similar they are often thought to be same person.[7] The Son of Man is revealed in these combined writings to be preexistent, heavenly, majestic, possessing dominion, and one day judging mankind and angels. But, there is some debate among scholars whether the Son of Man and Messiah were the same being before Jesus Christ in the thoughts of Jews.[8] In the fourth Gospel of John the Son of God virtually merges with the Son of Man, first introducing Him as mediator of the redemptive powers of heaven (John 3:14-15; 12:31) which harmonizes Christology doctrine in John’s gospel of the Father and the Son, and brings the Son of Man in Daniel 7 into full revelation. [9]

The Servant of the Lord[10] – The Servant Songs in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12 speak of the Servant of the LORD (Hebrew: ‘ebed YHWH). There is no clear identity to this servant, whether he is idealized or a real being, and there are separate attributes dependent upon perspective.[11] For instance, God’s perspective of the Servant is that he is chosen by Him and brings Him pleasure. God promises to anoint him with the Spirit (which is fully revealed in Isaiah 11:1-5 in the Messianic verses attached later to Christ), and rise up in his defense of the Servant at some point. However, the perspective of humans shows the Servant of the LORD to be rejected, mocked, tortured, and killed in the place of many who should have suffered, making them righteous before God (Isaiah 53).

Intertestamental Judaism has both collective and individual understandings of the term; however, Hellenistic Judaism characterizes the Servant of the Lord as a servant that is persecuted and suffers as a just man. Thus, there are some scholars that argue for the possibility that some Intertestamental Jews expected a suffering Messiah, especially with reference to Isaiah 53:11.[12] However, Emil Schüer argues in her History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ that it is not the idea of a suffering Messiah, but rather, the idea of a suffering Messiah that had atonement value, that should be questioned.[13] This raises the same point as the Levitic Messiah who is basically unneeded if the altar is properly used. It was probably only in learned circles on the periphery of Judaism in the Intertestamental period that expects some sort of suffering eschatological figure before the Christian era.[14]

The Prophet like Moses[15] – Deuteronomy 18:9-22 promises to raise up a Prophet like Moses to speak to them about their worship of idols and using magic for divine revelation and guidance. During the Intertestamental period, some Jews thought another Moses would come to them to lead them on a new exodus from bondage, renew the covenant between them and God, give new revelation of the things of God, and become their new national founder.[16] This idea of a Prophet like Moses is said to be parodied in the book of Jonah as a reverse Moses, enforcing some Jews messianic expectations of a Prophet like Moses to one day come, easily to discern the differences between the parodied Jonah vs. the real presence of a Moses-like prophet.[17]

Elijah[18] – At every Passover Seder Meal an extra glass of wine is poured to tempt Elijah to return, even today. Some Intertestamental Jews think that Elijah will come once again, but this time to prepare the path for the Messiah. Others claim Elijah to be the actual Messiah, who will one day be resurrected to lead them.[19]

Malachi 3:23-24 is the first reference as Elijah coming in the “great and terrible day of the Lord;” the Messiah is not mentioned. But, when the disciples ask Jesus why the scribes say that Elijah must come (Mark 9:11, Matthew 17:10), he responds by assuring them that he has already come; in the Mark reference Elijah is implied to be the person of John the Baptist, while the Matthew reference explicitly names him.

Scholar Morris M. Faierstein surveys the leading scholar citations concerning Jewish Messianic ideas of Elijah’s coming, and examines common evidences presented in defense of Intertestamental period belief. If Justinian’s reference in Dial. 8.3; 49.1 is excluded, there is no evidence of the concept of Elijah as forerunner of the Messiah as widely known during the first century C.E.[20] Scholar Dale C. Allison gives Faierstein credit for raising the question of scholars generalizing the universality of belief that Elijah would appear shortly before the Messiah; however, he cautions scholars to avoid the suggestion that Christians are responsible for the idea.[21] Since Christ addresses this issue, and the Scribes are speaking specifically about this in Scripture references Mark and Matthew, it reliably reveals the thoughts during Christ’s presence; however, there is scant evidence of when this thought of Elijah proceeding Christ developed and no solid proof that it was thought during the Intertestamental period.

Savior[22] – (Hebrew: yasha and moshia; Greek: soter) This concept is prominent in Old Testament, Intertestamental writings and Hellenism.[23] It is almost exclusively applied to God and Jesus Christ,[24] and represents the idea of rescue and deliverance that is fully developed into theological truths throughout Scripture.

Judge[25] - This concept is also prominent in Old Testament, Intertestamental writings and Hellenism.[26] It reflects the both the position and the work of Old Testament Judges as well as bring forth the expanded idea of a rescuer of people from dangerous situations or rejection by God. Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel, and Jewish apocalyptic writers apply the Judge name for the name or description of the Messiah liberally. 4 Ezra [= 2 Esdras]), written after the Domitian reign and destruction of Jerusalem, depicts the Messiah gathering the tribes of Israel, destroying enemies and bringing judgment. 2 Baruch, written after Jerusalem’s destruction, looks for the rule of the Messiah to brings commendation to the righteous and condemnation to the wicked through his judgment.[27]

Deliverer[28] - This concept is also prominent in Old Testament, Intertestamental writings and Hellenism.[29] The idea that God, the deliverer of His people from danger or exile, will use a human agent such as the Messiah is partially supported in Scripture, though the OT tends to stress that God acts alone; Joseph was God’s agent to deliver the Chosen people from famine (Genesis 45:7), Esther was warned by Mordecai that God would provide another if she failed to deliver (Esther 4:14), and Othniel and Ehud are deliverers in battle (Judges 3:9, 15).[30] The Messianic prophecies in the Book of Isaiah announce the coming Deliverer who will bring an everlasting deliverance (Isaiah 9:1-9:7), giving full support to Jews in the Intertestamental period of one part of the nature of the Messiah.

Shepherd[31] - Ezekiel 34:11-16 presents an image of a shepherd gathering together God’s scattered people. There are also a messianic terms in the context of Zechariah 11:4-17 and Zechariah 13:7. The Lord Jesus Christ completes these messianic shadows by teaching parables such as the parable of the lost sheep found in Luke 15:1-7.

Word[32] - The powerful title of Word if firmly established in John 1:1-5, and gives Christian’s confidence that Scripture reflects the inerrant Word of God. However, author Scott makes a point that “Wisdom” is mad so close in meaning to the way “Word” is used in the title reflecting Christ, and both of these words assumed to come from a Hellenistic environment, with possible Hebrew roots.[33] Psalm 119, an acrostic song in praise of the Scriptures, typologically reflects the depth of love for Scripture that is often expressed by believers toward their Lord as an expression of the Word of God, in my opinion.

Righteous or Just One[34] - 2 Samuel, the Septuagint of Isaiah 3:10, Isaiah 32:1 and Isaiah 53:11 are just some of many references to the coming Messiah using these titles. This title was confirmed by Stephen in Acts 7:52.

Branch[35] - The branch or shoot used as coming from the offspring of David can be found in Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, Jeremiah 33:15, Zechariah 3:8, and Zechariah 6:12. This title is of great typological significance later on as the Lord teaches his followers about doing works to glorify Him by bringing them to fruition through the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) and recognizing the corrupt fruit of the wicked (Matthew 7:15-20).

Elect or Chosen One[36] - Scripture reflects these titles, which confirms the knowledge of the 1st century Jew, in Isaiah 42:1, 43:10, and 44:1 with connection to Israel. 1 Enoch makes several references to this title also (45:3-5; 49:2; 51:3-4; 52:6,9; 53:6; 55:4; 61:8; 62:1)

Son of God or Son of David[37] - Isaiah 9:6-7, 1 Enoch 105:2; 2 Esdras 7:28-29; 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9 all make reference to either the Son of God or the Son of David. This provides ample proof that 1st century Jews connected the Messiah to these titles.

Stone[38] - The stone as becomes the foundation (Isaiah 28:16) placed by the LORD God, as a sanctuary for believers (Psalm118:22) and a stumbling block for the disobedient Jews (Isaiah 8:14); that stone is later revealed to be the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42).

[1] Julius J. Scott, Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1995), 309.

[2] F.L. Cross, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1082.

[3] Scott, 311.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck et al., The Encyclopedia of Judaism, vol. 2 (Brill, 2000), 877-878.

[6] Scott, 311.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 313.

[9] Neusner, lxxxiii.

[10] Scott, 314.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 316.

[13] Ibid., 317.

[14] Ibid., 318.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Duane L. Christensen, Word Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy 1-21:9, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

[18] Scott, 318.

[19] Ibid., 319.

[20] Morris M. Faierstein, "Why Do the Scribes Say That Elijah Must Come First," Journal of Biblical Literature 100, (1981): 85.

[21] Dale C. Allison, "Elijah Must Come First," Journal of Biblical Literature 103, (1984): 258.

[22] Scott, 319.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Walter A. Elwell, Barry J. Beitzel, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 1911.

[25] Scott, 319.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Simon J. Kistemaker, and William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 49-50.

[28] Scott, 319.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, et al., Holmon Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 411.

[31] Scott, 319.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 320.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.