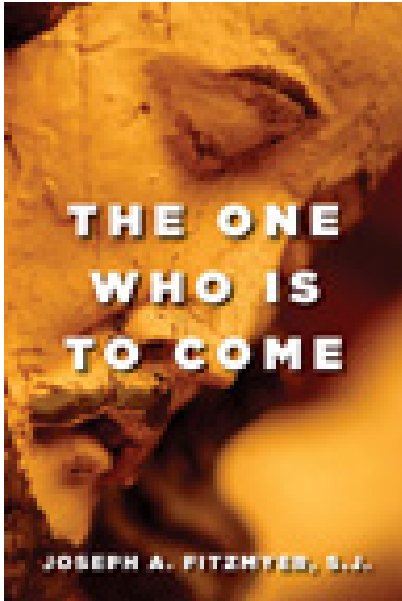


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Fitzmyer, Joseph A.

The One Who Is to Come

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. xvi + 205. Paper.
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Take a closer look at the cover design of Joseph A. Fitzmyer's book. The photograph you see is that of a mustached, bearded man with closed eyes and a slightly open mouth. The man's head seems to be slumped forward, and across his cheeks and nose are the words "The one who is to come." For any reader familiar with the history of Christian art, the image is clearly the cropped head of a statue of Jesus—a Jesus who has just died on the cross. But the juxtaposition of the book's title with the iconic figure of the dead Christ could not be further from Fitzmyer's argument. His is not a book that argues for or seeks to prove that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied by Jewish Scriptures. Fitzmyer's study of the word "messiah" in ancient Judaism is not a Christian apologia. As he argues in his opening chapter, "in modern discussions 'messianism' or 'the messianic' has become 'a rubber-band concept' that is made to embrace far more than 'Messiah' was ever meant to denote when it first emerged" (6). Thus his study focuses especially on establishing the pre-Christian Jewish and postbiblical Jewish meaning of the word when it had "not been slanted by Christian 'messianic' hindsight" (7).

The title of this book is an obvious allusion to Sigmund Mowinckel's groundbreaking 1951 study of messianism entitled *Han som kommer* (translated into English as *He That Cometh*), republished by Eerdmans just two years before the release of this book. In

contrast to Mowinckel's work (not surprisingly), one of Fitzmyer's longest chapters deals with the language of *messiah* in "extra-biblical Jewish writings of the Second Temple period" (largely Qumran texts)—texts unavailable to Mowinckel when he wrote his book. Fitzmyer's book is divided into nine chapters, with only one twelve-page chapter devoted to "The Use of Messiah in the New Testament." He devotes five chapters to the messianic idea in the Old Testament, including: the explicit use of term *messiah*; related texts that do not explicitly use the term; texts that reveal a developing (eschatological) understanding of the Davidic dynasty; "The Role of Daniel 9:25–26 in the Emergence of Messianism"; and the septuagintal interpretation of related texts. The latter chapter is a particularly helpful corrective that concludes, "the LXX passages which render the Hebrew texts that develop the theme of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty" (81) really contribute very little to the later Christian understanding of the term.

The five chapters on Old Testament texts are followed by the book's longest chapter, one that focuses on messianism in extrabiblical Jewish writings of the Second Temple period. Here Fitzmyer steers clear of the more sensationalist reconstructions and readings of Qumran texts that so capture the imaginations of the popular press, such as whether the Teacher of Righteousness was considered to be the Messiah. Fitzmyer concludes this chapter by emphasizing (I think correctly) "the variety of the hopes and expectations of the different kinds of Jews" and that, although the messianic expectations or hope was widespread among Jews in Palestine, "it was not universal in its conception of formulation and not universally held, even in the Diaspora" (132).

Fitzmyer's chapter on the use of *messiah* in the New Testament focuses largely on the Gospels as a problematical source for understanding Jesus' relationship to messianism, and the book's final substantive chapter explores the use of *messiah* in the Mishnah, Targums, and other rabbinic writings. A brief introductory chapter on the term *messiah* situates the study within the broader context of the history of ideas, and a two-page conclusion gives Fitzmyer an opportunity to reflect back on the significant findings of his research. A very helpful ten-page index of ancient writings, a six-page index of authors, and a four-page subject index complete the book.

While it is surely not Fitzmyer's intention to highlight the use of the term *messiah* in the New Testament, still, for this reviewer, it would have helpful to explore a bit more the anointing stories in the Gospels in light of messianic interpretations—or to say something about the book of Hebrews as a response to the tradition of an anointed high priest. After briefly mentioning the use of *messiah* in Rom 9:4-5 and in Josephus (*Ant.* 20.9.1 §200), Fitzmyer turns—tantalizingly—to a discussion of the opening chapter of the Gospel of John with its numerous messianic designations. He ends the chapter similarly with a tantalizingly short paragraph that looks at the use of Isa 61:1 in Luke 4:18. But what of

Mark 14:3–11 and Luke 7:36–50 and their parallels? These texts along with the argument of Hebrews could have been used to buttress Fitzmyer’s argument that “the expectation of a Jewish Messiah was not of one form” (182)—even within nascent (canonical) Christian traditions.

Fitzmyer’s book is a valuable updating and expansion of what Mowinckel and Joseph Klausner began in the 1950s, and it takes its place alongside the more recent studies of Joachim Becker (*Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament*) and James Charlesworth’s edited collection (*The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*). But Fitzmyer’s study unapologetically reflects a TDNT-like approach to the understanding of *messiah* in ancient Judaism. That is, the book is an extended, 200-page word study—the history of an idea. There is no serious attempt to place messianism within the broader matrix of social history. There is no interaction with, say, Richard Horsley or John Dominic Crossan’s work on social banditry and peasant movements (*Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus; The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*). One might then ask of Fitzmyer what communities he thinks are reflected in his textual study. If, as many have suggested, only 5 percent of the ancient Mediterranean population could read and write, then what segment of the population is reflected in Fitzmyer’s analysis? Is his “history of an idea” representative of Jewish belief at large, or does it represent only a small segment of the population? Does Fitzmyer’s study of the “history of an idea” reflect only the elites’ mental peregrinations, which are largely unrelated to the general masses? And what difference, if any, would his answer to this question make to this “history of an idea”?

Finally, the publishers are to be commended for formatting the book with footnotes rather than using that bane of all scholars—endnotes—and this is in keeping with the scholarly use of Hebrew and Greek fonts (some words are transliterated). Thankfully, all lengthier foreign language quotes (including French and Latin) are followed by English translations.

This work is recommended for scholars and graduate students familiar with Greek and Hebrew. The use of Hebrew and Greek fonts will be off-putting to most seminary students, even when lengthy quotations are followed by translations.