

The Concept of the Messiah and how it relates to the Jewish Leaders in the Jewish Study
Scripture and Today
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Israel survived a very long time living as an independent group who refused to assimilate to the pagan surroundings. But the question then becomes, how was that possible? They were few of them, and initially they were nomadic. So how could such a small group survive so long, without becoming absorbed into the surrounding nations? The answer comes from their leaders, the Messiah, or a man who understood Jewish law and its commandments, is righteous, fights for Israel, and is a good judge, military leader, and an inspiring speaker. Just as a child emulates their heroes and loved ones, the Israelites emulated their leaders. Regardless of if it were a patriarch, judge, king, or prophet, the Hebrews would listen and do as their Messiah said. Most of the leaders of the Jewish bible were pious, which is why the nation still survives today, but there were impious leaders from time to time, which caused the nation to crumble and have to restart. But what piety is, isn't very simple. It is a mixture of different values and ideals held by the people, just as impiety isn't just the opposite of the values of piety but the opposite ideas.

When choosing a leader today, whether it is for a local, state, or federal government, there are a few qualities that all Americans agree are important to have. The candidates ideally care about the future, share a concern for education, and have a political stance such as liberal or republican. In the Jewish bible, the leaders are much the same. They too, cared about the future of their people, the teachings of the bible, and had

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a religious stance such as Jewish or Pagan. But some of our qualities differ, today, many voters would be concerned if an overly religious or pious individual were in charge of the government, while for the ancient Israelites that was ideal!

The most important quality of any leader in the Jewish scripture is piety. Piety can be broken down into a few different sections; trust, prayer, and righteousness. All successful leaders in the Jewish scripture are pious. Whether they have always been pious or become pious in the process of their lives. In the Book of Judith, Judith herself is recognized as a God-fearing woman¹. In the Jewish Bible; Noah the patriarch is described as a righteous man², and Abram the patriarch puts his trust in God "...and he (Abram) put his trust in the Lord, He reckoned it to his merit."³ From the beginning of Genesis to 2 Chronicles with "Throughout his reign they did not deviate from following the Lord God of their fathers."⁴, piety is a main theme. This is because the Lord gave the Hebrews the land of Canaan, saying, "I will make of you a great nation..."⁵ But there were some stipulations;

...But they (The Israelites) did not obey; they stiffened their necks, like their father who did not have faith in the Lord their God, they spurned His laws and the covenant that He had made with their fathers, and the warnings He had give them. They went after delusion and were deluded; (They imitated) the nations that were about them, which the Lord had forbidden them to emulate. They rejected all the commandments of the Lord their God...they gave themselves over to what was displeasing to the Lord...The Lord was incensed at Israel and He banished them from His presence...⁶

¹"Book of Judith" New American Bible, accessed December 2015, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_PCQ.HTM 8:31.

² Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds. *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: New York, 2004, Genesis 6:9

³ *ibid*: Genesis 15:6

⁴ *ibid*: 2 Chronicles 34:38

⁵ *ibid*: Genesis 12:2

⁶ *ibid*: 2 Kings 17:14-19

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If the Israelites were impious and turned away from God, then they were cast out of Jerusalem and had to return to the Lord begging His forgiveness.⁷ It is also the piety of the leaders of Israel that allowed them win wars. The King and prophet Moses was pious, and therefore God “...(drove) out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites...”⁸ So long as the leader remained pious and kept faith in God, then Israel would win any battle. In the book of Judith, Achior; a pagan turned Hebrew prophet, tells commander-in-chief Holofernes;

So now...if these people are at fault, and are sinning against their God...we shall be able to go up and conquer them. But if they are not a guilty nation, then...(we) should keep our distance; otherwise their Lord and God will shield them, and we shall become the laughing stock of the whole world.⁹

Piety was not only a way of ensuring won battles or a fertile land, it also ensured the leaders: patriarchs, judges, kings, and prophets learned to trust in God. When the patriarch Abram was facing famine in the Canaanites land he left for Egypt. As he entered Egypt, he was afraid the Egyptians would kill him for his wife Sarai, so Abram asked of Sarai, “Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you.”¹⁰ When Abram does this, he is showing his distrust of Gods protection, and when Sarai is taken as a wife of the pharaoh¹¹ this is a sin in the eyes of God¹². When God sent plagues down onto the Pharaoh, the Pharaoh then sent Abram and Sarai out of Egypt. Abram learned to trust in God after that “...and

⁷ *ibid*: 2 Chronicles 30: 6-9

⁸ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, Exodus 33:2

⁹ Book of Judith: Ch.5:20-21

¹⁰ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, Genesis 12:13

¹¹ *ibid*: Genesis 12:17

¹² *ibid*: Leviticus 21:7-8

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he (Abram) put his trust in the Lord, He reckoned it to his merit.”¹³ When Abram trusted God he was able to take the land of the Canaanites. In Genesis 14, when Lot was taken captive, Abram “mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen...”¹⁴ and went to retrieve Lot. After defeating Chedorlaomer, Abram has accepted that it was the “Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth...” who was the power behind Abram. After learning trust to God, he then goes on buy the burial land for the future patriarchs.¹⁵ As well as father the nation of Israel.

There is a multitude of successful leaders in the Jewish scriptures, but David stands out. He is a contested figure in the bible because revisionists, such as Israel Finkelstein, have been attempting to find evidence that would prove David’s existence as merely “fictitious propaganda of the ancient biblical writers.”¹⁶ However, there has been some proof of David’s line. In Tel Dan, the inscriptions ““King of Israel”” and ““Beit David”” (House of David)”¹⁷ were found. Regardless of his status as real or not, David still embodies the qualities of a good King. He shows his trust in God when he went out onto the battlefield to slay the Philistine soldier,

Your (King Saul) servant has killed both lion and bear; and that uncircumcised Philistine shall end up like one of them, for he has defied the ranks of the living God. The Lord, who saved me from lion and bear will also save me from that Philistine.¹⁸

¹³ *ibid*: Genesis 15:6

¹⁴ *ibid*: Genesis 14

¹⁵ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, Genesis 23

¹⁶ Rabbi Dovid Lichtman *Archaeology and the Bible Part 2*, www.aish.com 02/09/2004

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1 Samuel 17:36-37

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And was never seen to have any doubt in God. Because of his constant trust in God,

David is considered one of the greatest Kings and warriors in the Hellenistic period.¹⁹

However, it is David's righteousness and devotion to God that makes him arguably the greatest king according to the Bible. David ensured not only the religious protection of his people,

...He (David) began to bless God with a loud voice, calling him the Father and Parent of the universe, and the Author of human and divine things...and to Solomon his son, a sound and a righteous mind... They (the Israelites) gave thanks to David, on account of all the blessings which they had received ever since he had taken the kingdom.²⁰

In this way, David blesses his son Solomon, and hopes that Solomon continues to act as righteous as David. But David also ensured the physical protection; and a King protects his people. This theme is seen across all faiths. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh builds great walls around the city of Uruk, "...a great rampart...the outer wall where the cornice runs...and the inner wall...it has no equal."²¹ By building the wall, Gilgamesh effectively protected his people from attacks. David protected his people by taking back Jerusalem²² and remaining righteous to God.

Righteousness and trust in the Lord created a solid relationship between the Israelites and God. But prayer created a form of communication between the two. It is very evident in the Book of Judith, how powerful prayer can be. After Commander-in-chief Holofernes has cut off the water supply of the Israelites living in the mountains in Judea, the Israelites were ready to give up, however Judith formulated a plan that would

¹⁹ *Digging for the Truth*, DVD, directed by Mark Hufnail (MPH Entertainment, 2000)

²⁰ Josephus. *The New Complete works of Josephus*. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1999. Book 7, ch. 15 pg. 265; 380-381

²¹ N.K.Sanders, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: England, 1972, pg. 61

²² Rabbi Lichtman *Archaeology and the Bible Part 2*

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save them. Before she could begin her plan, she needed Gods' blessing. Judith went to
the temple of the Lord,

...(She) threw herself down prostrate, with ashes strewn upon her head,
and wearing nothing over her sackcloth...Judith prayed to the lord with
a loud voice: "Lord, God...hear me also, a widow. It is you who were
the author of those events and of what preceded and followed them...
you are the God of the lowly, the helper of the oppressed, the supporter
of the weak...hear my prayer!"²³

She is showing her righteousness by the clothing she wears, and her adherence to the
rules of widows.²⁴ She also shows her trust in the Lord when she says he is the God of the
lowly, oppressed, and weak. That she trusts in Him to protect her when she executes her
plan. After she has infiltrated the camp of the Assyrians, she asks that Holofernes allow
her to pray each night, saying the prayers will "tell me (Judith) when the Israelites have
committed their crimes."²⁵ When in actuality, she would go out and pray to God to
"...direct her way for the triumph of his people."²⁶ After four days, Holofernes ordered a
banquet for the servants, and insisted that Judith come.²⁷ After Judith was able to make
Holofernes drunk, and fall asleep, she prayed once more to God "O Lord, God of all
might in this hour look graciously on my undertaking for the exaltation of Jerusalem;"²⁸
Before removing his head from his body. She was then able to sneak out with the head,
because the guards were told to let her go pray each night.²⁹

²³ Book of Judith: Ch. 9

²⁴ Book of Judith: Ch.8:5-6

²⁵ *ibid*: Ch.11:17

²⁶ *ibid*: Ch.12:8

²⁷ *ibid*: Ch.12:10

²⁸ *ibid*: Ch.13:4

²⁹ *ibid*: Ch.12:6

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Piety is as important to the Israelites as a political stance is to the modern American. Today, any voter can research the stance a candidate has on hot button issues such as abortion, gay rights, and the refugee situation. In Ancient Judea, it wasn't quite so easy, the Israelites needed to be sure that the leaders they were following were going to be successful. If a leader, such as Abram, David, or Judith were a pious individual, meaning they trusted God, were righteous, and prayed, they were going to be a successful leader.

But just as Americans have had their share of good leaders, we have also had some bad leaders. Individuals who lied and deceived the public, as well as believing themselves above the law. They tried to control the law, and change it to suit their needs. This is not just a problem of the modern world though, the ancient Hebrews also faced these problems. Just as an unsuccessful leader affects the general public today; the impiety: the sinful actions, disobedience and attempts to control God; of leaders in ancient Judea had dire affects on the Israelites.

King Ahab embodies the qualities of impiety; he is disobedient, sinful, and tries to control God. However, it is his sinfulness to God and Gods laws that ultimately end his lineage. King Ahab married Jezebel, who was a pagan queen. Because of her pagan upbringing, she had a different understanding of king and queen. To her, a king was a God. Therefore, when King Ahab tries to buy the land of Naboth the Jezreelite and is denied, Jezebel misunderstands King Ahabs saying “(Naboth said) I will not give my vineyard to you” to mean that Naboth insulted him. To which she says to King Ahab, “Now is the time to show yourself king over Israel. Rise and eat something, and be

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cheerful; I will get the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for you.”³⁰ She then uses corrupt judges to “Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the front of the assembly.”³¹ After which, Naboth was taken out and stoned to death. For Jezebel, this was all acceptable as a king is a God, as Naboths’ insulting of King Ahab could have hurt the whole community. But her actions render King Ahab an unsuccessful king, when he marries Jezebel, he is marrying outside the tribes.³² By letting her sentence Naboth to death, he is accepting Jezebel’s understanding of kings as equal to a God. He “...committed himself to doing what was displeasing to the Lord, at the instigation of his wife Jezebel. He acted most abominably...”³³ When the prophet Elijah confronts Ahab, and tells him how the “...dogs will lap up your (Ahab’s) blood too.”³⁴ Ahab finally turns back to God and begs his forgiveness, but God only agrees not to “bring disaster in his lifetime;...(but to) bring the disaster upon his house in his son’s time.” Ahab led Israel to sin³⁵

Just as King David is considered one of the greatest kings, King Saul is equally hated.³⁶ Saul was initially God’s chosen king, but he was tasked with destroying the city of Amalek. When he went to do so, he:

...destroyed Amalek from Havilah all the way to Shur...(but he saved)...the best sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value.³⁷

³⁰Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1 Kings 21:7

³¹ *ibid*: 1 Kings 21:9

³² Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, Exodus 34:15

³³ *ibid*: 1 Kings, 21:25-26

³⁴ *ibid*: 1 Kings, 21:19

³⁵ *ibid*: 1 Kings, 21:22

³⁶ *Digging for the Truth*

³⁷ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1 Samuel 15:9

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When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul claimed that he was afraid that the troops would turn on him if they had not been compensated.³⁸ To this, Samuel asks of him:

Dose the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As much as in obedience to the Lord's command?
Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice,
Compliance than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
Defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim.
Because you rejected the Lord's command,
He has rejected you as king.³⁹

Saul has clearly disobeyed the Lord, and has been sinful. After the Lord turns away from Saul, and Saul turns away from the Lord, Saul is filled with an evil spirit of God⁴⁰ but remains king. He continues to rule Israel, however he does so against Gods will. When God declares a new person, David, to be king of Israel, Saul schemes to have David killed. He sets David to tasks that would be considered impossible, and are intended to kill David, "The king desires no other bride-price than the foreskins of a hundred Philistines, as vengeance on the king's enemies."⁴¹ As well as tricking David into becoming a member of his house by having his daughter marry him. "I will give her (Sauls daughter Michal) to him, and she can serve as a snare for him, so that the Philistines may kill him (David)"⁴² Saul would have destroyed cities to kill David.⁴³ After disobeying God, Saul began to sin extravagantly, and act impiously.

Unsuccessful leaders often times turned to the gods of the people surrounding them for aid when the nation started to come into hard times, or if they had grown up

³⁸ *ibid*: 1 Samuel, 15:24

³⁹ *ibid*: 1 Samuel, 15:23

⁴⁰ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, 1 Samuel, 18:10

⁴¹ *ibid*: 1 Samuel, 18:26

⁴² *ibid*: 1 Samuel, 18:21-22

⁴³ *ibid*: 1 Samuel, 23:8

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during the time the nation was suffering. But because pagans surrounded them, this meant that the leaders often ended up worshiping pagan gods. In Exodus, Aaron and the Israelites began to worry when Moses was gone for so long a time on the mountain. Aaron then orders everyone to remove the gold from themselves and bring it to him, so he can cast it into a gold calf. He then declares it the God of Israel, “who brought you (the Israelites) out of Egypt.”⁴⁴ When Moses comes back down, he demands the Israelites remove the altar, and worship only God. During the reign of Jeroboam, the Israelites begin to worship idols,⁴⁵ because of the Assyrian influence. This is also one of the reasons that Nebuchadnezzar was successful in invading and controlling Jerusalem. Hezekiah’s son Manasseh ignored the teachings of God, and displeased Him by

Following the abhorrent practices of the nations that the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. He rebuilt the shrines that his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he erected altars for Baal and made a sacred post, as King Ahab of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the host of heaven and worshiped them, and he built altars for them in the House of the Lord...⁴⁶

Every unsuccessful king was guilty of disobedience and sinning, however, when they try to control God, they gain an element of paganism. The Jews believe law is objective, and comes from God, but the pagans believe that it is subjective and therefore comes from themselves. By siding with the pagan beliefs, they are rejecting God and his laws, and declaring themselves equal to God.

When a leader is unsuccessful, Americans have a few options; on a federal level, they can impeach them. On a state level, the representative can be recalled, and on a local

⁴⁴ *ibid*: Exodus, 32:2-6

⁴⁵ Berlin *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2 Kings 17:41

⁴⁶ *ibid*: 2 Kings 21:2-4

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level they are fired. The Israelites didn't have these options, if the king was bad, the only options they had were for the king to die in battle, be removed by an invading leader, or killed by someone. The Israelites were not able to choose who became king, God decided it for them, but if the sons of the generations that followed the king God chose became impious, the Israelites didn't have much choice but to remain as pious as they could.

The qualities that the Jewish scripture considers important for leaders and Messiahs to have all fall under piety. Trust, prayer, and righteousness made any leader successful, and if their sons and future leaders kept on that same path of piety, then Israel would remain an incredible nation. Capable of living surrounded by pagans, for hundreds of years, and still keeping their traditions, writings, and values intact. But when the leaders turned away from God, and became impious, Israel crumbled. Leaders who tried to control God, sinned, and were disobedient, allowed the nation to do those same things and Israel would then become assimilated to the pagan surroundings. It was not only important for the leaders of Israel to be pious, but it allowed the entire nation to survive and continue moving forward.

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