

# Messiah

The Prophetic Message on the coming of Christ

prophetic reference to Christ’s coming in the flesh. These Old Testament references provide a firm foundation to support John’s claim in 1:1 that Christ is the word with go and is God.

earthly life of Christ.

Gregory further supports this view with a paraphrase of Romans 5:12. “And this He said, not as holding before us any contest proper only to God, but as showing our own flesh in its capacity to overcome suffering, and death, and corruption, in order that, as sin entered into the world by flesh, and death came to reign by sin over all men, the sin in the flesh might also be condemned through the selfsame flesh in the likeness thereof.”

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

## Gregory Thaumaturgus

In addition to advocating the Christian understanding of the incarnation of Christ, Baruch and these related passages become proof texts against heretical interpretations of these events. Gregory Thaumaturgus uses Baruch to speak against those who deny the Divine aspect of the incarnation.

Baruch was used by heretical Christians to demonstrate that Christ’s appearance on earth was not a Divine presence but a shadow. They would claim that Christ’s appearance in the flesh was but a “projection” or “shadow” like the Platonic image of the cave in “The Republic”. Gregory points to Baruch 3:38 and the “conversation” with men as a clear demonstration of the reality of the flesh. The image of conversation can only occur with real people in real communication. He connects this physical existence with the Gospel stories of the suffering of Christ, that suffering can only occur in a fleshly existence. The promise of conversation with the Law of God in Baruch finds fulfillment in the

He places before us designations of susceptibilities proper to our constitution, in order to show that He was made man in the world, and had His conversation with men, yet without sin.

For he was born in Bethlehem according to the flesh, in a manner meet for Deity, the angels of heaven recognizing Him as their Lord and hymning as their God Him who was then wrapped in swaddling-clothes in a manger, and exclaiming, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men.’

Gregory Thaumaturgus Twelve Topics on

## Summary

Christian exegesis of Baruch 3:36-4:4 takes a series of equivalencies well supported by traditional Jewish readings of the Old Testament and applies them to the person of Christ. The extension of these symbols to Christ is well established by the introductions of the canonical scriptures and the preaching of Christ in the same. This Christian use of Baruch is not arbitrary, but does stand on the logic of the Old Testament texts themselves. Their application in the New Testament to the Christian messiah provides a deeper more perfect understanding of the texts. The Christian use of the same Baruch pericope against heretics indicates the dangers of over zealous stretching of the Old Testament concepts and further verifies the legitimate scope of the Christian interpretation.

## Baruch

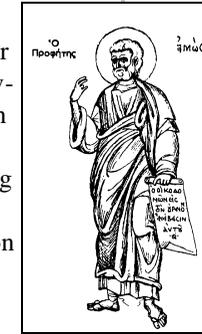
In the Byzantine lectionary Baruch 3:36-4:4 is used for Royal Hours on December 24 and vespers on the Feast of the Nativity. The mention of the law appearing on earth in verse 3:37 is seen as a reference to the incarnation, and earns this reading a place in the Nativity cycle. In Baruch 3:37 we read “Afterward she appeared on earth and lived with humankind.” This reminds us of “And the Word became flesh and lived among us,” John 1:14.

The mystery of the incarnation can be seen in this Old Testament passage by linking this appearance in Baruch to Jesus as the word in John. Deuteronomy 30:11-18 justifies the equation of the word to the law by Christians that creates the framework for the association.

Several early patristic works weave the Baruch citation into these incarnation themes. The progressive associations mentioned above become the foundation for explaining the theology of

## Wisdom Personified

In Baruch, wisdom is personified and becomes equated with the covenant law. “She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever.” Baruch 4:1 The personification of divine wisdom to teach the chosen people is woven throughout the Old Testament. By the time Baruch is compiled, the entire Ancient Near East is participating in the wisdom literature tradition. Egypt to the west and Mesopotamia to the east have preserved similar religious writings.



In Israelite literature wisdom is personified as woman that teaches wisdom.

He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to his servant Jacob and to Israel, whom he loved. Afterward she appeared on earth and lived with humankind. She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people. Happy are we, O Israel, For we know what is pleasing to God.

Baruch 3:36-4:4

the incarnation. Each of these early works approaches the subject from a slightly different perspective, but they hold in common this series of connections to the wisdom literature tradition.

In the biblical tradition wisdom flows from the Lord and is connected with the very act of creation in Proverbs 8,

becoming the instructor for the human race. Lady Wisdom is equated with justice. Speaking of wisdom Proverbs 8:20 reads, "I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice." This wisdom as justice makes Baruch's equation of wisdom with the Law itself only a short step. In this light, one can almost see the Lady Wisdom present in Deuteronomy 4:5-8 where the Lord instructs his people in his statutes and ordinances. The wise of all the other nations will see how great the Lord is by the laws his people follow.

Early Christian tradition claims that this pericope was used in the synagogue for the Day of Atonement (Apostolic Constitutions). The community coming to repentance receives this hope in the appearance of the law as the bride of the country. They can be comforted in accepting responsibility for their sins by taking the law as a bride anew, agreeing to live by the law over the coming year. In this annual event the community acknowledges its separation from God by not following the law in the fullest and agrees to take the law as its spouse again.

The lesson of the exile is acceptance of the Deuteronomic law. When Jacob takes the book of the law and holds it fast, prosperity will follow. The Baruch passage provides the instruction and hope to a community rebuilding the temple after the exile. The Law ultimately becomes the center of Judaism to the point that the permanent loss of the temple in succeeding generations will not destroy the people.

This Baruch pericope helps lay the foundation for this transformation.

For even now, on the tenth day of the month Gorpiaeus, when they (Jews) assemble together, they read the Lamentations of Jeremiah, in which it is said, 'The Spirit before our face, Christ the Lord was taken in their destruction's;' and Baruch, in whom it is written, 'This is our God; no other shall be esteemed with Him. He found out every way of knowledge, and showed it to Jacob His son, and Israel His beloved. Afterwards He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.' And when they read them, they lament and bewail...But after ten days from the ascension, which from the first Lord's day is the 50th day, do you keep a great festival: for on that day, the Lord Jesus sent on us the gift of the Holy Ghost.

## Apostolic Constitutions

The Apostolic Constitutions Book V uses Baruch 3:35-37 as the launching point for prophetic announcements of the coming of Christ. Lamentations is used to set the stage for this appearance. Baruch 3:35-37 is quoted with the gender adjusted to masculine to make the reference to Christ even clearer. Here the appearance is no longer she, but he. The walking among men is the start of the promise. This appearance of the law among men is then linked to the promise of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, that God will raise up a prophet like Moses.

Here the Christian interpretation takes the metaphor of God's presence walking among men to the next level. It takes the Jewish interpretation as the launching pad and connect this to the central Christian teaching on the incarnation. This fleshly appearance is then further connected to the Jewish hope of a new prophet like Moses. The connection of these two Old Testament appearances is a natural blending and extension of both ideals.

Later, in Apostolic Constitutions Book VI, the concept of Christ as the Law is extended and completed. The appearance in Baruch is the Law of the Lord; the Chris-

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tian appearance of Christ is also the law of the Lord. The argument culminates in Baruch 4:4 "Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God." The Christian is happy in the law of the Lord revealed in Christ. The power of the Romans demonstrates the goodness of God's law in Christ.

## Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria points out that Christ saves humanity by both threatening and exhorting. The exhortation towards the good is supported by Baruch 4:4 "Blessed are we, Israel; for what is pleasing to God is known by us." The word, Christ, is the source of this knowledge according to Clement. This Baruch passage is obviously seen as a description of Christ as the Word. The Law of Baruch is equated with the Word of Christ in the Incarnation. Other quotations from the Wisdom Hymn in Baruch support Clement's suggestion. Clement reminds Christians of the promises to Moses are fulfilled in the Word. Moses gave the Law for the prosperity of Israel. Baruch makes the Lady Wisdom and the Law one and the same. Proverbs 8 connects Wisdom to the Word of God. John's Gospel makes the Word and Christ one and the same. This series of equivalencies allows Clement to see the Baruch passage as a Hymn to Christ the Word.

That Christ is God In Jeremiah, 'This is our God, and no other shall be esteemed beside him, who hath found all the way of knowledge, and hath given it to Jacob His son, and to Israel His beloved. After this He was seen upon earth, and He conversed with men.'... Thus He Himself says in the Gospel according to John, 'Is it not written in the law, that I said, you are gods? If He called them gods to whom the word of God was given, and the Scripture cannot be relaxed, do you say to Him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, that thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God? But if I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, and you will not believe me, believe the works and know that the Father is in me,

The Baruch Hymn becomes another expression of Christ as the spouse for the faithful. This closing blessing in Baruch 4:4 caps this hymn with an expression of consolation and hope for the faithful.

## Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian covers the Christological theology in Book II of his Treatises. This Baruch passage is used as one of the proof texts in the section demonstrating that Christ is God. With the incarnation in view, Cyprian cites Baruch 3:35-37 and links this appearance to Christ's appearance on earth. First connecting Christ to wisdom sets up this linkage of Baruch to Christ in the early portion of book II. Using the logic of Proverbs 8 connecting wisdom with the creation account in Genesis, Christ is made the action of God in the creation account.

With Christ thus connected to the action of God in history, Cyprian can equate all those other forms of God's action to Christ. For example, the arm of God, the angels of God and the Word of God all become different descriptions of the same action of God in Christ. Christ as the action of God in history allows Cyprian to use Baruch as a