

## The Messiah And The Hebrew Bible

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### I. The Importance Of The Question

In a recent book review for *JETS*, Walt Kaiser has made a strong plea for the importance of the question of the Messiah and the Hebrew Bible. The question, says Kaiser, “could be a defining moment for evangelical scholarship and ultimately for the Church’s view of the way we regard Scripture.”<sup>1</sup> According to Kaiser, the question ultimately comes down to whether the NT interpretation of an OT text is, in fact, the meaning intended by the OT author. Kaiser states, “... if it is not in the OT text, who cares how ingenious later writers are in their ability to reload the OT text with truths that it never claimed or revealed in the first place? The issue is more than hermeneutics,” says Kaiser. The issue is that of “the authority and content of revelation itself!”<sup>2</sup>

Another evangelical OT scholar, Gordon McConville, has also stressed the importance of the Messiah in the OT. McConville says, “If the Old Testament is *the* problem of Christian theology ..., [then] the Messiah is at the heart of that problem.”<sup>3</sup> McConville goes on to say that “the validity of a Christian understanding of the Old Testament must depend in the last analysis on [the] cogency of the argument that the Old Testament is messianic.”<sup>4</sup>

These are strong statements. And they come from two respected Biblical scholars. I believe they accurately reflect the current state of mind of evangelical scholarship. If liberalism once defined itself as a quest for the *historical* Jesus, evangelicalism may well be in the process of defining itself as a quest for the *Biblical* Jesus. I believe this question lies at the heart of much of the current evangelical discussion about Biblical theology. I am sure there are more pressing issues facing us today, but I cannot think of a more important topic for us to reflect on at this occasion.

1. *Evangelical views of the Messiah and the Hebrew Bible*. Evangelical views of messianic prophecy can be traced to the work of two early nineteenth century OT scholars, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802–1869) and Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810–1877). The views ...

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