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Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Messianic Texts in the Book of Isaiah as Jewish/Christian Dialogue – from Matthew to the Rabbis[1]

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Introduction

The title of my paper is an imitation of the title of an article by Israel J. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue."[2] Yuval's argument is that the Passover Haggadah (or the oldest parts of it) should not be seen as the "background" of Christian texts about Passover, like the NT stories of Jesus' last meal, or Melito's homily *Peri Pascha*. It is rather the other way round. The Christians were the first to develop a Passover haggadah because to them there was the need of a story that could justify the entirely new meaning with which the Passover celebration had now been invested. In answer to this, the rabbis on their part developed a story that answered the new Christian story by negating it, by saying, basically: No, we still celebrate Passover in memory of our redemption from Egypt, and Passover will be celebrated on the basis of this story and no other even in the days of the Messiah. It will never be superseded by something else. The bread that we eat is still the bread of affliction that our fathers ate at *erev pesach* in Egypt. This explanation had become necessary because an alternative, competing interpretation had intervened.

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[1] Lecture held at the seminar "Receptionshistoria i den tidiga kyrkan" in professor Sten Hidal's honour at Lund University 20th September 2011. The manuscript has been revised and expanded in the light of very interesting feedback from many in the audience, for which I here express my thanks.

[2] Israel J. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (eds.), *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (Two Liturgical Traditions, 5; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 98–124 (Hebrew version published in *Tarbiz* 65 (1995): 5–28).

This is one example of a rather long series of topics that recently have been analyzed from this same perspective. Unlike the traditional paradigm, where the transport of ideas was seen as a one-way drive from Jewish to Christian, this new paradigm opens the possibility of an intense two-way traffic, Christians taking over and developing pre-Christian Jewish ideas, and rabbis in their turn responding to these Christian developments, thereby modifying their own ideas in the process. You only have to say out loud this very simple paradigm of Jewish/Christian relations for a simple question to be put: Yes, of course, and didn't we think like that all the time? In fact, we didn't, at least I didn't, and I was not alone.

In 1977 Raphael Jehudah Zwi Werblowsky said the following:

> [T]he relationship between the Church and the Jewish People is different from other relationships. There is a built-in asymmetry in the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Judaism has an integrity of its own, without any reference to Christianity… [E]ssentially a Jew can maintain his Jewish integrity in its fullness without taking Christianity into account, much as the Hindu can achieve a 100% Hindu integrity in his spirituality without taking Buddhism into account.[3]

Werblowsky implies, of course, that the same is not true the other way round. Christianity cannot be understood except by constant reference to Judaism, and Buddhists cannot understand their own religion without reference to the Hindu background or roots. This has been true not only concerning how adherents of the respective religions have understood the matter, it has also been true in scholarship concerning the Jewish/Christian relationship.

But not any more. In 2007 Philip S. Alexander said the following: "It is now widely recognized that emergent Christianity played a vital role in the self-definition of Rabbinic Judaism, just as Judaism played a decisive role in the self-definition of Christianity."[4]

I have already mentioned Israel Yuval as one of those scholars who have contributed to this paradigm shift. Another is Peter Schäfer, now

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[3] Zwi Werblowsky, "Summary of the Response," in Franz von Hammerstein (ed.), *Christian-Jewish Relations in Ecumenical Perspective: With Special Emphasis on Africa: A Report on the Conference of the WCC Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People, Jerusalem, 16–26 June, 1977* (Geneva: WCC, 1977), 9–10; quotation at 9.

[4] Philip S. Alexander, "The Rabbis and Messianism," in Markus Bockmuehl and James Carleton Paget (eds.), *Redemption and Resistance: The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 227–244, quotation at 243.

professor at Princeton. In 2007 he published *Jesus in the Talmud*,[5] in which he proposes that the rabbinic (Talmudic)

> stories about Jesus and his family are deliberate and highly sophisticated counternarratives to the stories about Jesus' life and death in the Gospels – narratives that presuppose a detailed knowledge of the New Testament, in particular the Gospel of John … I will argue … that they are polemical counternarratives that parody the New Testament stories, most notably the story of Jesus' birth and death.[6]

In 2010 Schäfer published a follow-up with the provocative title *Die Geburt des Judentums aus dem Geist des Christentums*.[7] Here he applied the same principle to other Talmudic texts that clearly contain open or veiled parody and polemic against Christian theologoumena. For example, he takes the rabbinic figure of Metathron not to be a possible background of NT Christology, but rather the other way round: Metathron is a conscious rabbinic construct intended to counteract Christological exegesis of the two divine thrones in Daniel 7.

While Schäfer has many ingenious, and in my view mostly convincing, analyses of rabbinic stories as counternarratives to stories about Jesus in the NT Gospels, he is less concerned with the Scriptural material activated in the NT Gospels. This inspired me to see if the new paradigm might work if we take a closer look, for example at the fulfilment quotations in Matthew. Perhaps this could throw some light on how Christians and Jews modified and developed traditional pre-Christian exegesis of supposedly messianic prophecies, and whether it happened in close mutual interaction between the parties or not.

Isa 7:14

> Matthew 1:21–22: "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "*Look, the virgin*

[5] Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
[6] Ibid., 8–9.
[7] Peter Schäfer, *Die Geburt des Judentums aus dem Geist des Christentums: Fünf Vorlesungen zur Entstehung des rabbinischen Judentums* (Tria Corda, 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

> *shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*" [Isa 7:14], which means, "God is with us."

There seems to be no pre-Christian material which allows us to determine if or how this saying was given a messianic interpretation before its emphatic use in Matthew. One could contemplate the possibility that the remarkable name of the child in 7:14 was seen in line with the other remarkable names given to the sons of Isaiah in 7:3 (*Shear Jashuv*) and 8:3 (*Maher Shalal Hash Baz*), so that Immanuel would be his son number two of three sons bearing a significant name. Another possibility seems to be hinted at in the LXX version of the text, in which the "she will call his name…" (Masoretic text)[8] is rendered as "you [Ahaz] will call his name…," implying that the son was Hezekiah.

In Matthew's version, neither of these possible interpretations is followed. Matthew clearly takes the prophetic oracle to be said about a future Messiah, who now has turned out to be Jesus. Like the LXX, Matthew changes the reading of the Hebrew *qara*, but this time so as to read "*they* will call his name."[9] For Matthew, neither the Messiah's father nor his mother gave him the name Immanuel; this was rather a name for Jesus' significance, given him by those who believed in him.

It is when we turn to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Matthew's use and interpretation of Isa 7:14 that we can speak of the interpretation history of this verse as Jewish-Christian dialogue. Justin says in his *Dialogue with Trypho* that the Jewish teachers assert that the true text has *neanis*, young girl, not *parthenos*, virgin (*Dial*. 43:8; 67:1; 71:3). This corresponds to the well-known fact that the three second century Jewish translations of Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus[10] all read *neanis* in Isa 7:14. The simplest explanation of this change is that it was triggered by the great significance given to the LXX *parthenos* by Matthew (and indirectly by Luke).

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[8] The same reading is found in the 1QIsa[a] scroll, cf. Martin G. Abegg, Peter W. Flint and Eugene Charles Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (Harper: San Francisco, 1999), 281.

[9] Matthew's reading may have a predecessor in 1QIsa[b], which reads "his name will be called…" (cf. Abegg, Flint and Ulrich, *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, 281). The different readings in the Hebrew text tradition and the LXX may reflect different pre-Christian interpretations of the text.

[10] Beginning with Eusebius (on one occasion referring to Origen), some Fathers have made Symmachus an Ebionite, thus a believer in Jesus. But the patristic evidence for this is weak, and a thorough analysis of Symmachus' translation concludes that he was not: Alison Salvesen, *Symmachus in the Pentateuch* (Journal of Semitic Studies Monograph Series, 15; Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991), 283–297. Cf. also Skarsaune, "The Ebionites," in O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 419–462, esp. 448–450.

But this attempt at linguistically excluding the Christian exploitation of the prophecy was not the only response of Jewish savants. Peter Schäfer has shown that two of the names given Jesus in rabbinic literature may be understood as parodies of *parthenos* in Matthew's Greek text. (1) First, *Jesus Ben Panthera*; here the most likely explanation is that Panthera is *parthenos* read in part backwards, the three middle consonants *r-t-n* being inverted as *n-t-r*. (2) A differently constructed defamation of Jesus' virgin mother may lurk behind the name *Ben Stada*. Stada may be a reference to his mother, derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic root *s-t-h* meaning "to be unfaithful." So, from the one Greek word *parthenos* the rabbis derived the name Stada, unfaithful, for Mary; as well as the name of the lover with whom she was unfaithful, Panthera.[11] Justin seems not to be aware of this Jewish parody; it is first attested by Kelsos' Jewish spokesman in his *Alethes Logos*, ca. 170.[12]

The Christian answer to the *parthenos/neanis* question was not slow in the coming. Justin was well prepared to argue against the reading *neanis* in Isa 7:14, so this had probably been on the table for some time when he wrote his *Dialogue*.[13] He first counters with the argument that if the birth was entirely natural, how could it be a miraculous sign? But he has more in his sleeve. The main argument is carefully constructed from an interpolated version of the LXX text of Isa 7:10–17. In this text, Isa 8:4 is interpolated in Isa 7 in the middle of verse 16:

> 14. [T]he Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel.
> 15. He shall eat butter and honey *before he knows* to reject evil, and choose good.
> 16. For *before the child shall know* good or evil, he refuses evil to do the good.
> [8:4. For *before the child knows* how to call father or mother,
> He shall receive **the power of Damascus** and **the spoils of Samaria**
> in the presence of **the king of Assyria**.]

[11] I have simplified somewhat the very thorough and detailed analysis in Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 15–24.
[12] Quoted in Origen, *Contra Celsum* I.32.
[13] For a comprehensive review of Justin's interpretation of Isaianic texts, see Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 32–44.

> And the land shall be forsaken, which you shall hardly endure on account of the presence of the two kings.[14]

The three elements in bold type in precisely the interpolated verse are what matters in Justin's argument. He explains that this prophecy was fulfilled when the magi visited the baby Jesus before he could even say father or mother. Interestingly, when Justin repeats the quotation of Isa 8:4 by itself four times in his exposition (*Dial*. 77.2–3), he reads that the child *shall take* (*elaben*) the power of Damascus etc. instead of the weaker *shall receive* (*lēmpsetai*) of the LXX text he has been quoting. Briefly summarized, Justin's interpretation runs like this: After having paraphrased the story told in Matthew 2, with elements from Luke 2 added, he takes the power of Damascus to mean "the power of the wicked demon that dwelt in Damascus". This power should be *taken*, that is, crushed by Christ at his birth. By coming and worshipping Christ, the Magi demonstrated that they had been liberated from this demon that had enslaved them. The same is meant when they are called the spoils of Samaria, since the same power is fittingly called Samaria in parabolic speech. The king of Assyria is of course Herod. The baby Jesus liberated the Magi and confronted Herod, and all this before he could even say father or mother. What stronger proof do you need that this baby had divine power right from his miraculous birth?[15]

But there is more involved. The Jews do not only eliminate the miraculous birth from the prophecy, they also say that the child Immanuel is none other that Hezekiah, son of Ahaz. Justin has an interesting report on how the Jewish sages interpreted Isa 8:4 (which for Justin was part of Isa 7:10–17):

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[14] The full text of Isa 7:10–17 with Isa 8:4 interpolated is quoted twice, in *Dial*. 43.5–6 and 66.2–3. The interpolation may in part have been suggested by the phrase common to Isa 7:16 and 8:4: "before the child knows" (italicized in the quotation above). Translation here according to Thomas P. Halton, *St Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho* (transl. by Thomas B. Falls, rev. by Thomas P. Halton, ed. by M. Slusser; Selections from the Fathers of the Church, 3; Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 66 and 102.

[15] Justin's exposition is very brief and difficult to make sense of in all details. One suspects that the text may be incompletely transmitted in the one extant manuscript. Irenaeus seems to depend on Justin in *Adv. Haer*. III.16.4, but is of little help in restoring Justin's argument. Tertullian, on the other hand, is very helpful in providing a consistent and meaningful interpretation that on the one hand clearly depends on Justin, but on the other hand fills in apparent lacunae in Justin's text (*Adv. Iud*. 9; *Adv. Marc*. III.12–13). Tertullian may have had a better text of Justin's *Dialogue*, or perhaps he refers directly to a source earlier than Justin's *Dialogue*. Clearer than Justin, Tertullian points out the necessity of taking a text that speaks about an infant plundering Damascus and Samaria to be meant metaphorically.

> [Justin:] Prove to me that Hezekiah was the one spoken of in the following words: 'Before he had known how to call father or mother, he received the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria in the presence of the king of Assyria' (Isa 8:4). Indeed, I will not accept your explanation that Hezekiah waged war with the people of Damascus and Samaria in the presence of the king of Assyria.[16]

There are interesting as well as puzzling features of this passage. As we have seen, there is no reason to doubt that an identification of the son spoken of in Isa 7:14 with Hezekiah could well be pre-Christian, since it seems to be presupposed already in the LXX rendering of that verse: "and you [Ahaz] shall call his name Immanuel". On the other hand, Justin assumes that the Jewish interpretation is based on the same conflation of the two sons in Isa 7:14 and 8:4 that he presupposes in his own text and interpretation. This makes him attribute to Jewish interpreters the view that "Hezekiah waged war with the people of Damascus and Samaria in the presence of the king of Assyria," which in fact never took place. What happened was that the king of Assyria captured Samaria in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18:10), but without any assistance from Hezekiah. I suspect that what Justin has done here, is converting the prophecy into an historical report on what happened. This could mean that Justin, from a correct assumption that the Jewish interpreters referred Isa 7:14 to Hezekiah, erroneously deduced that they interpreted Isa 8:4 the way he says they did. But this is not the only possible solution. If one assumes that the Jewish interpretation was in fact based upon the *Hebrew* text of Isa 8:4, the match between the prophecy and the historical events under Hezekiah becomes almost perfect. The Hebrew reads: "Before the child knows how to call "My father" or "My mother," the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria *will be carried away by the king of Assyria*."

Justin is more in accordance with factual history when he says in another passage:

> Your teachers have presumed to refer the statement, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool' (Ps 110:1) to Hezekiah, as if he were ordered to sit on the right side of the Temple, when the Assyrian king sent men to him with menacing messages

[16] *Dial*. 77.2; transl. according to Halton, 120.

> and he was warned by Isaiah not to be afraid (2 Kings 18:17–19:7 par. Isa 36:14–37:7).[17]

This is what Justin's elaborate argument from Isa 8:4 (and Ps 110:1) is really about. Hezekiah did none of those super-human deeds that the prophet is speaking about. I believe that this shows the real reason why Isa 8:4 was read together with the prophecy about Immanuel. None of the sayings about Immanuel in Isa 7 made him the subject of actions unsuitable for an infant, but Isa 8:4 did. This technique of combining biblical verses that contained remarkably similar wordings (italics above) was well-known in rabbinic circles, so the Jewish interpreters would have little to object concerning that point. And in fact, we shall see in some rabbinic texts that they apparently accepted the identification of the two sons in Isa 7:14 and Isa 8:4.

However, as Justin says and Trypho confirms, they identified the two sons with one and the same Hezekiah. Isa 7:15 and by implication the whole Immanuel prophecy is applied to Hezekiah in *Num. Rab*. 14.2, where it is said that Hezekiah was among those who "learned to know the Holy One … by his own unaided effort. How do we know? Because it is in fact written of him, 'Curd and honey shall he eat, when he knows [unaided by a teacher] to refuse the evil, and choose the good' (Isa 7:15)."[18]

In *Exod. Rab*. 18.5, the son named *Maher Shalal Hash Baz* in Isa 8:3–4 is said also to be Hezekiah, because he actually was "quick to plunder, swift to the spoil." He also was given the name Immanuel (Isa 7:14), because the Lord actually was with him (as stated in 2 Chron 32:8).[19] And this is not the whole story. Also the royal sons in Isa 9:5–6 and 11:1–10 are identified with Hezekiah: In *Gen. Rab*. 97 there is a list of men with six virtues each. One of them is Hezekiah: "Of Hezekiah too six virtues are recorded: 'And his name is called, Wonderful, Counsellor, Prince, Mighty, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace' (Isa 9:5)."[20] Finally, Isa 11:6 (peace among the animals) is applied to Hezekiah in *Lev. Rab*. 27.4 and in *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* 9.4.

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[17] *Dial*. 83.1; transl. according to Halton, 129.

[18] Transl. according to J.J. Slotki in H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers* (London: Soncino, 1931/61), 568.

[19] See English translation by S.M. Lehrman in H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* (London: Soncino, 1939/61), 221.

[20] Transl. according to Harry Freedman in H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabba: Genesis* (London: Soncino, 1939/61), 902. A somewhat more extensive parallel occurs in *Ruth Rab*. 7.2, here the whole of Isa 9:5–6 is applied to Hezekiah. Another application of Isa 9:6 to Hezekiah is found in *Lev. Rab*. 36.6.

One might argue, perhaps, that in Isa 7:14 the reference to Hezekiah could be traditional and not prompted by Christological readings of these passages. But the same cannot be said about Isa 9:1–6 with the divine names for the royal child.[21] In pre-Christian Jewish texts we have a clear indication that Isa 9:5 was seen as referring to the same *future* Davidic Messiah as Isa 11:1–10. In 1QH 3 it is said "… amid the pains of Sheol there shall spring from the crucible of the pregnant one a wonderful counsellor in his strength, and a man shall be brought forth from the birth canal."[22] John Collins remarks that "the manner in which this imagery is used in the Thanksgiving Hymn, as a metaphorical illustration of the distress of an individual, suggests that both the messianic connotations of Isaiah 9 and the notion of the "birth pangs of the messiah" were well-known in the first century BCE."[23] And this messianic interpretation is upheld in later rabbinic *midrashim*. For example, in *Deut. Rab*. there is the following comment on Deut 2:4: "Another explanation: He said to him [Moses]: 'I have yet to raise up the Messiah,' of whom it is written, 'For a child is born to us' (Isa. 9:5)."[24]

Concerning Isa 11:1–10 there is no doubt at all. This was one of the three most widely attested pre-Christian testimonies for an end-time Anointed One of David's stock (the two others being the Torah testimonies of Gen 49:10–11 and Num 24:17). This messianic interpretation is carried on very broadly also in post-Christian rabbinic texts.[25] So, what could have triggered the Hezekiah interpretation, so contrary to Jewish tradition?

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[21] In Matthew, only Isa 9:1–2 is directly quoted as fulfilled by Jesus, Matt 4:13–17. Apart from a possible allusion to Isa 9:6 in Luke 2:32 we have to go to Justin (*1 Apol* 35.2; *Dial*. 76.3 and 126.1) to see Isa 9:5 used as a major messianic prophecy, but from then on, this scripture became stock-in-trade in the Christian proof from prophecy tradition: e.g. Irenaeus, *Dem*. 56*; Adv. Haer*. III.16.3; 19.2; IV.33.11; Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 14.3; *Adv. Iud*. 10.11; *Adv. Marc*. III.19.2; *Ps. Clem. Hom*. XVI.14.1; Cyprian, *Test*. 2.21; etc.

[22] Translation according to John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 66.

[23] Collins, ibid.

[24] *Deut. Rab*. 1.20, transl. according to J. Rabbinowitz in H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Deuteronomy* (London: Soncino, 1939/61), 22. See also the *Isaiah Targum* ad Isa 9:6–7.

[25] See first and foremost the *Isaiah Targum* ad loc.; also *Gen. Rab*. 2.4; 97; *Num. Rab*. 131.11; *Ruth Rab*. I.16.51; and more.

Let us listen to a saying by one Rabbi Hillel (possibly the brother of the Patriarch Judah 2, in office ca. 230–270 CE):[26] "There shall be no Messiah for Israel, because they have already enjoyed him in the days of Hezekiah."[27] This view was obviously felt as quite controversial and did not go unchallenged. Immediately after quoting Rabbi Hillel, the Talmudic Baraita goes on:

> Rabbi Joseph said: May God forgive him [for saying so]. Now, when did Hezekiah flourish? During the first Temple. Yet Zechariah, prophesying in the days of the second [Temple], proclaimed, 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion…. Behold, your king *comes* to you…' (Zech 9:9).[28]

In one passage we meet what looks like an attempt at harmonizing the two references given for Isa 9:1–6 and 11:1–10, to Hezekiah as well as the Messiah:

> Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end (Isa 9:6). … Bar Kappara expounded in Sepphoris, why is every *mem* in the middle of a word open, whilst this [the *mem* in le*m*arbeh, "the increase"] is closed? – The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah, and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog; whereupon the Attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe! If You did not make David the Messiah, who uttered so many hymns and psalms before You, will you appoint Hezekiah as such, who did not hymn you in spite of all these miracles which you wrought for him?' Therefore it [the *mem*] was closed [God's original intention was revoked].[29]

Rabbi Hillel's view, however, clearly states the basic principle behind the rabbinic passages we have just reviewed. The fact that this view is first attested in a dialogue between a Jew and a Christian, and that the Christian clearly responds with a prefabricated argument meant to refute it, speaks for the view that this Jewish interpretation of prophecies in Isaiah originated in the Jewish/Christian debate.

In Origen, we find a new development in this debate.[30] In his second *Homily on Isaiah* Origen is clearly out to combat an interpretation that

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[26] So according to H. Freedman, the Soncino ed. translator.
[27] *b. Sanh.* 99a; transl. by J. Schachter and H. Freedman in I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Nezikin* Vol. 3: *Sanhedrin* (London: Soncino, 1935), 669.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *b. Sanh.* 94a; transl. according to Epstein, *Sanhedrin*, 630.
[30] On Isaiah in Origen, cf. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand,* 62–74.

claims that, since the prophecy was spoken to Ahaz, its realization must have taken place during Ahaz' reign. Origen counters this by pointing out that the Immanuel oracle is not addressed to Ahaz, but to "the house of David." This also explains the use of "you shall call him…" in the LXX text, and excludes any contradiction with Matthew's "they." What the prophecy says is that "you," that is "the house of David," shall call him Emmanuel. And the house of David is, spiritually understood, no other than those who believe in Jesus. Therefore, Matthew correctly interpreted the prophecy's true meaning when he rendered it according to its sense: "they [the believers in Jesus] shall say about him: In him God is present among us: Immanuel."[31]

It may be that Origen is also the originator of another anti-Hezekiah argument, which is first attested by Eusebius in his *Eclogae propheticae*.[32] If one combines the age of Hezekiah at his ascension to the throne (after the death of his father Ahaz) – 25 years (2 Kings 18:2) – with the length of Ahaz's reign – 16 years (2 Kings 16:2) – one must conclude that when Ahaz became king, Hezekiah was already nine years old! But Isaiah's prophecy was proclaimed to Ahaz during his reign. In other words, Hezekiah must have been at least nine years of age when the oracle was uttered. But the prophecy clearly speaks about a future birth.

After having stated this argument, Eusebius continues: "The meaning of each of the sayings in this [prophecy] will be known by the one who diligently attends to the interpretations of these sayings by that admirable man."[33] Since Eusebius in the near context is demonstrably dependent upon Origen's interpretation of Isa 7–8, I think it very likely that Origen is also the "admirable man" here referred to. (This exegesis is briefly repeated in *Demonstratio evangelica* VII.1.40–41.)[34]

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[31] *In Isaiam Hom.* II,1; Latin text in W. A. Baehrens*, Origenes Werke achter Band: Homilien zu Samuel I, zum Hohelied und zu den Propheten, Kommentar zum Hohelied in Rufins und Hieronymus' Übersetzungen* (GCS 33; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1925), 248 (line 13) – 251 (line 2). I am not aware of any translation of these homilies.

[32] *Eclogae Propheticae* IV.4C, Greek text and Latin translation in Migne, PG, 22:1204. No other translation is known to me.

[33] Ibid., my translation.

[34] Greek text in Ivar A. Heikel, *Eusebius Werke sechster Band: Die Demonstratio Evangelica* (GCS 23; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1913), 305, lines 18–26. English translation in W. J. Ferrar, *The Proof of the Gospel: Being the Demonstratio Evangelica of Eusebius of Caesarea,* Vol. II (London: SPCK, 1920), 57. On Isaiah in Eusebius, see Childs, *The Struggle to Understand*, 75–89.

After Eusebius, this argument is repeated, but in much more complete statements, by Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 350)[35] and Jerome (ca. 380–90? – the text is quoted below).[36] Since both of these authors have basically the same detailed argument, which is only summarily stated by their predecessor Eusebius, I strongly suspect that all the three authors depend on a common source, for which Origen, as we have seen, is a strong candidate.

One would think this argument was quite devastating for the Hezekiah interpretation, but interestingly, Jerome reports a Jewish answer to it:

> The Jews think that this prophecy concerns Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, since Samaria[37] was captured during his [Hezekiah's] reign (2 Kings 18:10). But this can in no way be proved. For Ahaz … reigned over Judea and Jerusalem for 16 years (2 Kings 16:2), and was then succeeded by his son Hezekiah, who was at that time 25 years old, and who reigned over Judaea and Jerusalem for 29 years (2 Kings 18:2). How, then … could the prophecy [proclaimed to Ahaz during his reign] speak about Hezekiah's conception and birth, since he was already nine years old when Ahaz began his reign? [This is impossible] unless one refers the prophecy to the capture of Samaria in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign, and argue that he may still be called "a child" at that time, not in terms of his age, but in terms of his "age" as king. But that this interpretation is forced and violent, is evident even to the stupid.[38]

It is hard not to agree with Jerome in this last verdict. But then again, his own interpretations and those of his Christian predecessors are not always more evident. What interests me here, however, is to observe an ongoing exchange of arguments and counter-arguments that has obviously been going on for several centuries. Each side in the debate developed their own interpretations and their arguments for them in an intense back-and-forth exchange, thereby prompting new interpretative ideas on both sides.

Before we leave Jerome's contribution to the debate, it is of interest that he reports a Christian interpretation of the Isaianic prophecies that in reality undercuts the whole debate we have been studying.

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[35] *Cat. bapt*. XII.22; English transl. in Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson (transl.), *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem,* Vol. I (The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, 61; Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 240–241.

[36] On Jerome's treatment of the Isaiah prophecies, see Childs, *The Struggle to Understand*, 90–103.

[37] This clearly presupposes that the Jewish interpretation was based on the same conflation of Isa 7:16 and Isa 8:4 as in the Christian tradition.

[38] Jerome, *Comm. Isa*. III, 7:14; CCL 73:105.78–90; my translation.

> One of ours [Apollinarius?] contends that the prophet Isaiah had two sons, *Jasub* (Isa 7:3) and *Immanuel* (Isa 7:14). Immanuel was born of the prophet's wife, the prophetess, as a type of our Lord the Saviour, while the first son, Jasub, whose name means abandoned or converting, signifies the Jewish people which is now abandoned, but afterwards will be converted. The second [son], however, Immanuel or "God with us", signifies the calling of the gentiles, ever since the Word was incarnate and lived among us.[39]

There is no doubt that this radically different line of interpretation cuts the Gordian knot that Christians as well as Rabbis had been struggling with. It takes the texts as speaking about persons and events in their own time, but then treats these persons as prophetic types. And instead of identifying the different sons with Hezekiah, this interpretation takes them to be sons of Isaiah, which is no doubt true of the sons in Isa 7:3 and 8:3–4. As I said earlier, my guess would be that this is in fact the oldest interpretation of the Immanuel prophecy, based on Isa 8:18: "Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. We are *signs* and symbols in Israel from the Lord…"

What I have proposed to you with these examples from the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Immanuel prophecy is that we find here a sequence of moves and counter-moves on the Jewish and Christian side in an ongoing debate. I am not absolutely sure that I have got the sequence right in every detail, but I feel pretty sure of having demonstrated that the two interpretative traditions did not develop in splendid isolation from each other. And to wrap it all up, I will add another example, also beginning in Matthew.

Isaiah 11:1–10

In Matthew, Isa 11:1–10, the prophecy about the Branch (*netser*) from Jesse, is a subtext in more than one passage. But I will concentrate on a more narrow path by focussing on the one formal fulfilment quotation that Matthew has of this prophecy, in 2:23:

[39] Jerome, *Comm. Isa*. III, 7:14; CCL 73:105.90–97, my translation. Jerome returns to this anonymous interpretation in op. cit., III, 8:18; CCL 73:119.38–44. Here he rejects this "literal" interpretation of the prophetic text.

> There [in the Galilee] Joseph made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called "*a Nazorean*" [Isa 11:1].

In the early Church, there was ignorance as to which prophecy the evangelist had in mind, and the one Church father to whom the right answer was communicated, rejected it. We read in Jerome:

> All the orthodox writers have looked in vain [in the Old Testament] for the source of the line in Matthew's Gospel, 'He shall be called a Nazorean' (Matt 2:23). Learned men of the Hebrews think it originated in this passage in Isaiah (11:1).[40]

Indeed, you have to be familiar with the Hebrew text, and also with the Jewish technique of *al tiqrê* readings to be able to recognize Isa 11:1 as the prophecy in question. What Matthew does, is to propose the following reading: In Isa 11:1, don't read (*al tiqrê*) *netser*, read *notsri*, and you get: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a Nazorean shall grow out of his roots." This technique of alternative vocalizations of the Hebrew text is well-known to all readers of rabbinic *midrashim*, and there are indications in the Dead Sea scrolls that it was pre-Christian.[41]

Since no known Christian writer after Matthew recognized this Midrashic reading of Isa 11:1 in his Gospel, we have in this case to go directly to the rabbis to find someone who took the point immediately. Let us have a look at a passage in *b. Sanh.* 43a:

> Our Rabbis taught: Yeshu the Nazorean [*ha-Notsri*!] had five disciples, and these are they: Mattai, Naqqai, Netser, Buni and Todah. When they brought Mattai [before the court], he said to them [the judges]: Mattai shall be executed? It is written: 'I *Mattai* [= when] shall come and appear before God' (Ps 42:3). They answered him: Yes, Mattai shall be executed, since it is written: 'Mattai, he will die and his name perish' (Ps 41:6).

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[40] *Comm. Isa*. IV, xi:1–3; CCL 73:147.23–26, translation according to Robert Louis Wilken (ed. and transl.), *Isaiah Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (The Church's Bible; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 137. Jerome goes on with some irrelevant comments on the fact that Nazirite is written with a zayin, not a tsade. Nazirite, however, has nothing to do with Nazareth, which has always been written with tsade, as have notsri and notsrim, Hebrew for Christians (= Nazoreans, followers of the Nazorean).

[41] On the *'al tiqrê* ("Do not read X, but Y") formula, see Mark Hirshman, "Aggadic Midrash," in S. Safrai et al. (eds.), *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part* (CRINT, 3b; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006), 107–132; esp. 121; and Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 59.

> When they brought Naqqai… 'You shall not execute *Naqi* [the innocent] and the righteous' (Ex 23:7). … 'From a covert [or in secret] he executes *naqi*' (Ps 10:8). When they brought Netser… '*Netser* [an offshoot] shall grow forth out of his roots' (Isa. 11:1)… 'You shall be cast forth away from your grave like an abhorred *netser*' (Isa 14:19). When they brought Buni… 'My son [*beni*], my firstborn is Israel' (Ex 4:22). … 'Behold, I will execute your firstborn son [*binkha*]' (Ex 4:23). When they brought Todah… 'A psalm for *Todah* [thanksgiving]' (Ps 100:1). … 'He who sacrifices *todah* [the sacrifice of thanksgiving] honours me' (Ps 50:23).[42]

Peter Schäfer, in his interesting analysis of this story about Jesus' five disciples, has suggested that the main point of the story is that the five disciples are really five impersonations of Jesus, so that their five names are really cover names for Jesus himself.[43] The middle name among the five is Nazorean (*Notsri*); that is also the one name given to Jesus himself at the beginning of the passage. One may therefore say that the name from Isa 11:1 is the main name treated in this passage. But all the five names are interesting as anti-Jesus polemic.

The first, Mattai, may suggest that it is the Jesus *of Matthew* that is especially in view, and this agrees fully with the third name, which only occurs in Matthew as a scriptural name of the Messiah. The laudatory messianic name in Isa 11:1 is turned into a negative one by a common exegetical technique: compare this first and positive saying about the *netser* with the only later mention of the *netser* in the book of Isaiah, 14:19, and you will find that the end of the *netser* is a very sad one. He shall even be taken away from his tomb. This reminds one of the report in Matthew that according to the Jewish leaders, the dead Jesus was taken away from his tomb by his own disciples.

The same implicit reference to Matthew may also be recognized in some of the other names of the disciples. Naqqai is a revocalization of biblical *naqi*, innocent, which in Ex 23:7 (quoted by "Naqqai" in his own defence) is rendered *athoos* in the LXX. In the NT this term occurs only twice, in Matthew's passion narrative. First (Matt 27:4) we hear Judas complain that he has betrayed *haima athoon*, innocent blood (which Franz Delitzsch in his Hebrew NT renders *dam naqi*).[44] By implication, Judas

[42] Transl. according to Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 75–76, somewhat modified.
[43] Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 76–81.
[44] This may allude to Deut 27:25: "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood [*dam naqi*]."

gives Jesus the name *naqi* here. And in Matt 27:24 we hear Pilate say *athoos eimi*, which in Delitzsch reads *naqi anochi* – so if you want to look for a literary figure behind Naqqai, it could well be Matthew's Pilate.

With Buni it is very much the same, it reads like a revocalization of a well-known Christological title in Matthew, viz. "My Son," *beni*. In Matthew, this title occurs in his fulfilment quotation of Hos 11:1, in Matt 2:14: Jesus and his mother were taken to Egypt by Joseph "to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son' (Hos 11:1)." The rabbis who constructed the story in Sanhedrin 43 might well have chosen to let Buni defend himself by quoting this verse; they actually chose, however, to quote the Torah parallel instead, Ex 4:22, because here the refuting verse is the verse immediately following, Ex 4:23. While it is true that the Son that God really recognizes as his own, Israel, was saved by God, it is something completely different with "your son," the pretended divine son of a Gentile (Pharao – a reference to the ben Pantera motive may be implied). He shall be killed.

Finally, Todah may contain a veiled reference to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb of atonement, but designated as the sacrifice of thanksgiving because his sacrifice is seen through the lens of the Eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving. According to Ps 100:1 this sacrifice is to be greeted with psalms of praise; according to Ps 50:23, however, anyone who sacrifices, that is kills, *todah*, honours God. (This verse may have been chosen as a counterpart to John 16:2.) In this way, at least two important messianic testimonies in Matthew, Hos 11:1 and Isa 11:1, are turned against Jesus and his followers.

Let me add, as an afterthought, some comments on another Talmudic passage not mentioned in this context by Schäfer. In *b. Sanh.* 98b we read an interesting midrash on the *names* of the Messiah:

> What is the Messiah's name? The school of R. Shila [in Babylon, ca. 220 C.E.] said, His name is *Shiloh*, for it is written, 'until Shiloh come' (Gen 49:10). The school of R. Yannai [ca. 225 C.E.] said: His name is *Yinnon*, for it is written, 'His name shall endure forever; before the sun was, his name is Yinnon' (Ps 72:17). The school of R. Haninah [ben Hama, ca. 225 C.E.) maintained: His name is *Haninah*, as it is written, 'Where I will not give you Haninah' (Jer 16:13). Others say: His name is *Menachem* the son of Hezekiah, for it is written, 'Because Menachem ['the comforter'], that would relieve my soul, is far' (Lam 1:16). The Rabbis said: His name is 'the leper of Rabbi's school [lit. house]' as it is written, 'Surely, he has

> borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him a leper, smitten of God, and afflicted' (Isa 53:4).[45]

In the haggadah about Jesus' *five* disciples quoted above, the *names* of the five disciples represented five cover names for Jesus. In the present text, *five* names for the true Messiah are proposed, at least four of them derived from the names of his true *rabbinic disciples*. Could it be that this passage is a consciously composed positive counterpart to the haggadah about Jesus' five disciples? Let us take a closer look at some details in the text.

The first two names are derived from two scriptural testimonies that were central in the Christian proof-from-prophecy concerning Jesus. Gen 49:10 is the first Christological testimony quoted by Justin, and one of those he makes the most of.[46] And from Justin on, this is brought forward again and again as the undeniable proof that (1) the Messiah had in fact come, and that (2) he should be the one upon whom the Gentiles set their hope. Both criteria were met by Jesus, but not by any other messianic pretender. The Christian interpretation, like that of the LXX, depended on reading *Shiloh* as *she-lo* = *asher lo*: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes, *whose it [the messianic kingdom] is*." By taking the enigmatic *Shiloh* as simply a *name* of the Messiah, by "accident" very similar to the name of their school-head, these rabbis reclaim a favourite Christian messianic proof-text for the Jewish Messiah.

Psalm 72:17 was used by Christians, from Justin onwards, as a favourite testimony concerning the divine pre-existence of Jesus.[47] Again, the rabbis here reclaim it for the Jewish messiah by reading *yinnon shemo* as "his name will be Yinnon"; hardly what the Psalmist intended, but perfectly possible.

The third name is derived from a scriptural text which, in the rabbis' opinion, clearly stated that the Messiah *had not yet come*, Jer 16:13. The same is true with the fourth name; Lam 1:16 states that comfort/the comforter, *menahem,* is far from Israel. But the saying that he is Hezekiah's son is enigmatic. One could contemplate the possibility that the Messiah is here called Hezekiah's son in the same sense as when he is called David's

[45] *b. Sanh.* 98b, transl. according to Epstein, *Sanhedrin*, 667–668.
[46] Justin's two main treatments of this testimony are to be found in *1 Apol*. 32 and *Dial*. 52–54. In the *Apology*, this testimony is the first that Justin comments upon (the proof from prophecy is introduced in *1 Apol*. 31).
[47] Justin, *Dial*. 64.5–7; 76.7; 83.4

son.[48] As we have seen already, in discussion with Christians about the messianic prophecies of Isaiah 7–11, the rabbis elevated Hezekiah to the status of Messiah or almost-Messiah. By calling the Comforter Messiah "Hezekiah's son," the rabbis would continue their anti-Christological argument concerning the prophesies in Isa 7–11.

The final name, "the leper from Rabbi's house," is perhaps the most interesting. For once, the rabbis directly address one of the crucial Christian testimonies, Isa 53:4, and in this case actually applies it to the Messiah; he is the one "stricken [with leprosy]."[49] In Matthew, Isa 53:4 plays a major role as a testimony on the healings of Jesus: "That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases' [Isa 53:4]." As one can see, the rabbis extract a new *name* for the Messiah by extending the quotation to the next phrase, "we considered him stricken," or perhaps rather "we called him 'The Stricken One'." Billerbeck suggests that since there is a reference to the *bet Rabbi*, there is a veiled reference to Rabbi Judah the Prince here. According to the rabbis, he suffered vicariously for Israel for 13 years – through his illnesses, other Israelites were healed.[50]

And with this the rabbis have closed the circle, for the *first* name of the Messiah was derived from Gen 49:10 – another scriptural verse associated with Judah the Prince. To counter Christian arguments from this verse, the Rabbis claimed that Judah the Prince was of Davidic lineage and that he was invested with a Messianic role, so that Judah the Prince and his line of Jewish patriarchs could be said to continue in unbroken succession the royal power that Gen 49:10 said would never fail until the coming of the Messiah.[51] In our Talmudic passage the Messiah is probably expected to be "from the house of Rabbi [Judah]."

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[48] For other possibilities, see Schäfer, *Geburt des Judentums*, 16–17. It may be relevant to note that the only other rabbinic passage in which "Menahem, the son of Hezekiah" occurs as a name for the Messiah, is *y. Ber.* 2.4, a text which Schäfer interprets as a carefully constructed parody on the story of Jesus' birth and flight to Egypt in Matthew, op. cit. 3–31.

[49] In 2 Chron 26:20 the same verb, *n-g-ayin*, is used: "When the chief priest Azariah … looked at him [king Uzziah], he was leprous… because *the Lord had struck him*."

[50] Strack-Billerbeck I:481, with rabbinic references.

[51] On this "rabbinization" of the Messiah in the second and third centuries, see Skarsaune, "Jews and Christians in the Holy Land, 135–325 C.E.," in Markus Bockmuehl and James Carleton Paget (eds.), *Redemption and Resistance: The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 158–170; esp. 168–169.

Being no expert in Talmudic exegesis, I only offer these ideas as suggestions. But it seems to me that the above interpretation makes the Talmudic passage fit in well with the general tendency of rabbinic messianism at the turn from the second to the third century – the period of all the quoted rabbis in the text.

Concluding remarks

Let me conclude by making two remarks. *First*, our friend and colleague and today's *jubilant* Sten Hidal has often called our attention to the great difficulty of establishing with any certainty direct dependence upon or very immediate influence from Jewish (most often rabbinic) *haggadot* in the Church Fathers in general. I think that is a wise caution. What I have presented here should not be unduly generalized. On the Christian side, I have taken the author of Matthew, and then Justin, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome as my sources, and in many respects they had exceptional competence in things Jewish (even Justin, who was certainly no expert in Hebrew). We should not generalize from these authors and paint a picture valid for *all* Greek and Latin Fathers. On the other hand we should not underestimate the general influence of this "club" of Christian "rabbinists" within the Church. As exegetes and biblical scholars, they were all extremely influential. And we should extend the "club" to include some of the anonymous authors of the Jewish/Christian dialogues that were produced as follow-ups and "updates" of Justin's pioneering work in this genre[52] – and of course some of the great Syrian Fathers.[53]

[52] For an instructive and rather exhaustive review, see Lawrence Lahey, "Evidence for Jewish Believers in Christian-Jewish Dialogues through the Sixth Century (excluding Justin)," in Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 581–639.

[53] With Sten Hidal in the audience, I hesitate in saying anything concerning Afrahat and Ephraim – Sten is the expert, not I. But I say "Syrian" instead of Syriac, in order to include two so different authors as Apollinarius of Laodicaea and Eusebius of Emesa. Concerning Apollinarius and his "Jewish" exegesis, see e.g. Wolfram Kinzig, "Jewish and 'Judaizing' Eschatologies in Jerome," in Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion, 3; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 409–429. (A full investigation of Apollinarian material in Jerome's scriptural commentaries is a great *desideratum*.) On Eusebius of Emesa, cf. e.g. Henning Lehmann, "Den jødiske hellige skrift og jødiske traditioner hos en kristen syrisk forfatter i 4. årh.," in Sten Hidal et al. (eds.), *Judendom och kristendom under de första århundradena*, vol. 2 (Stavanger: Universitetsforlaget, 1986), 220–228;

These authors and writings explicitly present their interpretations as meant to counter Jewish interpretations, and present the Jewish points of view as arguments against the Christian interpretations. This is more or less unique to this segment of the literature of the early Church, but in this segment I believe the concept of Jewish/Christian dialogue is not something we impose on these sources, it is there in the texts themselves.

On the Jewish side, some of the texts used in recent scholarship to argue that the rabbis responded from their end of the line, are likewise explicitly polemical against Jesus, his disciples and Christian *theologoumena*. In other texts the anti-Christian polemic is more veiled, but once one has familiarized oneself with the often subtle techniques used in rabbinic discourse, it is discernible with different degrees of certainty. In this case all one needs to claim is that some Jewish sages knew the New Testament gospels in Greek (which could well be the case for example in Caesarea and Antioch [Matthew!]), or in Syriac, for example the Babylonian rabbis. It would be strange if they didn't. And it is not far-fetched to assume that at least some of them sometimes had face to face discussions with Christian scholars, like Origen, Jerome, and others. It seems to me that this provides a historically credible setting for the dialogue we have been speaking about.

My *second* remark concerns something completely different. When studying early Christian interpretation of the Jewish bible, or early Jewish interpretation of it, for that matter, a modern reader may have the feeling of looking into a showcase of oddities and absurdities. The exegetical and hermeneutical rules of those times were entirely different from ours.

This, of course, is no surprise, and as historians we should not behave overly anachronistically in requiring modern principles in ancient authors. This said, I feel deep sympathy with something Robert L. Wilken said at the conclusion of a memorable lecture in Oxford in 1991:[54]

> The ancient oracles of the prophets will inevitably look different when the interpreter is faced with actual events that seem to correspond, however unexpectedly, to what the prophets envisioned. That is true of Jews as well as Christians… It is one thing to anticipate a Messianic age at some time in the distant future, something else to claim that it has begun to appear. When that occurs the words of the prophets may not mean what they seem

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and Robert Barend ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997).

[54] Concluding Lecture at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 23 August 1991.

> to mean…That, finally was the argument Christian interpreters gave to their critics… Early Christian interpreters did not impose an evanescent superstructure on the text without root in history or experience. Most Christian exegetes repudiated a literal or historical reading of the prophets, not because they preferred allegory or anagogy to history, but because they were attentive to a new set of historical events. If Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, as the Scriptures taught, the prophecies about the Messianic age had already been fulfilled, and it was the task of biblical interpreters to discover what the scriptural promises meant in light of this new fact. Paradoxically, in the language of early Christian exegesis, the spiritual sense *was* the historical sense.[55]

If I am not mistaken, our friend and esteemed colleague Sten Hidal would encourage us to move along this and similar lines of thought.[56]

[55] Wilken, "*In novissimis diebus*: Biblical Promises, Jewish Hopes, and Early Christian Exegesis," in Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 95–119.

[56] Cf. his essay "Bokstavstro. Varför är det så farligt att läsa Bibeln bokstavligt? Om Origenes, Augustinus och Efraim Syrierns bibelförståelse," in Marjo Ahlquist, Anni Maria Laato, Mikael Lindfeldt (eds.), *Flumen saxosum sonans: Studia in honorem Gunnar af Hällström* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi förlag, 2010), 41–54.