

The Mantle of Messiah

An Essay by Ariana Horn

Unlike the Christian Bible's depiction of Jesus as unchanging, *The Urantia Book* portrays Jesus as evolving intellectually and growing spiritually over time. Lived experience, coupled with ripening communion with his Thought Adjuster, informed how Jesus thought about religious concepts, his relationship to God, his role in both the Jewish and Gentile communities, and how to reveal the universal family of God and the spiritual kingdom. His evolving approach to the Jewish concept of Messiah is among the most consequential of his ideological maturations, not only to the reception and subsequent distortion of his message, but to the ultimate success of his bestowal mission.

In his fifteenth year, Jesus considered, but rejected, identifying his mission with the Hebrew prophets' promise of the long-heralded Jewish Messiah—a reclamer of the stolen throne of David from the succession of foreign usurpers and deliverer of the nation of Israel to the Jewish people. Jesus' contemporaries expected that this Messiah would be a political, worldly figure dedicated to the deliverance of the Jewish people only (122:4 (1347.3)). The Hebrew Bible, the collection of sacred texts that records these prophecies, also functions as a history documenting God's favor of the Jews as his Chosen People (Gen 15 & 17).

The first book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, recounts the origin story of all creation and tells of the first divine covenant made between God and humankind. God commanded Abraham to demonstrate his faith by offering his only son Isaac, in sacrifice. Seeing that Abraham was fearful and devoted, and was willing to make the greatest of sacrifices to His glory, God stayed his hand and promised Abraham that his descendants would possess the land of Israel, the physical occupation of an earthly kingdom.

The covenant is described in *The Urantia Book* as a covenant between Machiventa Melchizedek and Abraham. Melchizedek brought the third great revelation of God to Urantia around 5,000 years ago in preparation for Michael's incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. Around 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus, Melchizedek convinced Abraham to abandon his campaign of territorial conquest and "temporal rule in favor of the spiritual concept of the kingdom of heaven (93:6.1 (1020.4))." Their covenant represented the "agreement between divinity and humanity whereby God agrees to do everything; man only agrees to believe God's promises and follow his instructions (93:6.4 (1020.7))." Salvation and God's favor is not had by sacrifice or appeasement, but by faith. Memory of the covenant was passed down through oral tradition and eventually, although incompletely and inaccurately, written down and preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Successive episodes of the Hebrew scriptures tell how God's covenant was renewed again and again with the descendants of Abraham from Isaac to Jacob, Moses to Ezra, and then Nehemiah. In the books of Samuel and Psalms, God elaborated on his promise to the faithful descendants of Abraham by bestowing authority to the House of David as heirs of the Godly nation with its governing seat in Jerusalem. This Davidic Messiah, the "anointed one," the prophets foretold, would rule and reclaim sovereign power of the kingdom of Israel and bring material prosperity to the Jewish people (2 Sam. 7:12-17; Psalms 2: 110). This new facet of God's commitment to the Jewish people further confirmed in the minds of many that inheritance of the promised kingdom would be a material reality, not a metaphor for spiritual heights attained in heaven.

For The Urantia Book's account of early human association of sacrifice as a means to appease the gods and the later development of covenants as a bargaining tool. See 89:8.

Jesus Adopts the Title Son of Man

Jesus did not know of Gabriel's visit to Mary—nor of the messianic lens with which his mother interpreted the prophecy of his birth—until the day of his baptism many years later (122:8.4 (1351.8)) and 126:2.4 (1388.4)). He was well aware of the growing desire in the Jewish community for a deliverer, yet he was unmoved by such a fantastic remedy to worldly problems. Jesus "measured every institution of society and every usage of religion by the unvarying test: What does it do for the human soul? does it bring God to man? does it bring man to God" (126:2.5 (1388.5))? The mantle of Messiah held no personal attraction nor inspiration for him. Instead, Jesus decided to embrace the title Son of Man, perceiving that his Father in Heaven intended that he reveal a kingdom of the spirit, open to all regardless of lineage or nationality. To Jesus, the concept of the Son of Man as a teacher and revealer of spiritual truths better captured the intent of his mission and the role he wanted to take among his brothers and sisters on Urantia (2 Enoch; 126:3.6 (1390.1)). The God that the Son of Man extols is a Lord of the Spirit, not a Lord of territory. Jesus believed that the Son of Man concept as presented in the book of Enoch could be used as a starting point to reveal the God he knew as his Heavenly Father.

The concept of the Messiah—as his mother Mary would all too soon remind him—lauded a sectarian, man-made political project advancing a nationalist cause (127:2 (1396.6) and 136:6.8 (1519.1)).

136:1.3 (1509.5) They [the Jewish people] were looking for a restoration of Jewish national glory — Israel's temporal exaltation — rather than for the salvation of the world.

Jesus' decision to avoid association with the Zealot political campaign in his seventeenth year, however, did negatively impact how he and his message were received by his fellows in Nazareth (127:2 (1396.6)). And as his reputation grew throughout his adult life, he continued to come face-to-face with the challenge of how to handle the idea of the Messiah in relation to his mission. Could he tailor the mantle of the Davidic Messiah to fit him as a messenger of the spiritual kingdom?

John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus' revelation, compounded the confusion about the nature of the coming kingdom and its messenger (135:7.1 (1503.1)). John's parents, Elizabeth and Zacharias, interpreted Gabriel's message through the lens of the Davidic Messiah. Even though Gabriel spoke of Jesus as a "divine teacher," "soul-healer," "and spirit-liberator of all mankind," John's parents steeped the meaning of their son's mission in the foundational narrative of God's covenant with Abraham and deliverance by an heir to the throne of David (122:2.3 (1345.5)). John repeated his parents' assessment of his mission by proclaiming that he was the herald of the Messiah (135:4.6 (1499.6) and 135:7.1 (1503.1)).

John's thundering proclamation "Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand" was influenced by the apocalyptists—a school of religious teachers popular in the century before the days of John and Jesus—who held that the age of gentile domination was coming to an end and that the realization of a new kingdom of God was imminent.

135:5.2 (1500.2) To the Jews of Palestine the phrase "kingdom of heaven" had but one meaning: an absolutely righteous state in which God (the Messiah) would rule the nations of earth in perfection of power just as he ruled in heaven — "Your will be done on earth as in heaven..."

135:5.4 (1500.4) Many who read the Old Testament literally looked expectantly for a new king in Palestine, for a regenerated Jewish nation delivered from its enemies and presided over by the successor of King David, the Messiah who would quickly be acknowledged as the rightful and righteous ruler of all the world.

Accepting the Ill-fitting Mantle

In his thirty-second year, having learned from experience, Jesus was willing to negotiate *terms*, literally. His reluctant acceptance was not capitulation, however. He recognized that his message would survive if it could build upon an existing conceptual tradition (137:5.3 (1532.1)). Jesus adapted his approach according to his audience. When teaching his

apostles, “He did not make the mistake of overteaching them. He did not precipitate confusion by the presentation of truth too far beyond their capacity to comprehend” (137:7.14 (1535.6)). In a similar fashion, the revelators of *The Urantia Book* explain how they had to translate divine values into concepts graspable by human minds. They lament the limitations of language that inevitably distort true meaning (2:0.3 (33.3)). The vision of a glorious Messiah and the deliverance of the Jewish people from a life of want and oppression to a life of abundance and sovereignty were woven into the fabric of Jewish history, culture, and identity. Ensuring that his message was not summarily rejected was more important to Jesus than unseating the foundational narrative of the people of Israel.

2:0.3 (33.3) In all our efforts to enlarge and spiritualize the human concept of God, we are tremendously handicapped by the limited capacity of the mortal mind. We are also seriously handicapped in the execution of our assignment by the limitations of language and by the poverty of material which can be utilized for purposes of illustration or comparison in our efforts to portray divine values and to present spiritual meanings to the finite, mortal mind of man. All our efforts to enlarge the human concept of God would be well-nigh futile except for the fact that the mortal mind is indwelt by the bestowed Adjuster of the Universal Father and is pervaded by the Truth Spirit of the Creator Son. Depending, therefore, on the presence of these divine spirits within the heart of man for assistance in the enlargement of the concept of God, I cheerfully undertake the execution of my mandate to attempt the further portrayal of the nature of God to the mind of man.

From this point on until the end of his life, Jesus no longer disavowed the title of Messiah. Yet he would not conform to popular expectations of such a Messiah—the mantle would drape ill-fittingly over his shoulders. He refused to perform the spectacular magical acts and self-glorification his contemporaries expected of the Messiah (136:6.2 (1518.1)).

Notably, the six great decisions that would control and guide his conduct for the remainder of his bestowal mission were defined largely in contradistinction to the conduct expected of the fabled Messiah (136:4 (1514.2) through 136:10 (1523.6)).

Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan represented the consecration of the Son of Man to the Father’s will, demonstrating achievement of self-mastery, personality perfection, and complete communion with the Spirit. He was greeted by his Personalized Adjuster as a Son of God and sovereign of the universe of Nebadon, having surpassed the spirit development stage of Adjuster fusion. In consultation with his Personalized Adjuster, Jesus made his first great decision, that he would not use the legions of seraphim under his command and at his disposal to advance his mission on Urantia (136:5.2 (1516.2)). Jesus also decided to follow the normal path of earthly existence, to live and die as a mortal and not use his

power for his own benefit, self-aggrandizement, or protection. He refused to perform miracles and exercise his supernatural powers to win adherents.

136:8.5 (1520.6) Jesus was fully aware of the short cuts open to one of his powers. He knew many ways in which the attention of the nation, and the whole world, could be immediately focused upon himself. Soon the Passover would be celebrated at Jerusalem; the city would be thronged with visitors. He could ascend the pinnacle of the temple and before the bewildered multitude walk out on the air; that would be the kind of a Messiah they were looking for. But he would subsequently disappoint them since he had not come to re-establish David's throne. And he knew the futility of the Caligastia method of trying to get ahead of the natural, slow, and sure way of accomplishing the divine purpose. Again the Son of Man bowed obediently to the Father's way, the Father's will.

By voluntarily limiting his power, refusing to perform miracles, and ministering to spiritual, rather than material needs, Jesus was rejecting the type of Messiah that many wanted. His refusal to act like the expected Messiah, while reluctantly accepting the mantle he long desired his followers to discard, ensured that many would "finally reject all of his [Jesus'] claims to authority and divinity" (136:9.12 (1523.4)). Yet, in so doing the Father's will, Jesus successfully completed his mission: first, by mastering the experience of high moral living as a human in the realm of time and space (having already mastered the lived experience of the local Sons of God, Seraphic hosts, ascendant mortals of spirit status and then morontia status); and second, by revealing to the people of Urantia and all the beings of his local universe the nature of the Universal Father (128:0.3-4 (1407.3-4) and 136:6.11 (1519.4)).

The Figurative Mantle Made Literal

Revelation of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man was not the message that many wanted to hear. Yet the appearance of a political rival was an equally unwelcome prospect to those in positions of power. Annas, the Sanhedrin, Caiphas, and Pilot valued the political and religious authority they held over others. Their hearts lay buried under the material riches they so treasured. Believing that the Davidic Messiah would covet what they coveted, they sought to undermine and eliminate any semblance of competition.

When his accusers demanded to know if he was the Son of God, Jesus answered unequivocally in the affirmative (184:3.16 (1983.8)). When his accusers asked if he was the Messiah, a political, worldly deliverer of the nation of Israel, Jesus answered enigmatically. Jesus frustrated Annas' interrogation by answering "So you have said (184:1.8 (1979.6))."

And to the women in the high priest's palace he said: "If I tell you, you will not believe me; and if I ask you, you will not answer" (184:5.10 (1986.2)).

Jesus needed no finery to command attention or inspire awe. "[C]lothed in his usual garments" Jesus' majestic appearance defied ornamentation (184:3.5 (1982.6)). Caiphus challenged Jesus to admit that he was the Deliverer, the Son of God. Jesus responded by rhetorically dressing himself in a mantle of spiritual glory: "I am [the Son of God]. Soon I go to the Father, and presently shall the Son of Man be clothed with power and once more reign over the hosts of heaven" (184:3.14 (1983.6)).

The Sanhedrin twisted Jesus' foretelling of the fall of the temple into an act of rebellion and his claim of sonship to God into a political coup. Thus they found Jesus guilty and thereby justified the sentence of death (185:2.10-13 (1990.5-8)). Instead of declaring Jesus innocent of political transgression, the cowardly Pilate beseeched Jesus to save himself by renouncing any claim to David's throne. Jesus responded, "Do you not perceive that my kingdom is not of this world" (185:3.3 (1991.3))? If Jesus had sought to wear the mantle of Messiah and rule a kingdom on earth, surely he would be wrapped in royal garments rather than bound in prisoner's bonds.

Attempting to mock Jesus and to dramatize the charges put against him, the Roman soldiers forcibly dressed Jesus in the raiment befitting a King of the Jews. "There stood Jesus of Nazareth, clothed in an old purple royal robe with a crown of thorns piercing his kindly brow" (185:6.4 (1995.3)). Making the figurative mantle of the Messiah literal, Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd: "Behold your king" (185:7.5 (1996.4)). And so he was nailed to the cross.

A New Covenant Claimed by Christians

After the crucifixion, the importance of the divine covenant to the Jews and early followers of Jesus did not diminish. The community of believers, later known as Christians, practiced their religion in diverse ways in the centuries after Jesus' death. The Christian Bible—the Hebrew scriptures, or Old Testament, bound together with the New Testament—is a product of the efforts of early Christian leaders to establish a set of orthodox beliefs and administrative guidelines. In the centuries following Jesus' death and resurrection, the early Church Fathers used Paul's letters and other governing documents to justify a central institution with the authority to codify "righteous" dogma, to privilege certain theological interpretations over others, and to establish communal and individual behavioral practices.

The New Testament was a constructed communal project that went through a long and contested process of ecclesiastical review to determine which texts or writings would form a part of an approved Christian canon. Bitter disagreements between various religious communities over which beliefs were orthodox, and which scriptures were canonical, resulted in a fracturing of the community of believers into many distinct, and sometimes warring factions. Regardless of their differences, Christians were united by the text of the New Testament, and the New Covenant between God and the Gentiles they claimed it represented. Christian tradition holds that the Jews, having rejected Jesus as the Messiah, forfeited their claim as God's Chosen People. Those who accepted Christ as their savior and joined the community of Christians inherited God's covenant, thereby replacing the Jews as the righteous descendants of Abraham. To Christians, the Bible not only represents the history of the Jews' relationship with God and the rejection of his Son. It also records a true and replete record of Jesus' life and teachings culminating in the willing human sacrifice of the Son of God in exchange for the atonement of his believers' sins—the salvation of the Christian community in this life, and the promise of the inheritance of the kingdom of God in the next.

122:4.4 (1347.6) Most of the so-called Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were made to apply to Jesus long after his life had been lived on earth. For centuries the Hebrew prophets had proclaimed the coming of a deliverer, and these promises had been construed by successive generations as referring to a new Jewish ruler who would sit upon the throne of David and, by the reputed miraculous methods of Moses, proceed to establish the Jews in Palestine as a powerful nation, free from all foreign domination. Again, many figurative passages found throughout the Hebrew scriptures were subsequently misapplied to the life mission of Jesus. Many Old Testament sayings were so distorted as to appear to fit some episode of the Master's earth life. Jesus himself onetime publicly denied any connection with the royal house of David...The early followers of Jesus all too often succumbed to the temptation to make all the olden prophetic utterances appear to find fulfillment in the life of their Lord and Master.

The belief that God demanded human sacrifices—in the form of Isaac in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus in the New Testament—are narrative bookends that have had a devastating impact upon humankind's understanding of the nature of God and have disguised the essentially loving and all-forgiving nature of the Universal Father. On the one hand, the idea of the New Testament as a New Covenant has perpetuated the notion of a Chosen People with certain entitlements and continues to affect the course of world history into the present era. On the other hand, it has effectively prolonged a damaging and fundamentally immature, and inaccurate concept of God as an unloving, judging

Father who requires the blood sacrifice of his beloved divine son to wipe out the sins of his errant human children.

The power and authority of the Bible as a book—the material vehicle of memory and distortion of God’s relationship to humankind—signals why the fifth revelation of the nature of God, *The Urantia Book*, came to humanity in the form of a book rather than in the form of an incarnated spirit personality. Humans, past and present, bestow that authority and lend legitimacy to the written word that we refuse to attribute to the embodiment of the highest spiritual values. We live in a world where preconceived notions about the idea of Messiah, and on the most superficial level, what a Messiah would look like and wear, continues to stretch the fabric of our faith, our relationship to God, and to each other.

Every Person a Child of God - The Covenant Expanded

The Urantia Book offers new words and ways to conceptualize God and provides a detailed account of the life and teachings of his son, Jesus. We are gifted transcripts of many forgotten or misunderstood discourses Jesus shared with his apostles and revealed to his contemporaries. Spoken while on his preaching tour in Capernaum, Jesus expanded the divine covenant:

145:2.4 (1629.5) “You well know that, while a kindhearted father loves his family as a whole, he so regards them as a group because of his strong affection for each individual member of that family. No longer must you approach the Father in heaven as a child of Israel but as a child of God. As a group, you are indeed the children of Israel, but as individuals, each one of you is a child of God. I have come, not to reveal the Father to the children of Israel, but rather to bring this knowledge of God and the revelation of his love and mercy to the individual believer as a genuine personal experience. **The prophets have all taught you that Yahweh cares for his people, that God loves Israel. But I have come among you to proclaim a greater truth, one which many of the later prophets also grasped, that God loves you — every one of you — as individuals. All these generations have you had a national or racial religion; now have I come to give you a personal religion.**

Jesus related the expanded revelation of the universal Family of God, a family of which each and every person is a member, to beliefs the Jews had long held. He reminded his audience of the proclamations of the Prophet Jeremiah who foretold of a day when all people of all nations would be God’s Chosen People (145:2.5 (1630.1) and Jeremiah 31: 31-34). Jeremiah cites the many threats God aims at the people of Israel should they fail to do his bidding. The Hebrew Scriptures were constructed over centuries to record the history and fate of the Jewish people in particular. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the

prophecies of Jeremiah most expounded and repeated reflected that which dealt with the people of Israel explicitly. Yet Jesus emphasizes the one time Jeremiah attributes God's embrace of all humankind. In the recovering of the Capernaum tour by the revelators, we are reminded of this instance when Jesus used an easily overlooked reference to God's kinship with, and love for, every individual being to insist that the spiritual kingdom of God was for everyone and not an exclusive birthright of a nation (145:2.6-10 (1630.2-6)).

The Spirit of Truth

At the last supper, Jesus tried to reconnect the mission of his life on Earth to Enoch's understanding of the Son of Man and loosen the grip of the political Messiah over the minds of his apostles. To prepare them for his physical departure, Jesus promised the apostles "...you will be indwelt by the Son as well as by the Father. And these gifts of heaven will ever work the one with the other even as the Father and I have wrought on earth and before your very eyes as one person, the Son of Man. And this spirit friend will bring to your remembrance everything I have taught you" (180:4.3 (1948.4)).

The helper Jesus promises will take his place is the Spirit of Truth. In addition to the piece of God that lives in each one of us, the Spirit of Truth will provide the guidance longed for. The written word—in the form of the Hebrew Scriptures or later, in the collection of the Christian Bible—is not the word of God, nor the unmoving letter of the law. Rather, the teacher of the living truth is inscribed on our hearts.

180:5.1 (1949.3) The new teacher is the conviction of truth, the consciousness and assurance of true meanings on real spirit levels. And this new teacher is the spirit of living and growing truth, expanding, unfolding, and adaptative truth.

The Spirit of Truth as a living, evolving, and growing experiential reality was not, and in all likelihood, could not be captured in a set of documents meant to legislate belief and codify behavior, as the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Bible were meant to do. In that respect, *The Urantia Book* is not meant to function as a complete corrective or final revelation. Rather it is a reminder, one that resurrects the lost Jesusonian religion and transmits an expanded revelation of the nature of God, and our relationship to Him, in a form that can survive many generations. Yet the revelators reiterate:

180:5.2 (1949.4) ...You can know the truth, and you can live the truth; you can experience the growth of truth in the soul and enjoy the liberty of its enlightenment in the mind, but you cannot imprison truth in formulas, codes, creeds, or intellectual patterns of human

conduct... Static truth is dead truth, and only dead truth can be held as a theory. Living truth is dynamic and can enjoy only an experiential existence in the human mind.

While God's demand for human sacrifice opened the narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures and closed the narrative of the Christian Bible, Jesusonian religion resurrected in *The Urantia Book* reminds us that neither human- nor self-sacrifice is demanded of us. *The Urantia Book* does not signify a new covenant, it reminds us that the Spirit of Truth is our ever-present guide that Jesus lovingly bestowed two thousand years ago. Lived experience and communion with the Thought Adjuster enhance our ability to discern the will of the Father. The religion of Jesus privileges the reality of universal membership in the family of God and the spiritual kingdom to come. Rather than simply receiving information, our partnership with the Spirit enhances our ability to discern higher moral values and cultivates wisdom (180:5.10 (1950.5)). **We are reminded that our relationship with God is not contractual or transactional. It is founded in love and sustained by faith.**

Further Readings:

Charles Cohen, *The Abrahamic Religions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

F.E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam From Covenant to Community* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

To learn more about the renewal of the Covenant with Abraham's descendants, see Robert Bradshaw, *Covenant and Covenants in the Bible* on Biblical Studies.org.uk.

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_covenant.html

To read a short comparison of how Judaism depicts the Messiah and how Christianity does, see Dr. Roni Kedmi, *The Image of the Messiah in Judaism and Christianity* on Israel Ministry on Foreign Affairs.

https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/IsraelExperience/Religion/Pages/Image_of_Messiah_in_Judaism_and_Christianity.aspx

To learn more about the construction of the New Testament see:

"Development of the New Testament Canon," Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon

"The Christian Canon," Encyclopedia Britannica

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/Texts-and-versions>

To learn more about biblical etymology, see [Online Etymology Dictionary](#).

Genesis (n.) - Old English Genesis, first book of the Pentateuch, which tells among other things of the creation of the world, from Latin genesis "generation, nativity," in Late Latin taken as the title of first book of the Old Testament, from Greek genesis "origin, creation, generation," from gignesthai "to be born," related to genos "race, birth, descent" (from PIE root *gene- "give birth, beget," with derivatives referring to procreation and familial and tribal groups).

Greek translators used the word as the title of the biblical book, rendering Hebrew bereshith, literally "in the beginning," which was the first word of the text, taken as its title. Extended sense of "origin, creation" first recorded in English c. 1600.

Messiah (n.) - c. 1300, Messias, a designation of Jesus as the savior of the world, from Late Latin Messias, from Greek Messias, from Aramaic (Semitic) meshiha and Hebrew mashiah "the anointed" (of the Lord), from mashah "anoint." It is thus the Hebrew equivalent of Christ, and it is the word rendered in Septuagint as Greek Khristos (see Christ).

In Old Testament prophetic writing, it was used as a descriptive title of an expected deliverer of the Jewish nation. The modern English form represents an attempt to make the word look more Hebrew, and dates from the Geneva Bible (1560). Transferred sense of "an expected liberator or savior of a captive people" is attested from 1660s. Related: Messiahship "the character, state, or office of Jesus Christ as savior of the world" (1620s).