

The Messiah and His two children

- A midrashic prophetic interpretation of Isaiah 8,18 -

Introduction

The image of Messiah having children is not so customary. Yet it is a Scriptural image that can be of importance for the understanding of and the teaching about the twofold structure of the Body of Messiah. It can help to clarify and illuminate the relations of Messiah Yeshua and the two communities of believers (i.e. from Israel and from the nations) who have come to find their respective place 'in Him'.

The midrashic prophetic interpretation of Isaiah 8,18, which will be advocated in this article, provides a sobering prophetic 'sketch of character' (and of the history of actions) of the community of believers from the nations. At the same time it enlightens the relation of the Messiah with His children to the whole of Israel.

The Messiah and His children – Hebrews 2,13 and Romans 9:27

It is the letter to the Hebrews, which causes us to think about the Messiah having children.

*"Here am I, and the children God has given me."*¹

The writer of this letter quotes Isaiah 8,17-18 – where Isaiah speaks about himself and his two sons – when he deals with the blessing resulting from the intimate relationship between Christ/Messiah and His followers. He uses the metaphors of sons of GOD, brothers and children.²

It is the metaphor of children, which draws our attention. The Messiah having children is a manner of speaking which is not too common. GOD has children, but the Messiah? Although we are not used to this metaphorical way of pointing to the Messiah and His followers, the writer of Hebrews was certainly using a Biblical mode of speech. In Isaiah 53 – the fourth so called Song of the Servant – we hear that the Servant will see offspring.³ Within a Messiah oriented interpretation of this chapter we thus find here the thought of Messiah having offspring, children.

Isaiah and his sons are in some way prophetically related to the Messiah and His children. That is what the text of Hebrews suggests to us.

Also Paul in his letter to the Romans makes us discover this relation between Messiah and the sons of Isaiah. When he speaks about that part of the people of Israel, which had believed in the good news about Yeshua as the Messiah, he also quotes Isaiah. He cites the words about the remnant that will turn to the LORD.⁴ By doing so he in fact provides us with an interpretation of the name of the first son Isaiah which sees this name prophetically fulfilled in the existence of that first fruits⁵ part of the Jewish people, which confesses: 'Yeshua is the Messiah'.

¹ Hebrews 2,13 (Revised Standard Version)

² Hebrews 2,10-18

³ Isaiah 53,10

⁴ Romans 9,27; see Isaiah 10,21

⁵ Romans 11,16

Isaiah and his two sons

Thus both Paul and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews direct our attention toward Isaiah and his children. Therefore we now turn to this prophet of GOD.

Isaiah fathered two sons who both received prophetic names. Apart from the names this father and his two sons also lived in their lives a symbolic presence of the Word of GOD in the midst of Israel.

The eldest son had a name – most probably commanded by the LORD GOD⁶, just as it was the case with the second son – which had a multi layer meaning. His Hebrew name *Shear-Jashub*⁷ has as its meaning: a remnant will turn back. As such this can point to a future returning from exile, but also to a turning back to GOD. And whilst this returning is a positive thing it presupposes also a going into exile due to a turning away from GOD. And also a remnant as such is only a remnant, it is not the whole of the people. So in fact this name is a promise of judgement and salvation at the same time.

In Isaiah 10,21 the name *Shear-Jashub* becomes the message it is in itself and it is this verse, which is being quoted by Paul. A remnant will turn to the LORD.

The name of Isaiah's second son is also a prophetic message. This child gets the name, which at some nearby point in time had been written by father Isaiah as a clearly visible and readable message on a writing board in Jerusalem. This message – *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*⁸ – meant that soon destruction from the side of Assyria would befall the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem. As such it would also befall the people of GOD living in the Northern kingdom. But not just the Northern kingdom merited the judgement of GOD. In 8,14 Isaiah proclaims the threat of judgement for “the two Houses of Israel” and for “those who dwell in Jerusalem”.⁹ As such the name *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* pointed to more than just the Assyrian pillaging and looting. Peril dawned upon the existence of all twelve tribes of Israel.

In this context we read:

“Here stand I and the children the LORD has given me as signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of Hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.”¹⁰

Isaiah and his sons had a calling to be a living prophetic testimony in the midst of Israel. The names of the sons were prophetic expressions of realities, which would have profound impact on the life of the people of Israel.

Not just a message for the 8th century B.C.

It is clear that the name *Shear-Jashub* is more than just a name. Isaiah refers to this name when he speaks about a future in which a remnant of Israel will seek GOD and return to the LORD.¹¹ And Paul sees this prophecy in his own time fulfilled in the Yeshua-as-Messiah confessing part of the people of Israel.¹²

⁶ Cf. Isaiah 8,3

⁷ I follow the translation of the Jewish Study Bible (JSB), Oxford 2004.

⁸ Meaning ‘Pillage hastens, looting speeds’, annotation in JSB.

⁹ Phrases from Isaiah 8,14, JSB

¹⁰ Isaiah 8,18, JSB

¹¹ Isaiah 10,21

¹² Romans 9,27

Furthermore we may conclude from Hebrews 2,13 that Isaiah and his sons in some way have been a type of Messiah and his followers. GOD wanted their existence to be a message not just for the 8th century B.C.

The question arises then: has the name *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* also to say anything relating to the Messiah and His followers? What meaning could this name, which speaks about the disasters of robbery from the side of foreign nations, have in relation to the Messiah and his followers?

We can imagine that the eldest son in some way prophetically can point to a specific group of followers of Yeshua Messiah/Jesus the Christ i.e. to His followers from Israel. But could the same be true for the youngest son with his ominous and sinister name? Could perhaps the image of Isaiah with both his sons in the midst of Israel tell us something about Messiah Yeshua and His 'offspring' from both Israel and the nations?

The youngest son

More than ever there is now awareness in the Body of Messiah of the fact that the community of believers from the nations has behaved as a community of identity-thieves. Due to the massive multitude of us, believers from the nations, and our age long prevailing attitude of anti-Judaism and replacement thinking we have mostly been blind for the sheer existence of a distinct community of believers in Yeshua from Israel. And not only have we been blind for the fact that due to the faithfulness of GOD always these Jewish believers could be found in the Body of Messiah. We have even tried in a very active way to diminish and to extinguish the Jewish presence 'in Messiah'.

We have 'robbed' the identity and the GOD-given specific place of the community of believers from Israel. We 'replaced' them with ourselves. And due to our guilty blindness and our Christian theological anti-Judaism and resulting anti-Semitism we even 'robbed' the Messiah from His Jewish identity and from the place He wants to have in the midst of His own people.

It is only in very recent times that a vanguard of believers from the nations through the grace of God has come to realize this all and that that there is a searching for repentance and change for our hearts and thoughts and actions.

At the same time we should realize that we – the community of believers from the nations – have been a terrible hindrance for the deep longing of Messiah Yeshua to be recognized by the whole of His people Israel. He still wants to stand 'in the midst of Israel' with the two communities who have already come to Him.

Against this background it is with an unexpected and sudden recognition that we – believers from the nations – might recognize ourselves in the second son of Isaiah. We have not been different from the nations we belong to. We have behaved exactly the same. The nations have tried time and again to rob Israel of its place with God and of its GOD-given blessed prerogatives and promises. We have shown that we – even as believers in Yeshua/Jesus – are such robbers too. We were warned but our pride has made us fall deep!¹³

The name of the youngest son of Isaiah has become a tragic reality in the community of believers from the nations. Our joining sides with Messiah has meant pillage and looting all over. This name has been a prophetic sketch of character of the Church from the gentiles. The 'ecclesia ex gentibus' has been a disastrous 'brother'¹⁴ for the 'ecclesia ex circumcissione'. It has behaved in blind pride and even has tried in disobedience to get rid of the Jewishness of the Christ/Messiah Yeshua and of the

¹³ Romans 11,20

¹⁴ I use the metaphor of 'brothers' although ecclesia is feminine.

abiding self-revelation of GOD as the GOD of Israel. By doing so we have sinned against GOD, His Messiah and the Holy Spirit.

Two children of Messiah

And yet God did not forsake us but He has begun opening our eyes and forgiveness is offered to us when we turn in repentance to Him and His ways in Messiah. It is hard to imagine how He has suffered through our wilful and sinful blindness. Only He knows how we have hindered His ways in the midst of Israel toward the heart of His own people. Only He knows what is the measure of the misrepresentation of GOD we have wrought under the nations.

And yet we are welcomed in His forgiving love in our Messiah, 'in Him'. And we may learn anew that 'in Him' there are and will be two communities. From Israel and the nations. 'In Him' this fundamental distinction is not annulled. 'In Him' the Messianic shalom between Israel and the nations has begun. 'In Him' and in the Body of Messiah we have to learn to live in this shalom as Israel and the nations. 'In Him' and through Him it will be fully realized in the future of God.¹⁵

Under His tallith

Whoever visited a synagogue will at some point probably have seen fathers wearing their tallith with children underneath it. A picture that shows peace and safety. Children, under the prayer shawl of (grand)father. Children under the wings of the Almighty. In a little *sukkah* – His hut – and in a little tent – His *mishkan* – as in Psalm 27.¹⁶

Let us envisage in our minds and hearts this picture in relation to what we wrote above. Then we see before us Messiah Yeshua with under His tallith – yes, He wears a tallith as the sign of His obedient and dedicated life! – two children.

A Jewish child – recovering from intended annihilation and 'starvation' and learning to live its own identity 'in Messiah'. This child is the eldest of the two.

We also see a non-Jewish child – still in some way obese from age long pride, but in the process of having to learn to live its own calling under the tallith of its Jewish Messiah. This youngest one has a history of bullying and elbowing and pushing aside of the older brother. Its name is a humbling reminder of this dark history.

This Messiah with these two children stands in the midst of Israel. As a sign and token. As the Servant of the God of Israel. In Him is life and reconciliation with GOD and each other.

Midrashic and prophetic metaphor

The line of interpretation followed in this article provides us with a powerful image and a prophetic metaphor, which can be of value in the area of learning and teaching in the Body of Messiah. This somewhat midrashic interpretation gives us a Scripture based 'tool' for the understanding of important parts of the history of the Body of Messiah. The twofold character of the Body of Messiah due to the presence of communities from both Israel and the nations in Him and the history of relations

¹⁵ For the designation of the Body of Messiah as the place of Messianic shalom between Israel and the nations I am indebted to the thinking of R. Kendall Soulen (study conference, Nijkerk, The Netherlands, 5th and 7th of March 2012).

¹⁶ Psalm 27,5

between these two groupings are of a such a complicate nature, that easy to grasp images can be a real help.

Peter Hocken has served the Body of Messiah – through the grace of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit – with deep insight. His labour has been a work of love for the internal shalom in the Body of Messiah.

It seemed therefore fittingly to honour him by presenting this interpretation of Isaiah 8,18 in this place.

May there be shalom and a heartfelt honouring of each other among the two children of the Messiah – may Messiah's longing for His people Israel and His love for all nations be served by this mutual love.

*"How good and how pleasant it is
that brothers dwell together.
It is like fine oil ... like the dew ...
There the Lord ordained blessing,
everlasting life."¹⁷*

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¹⁷ Words from Psalm 133, JSB