



The
Messiah of the
Jubilee

By Jacques B. Doukhan

God's answer to the prayer of Daniel and to his question concerning the 2300 evenings and mornings is Gabriel's announcement of the Messiah: "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens'" (Daniel 9:25).

Biblical tradition regards the Messiah as a person set apart with a divine mission to save God's people. The Hebrew word *mashiah* (messiah) is a passive form of the verb *mashah* (to anoint). *Mashiah* (Messiah) designates the individual "anointed." The person designated as a messiah usually went through a ceremony that initiated his role. Someone anointed the person with oil, symbolizing the transmission of strength and wisdom as well as the faith of the anointer in the success of the newly appointed messiah.

Priests, prophets, and even kings were anointed to become messiahs. The history of Israel records several messiahs. Scripture calls Aaron a messiah (Exodus 28:41; Leviticus 16:32), likewise the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1), Saul (2 Samuel 1:14), David (1 Samuel 16:6, 13), and even a foreign prince, Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1). The hope of Israel thus maintained itself from messiah to messiah.

The prophecy of the 70 weeks comes as an answer to the prophecy of the 70 years and as the ultimate solution. It is not just *a* messiah we are dealing with in this context, but *the* Messiah. Consulting the prophecy of the 70 years, Daniel expected one particular messiah, Cyrus. But the prophecy of the 70 weeks is the universal version of the prophecy of the 70 years, as we see already implied in the language of the passage. The 70 years (7 x 10) lead to the messiah of the sabbatical

year, whereas the 70 weeks, or "seventy sevens" (7 x 7 x 10), lead to a messiah of jubilee. Furthermore, words that in the context of Daniel's prayer expressed a particular and relative situation now appear in an indefinite and universal sense. For example, the word "transgression" (*ht'*) in Daniel 9:24-27) has an indefinite sense (verse 24), whereas verses 1-23 employed the same word in a definite and particular sense: "We have sinned" (verses 5, 8, 11, 15), "our sins" (verse 16), "my sin" (verse 20), "the sin of my people" (verse 20). Likewise for the words "transgression," "justice," "vision," "prophecy," etc. It is thus not surprising, in this context, that the word "messiah" also has an indefinite, universal sense. And it is for the only time in the Hebrew Bible. The messiah in this passage is *the* Messiah, encompassing all other messiahs—the Messiah of messiahs, the universal Messiah.

The rest of the passage develops the mission of the Messiah as a universal one involving "many" (verse 27). In the biblical tradition the word *rabbim* (many) carries a strong universal connotation (see Ezra 3:12; Daniel 12:2). Prophets often use it to designate the peoples and the nations implicated in the universal adoration of God (Micah 4:2). The messiah in this passage is the Messiah of all peoples, the Messiah who will save the world.

And this is why this last Messiah leads to the jubilee, the Levitical festival symbolizing the re-creation of the world. It is a Sabbath of sabbaths, occurring every 7 x 7 years, a time of grace and liberty (Isaiah 61:1, 2) when humanity and nature were born anew (Leviticus 25:8-17).