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The King of Persia as Deliverer

THE GREATEST SUBJECT in this section of Isaiah is the coming of the One who will deliver His people and reestablish Jerusalem as the center from which His blessing will go out to all the world. The promises about this Messiah have been a great element in Jewish thought through the ages. The Dead Sea Scrolls frequently refer to the promised coming of the Messiah. At the beginning of the present century many Jews opposed Zionism, declaring that Jerusalem would not be reestablished and the Temple rebuilt until the Messiah would come. Yet the Hebrew word that is transliterated as "Messiah" occurs only once in the book of Isaiah, and in that instance it refers not to the Saviour but to a king of Persia.

Although this word occurs about forty times in the Old Testament most English versions render it as "Messiah" in only two of them (Dan 9:25-26). In all its other occurrences they translate it as "anointed, " or "the anointed one." Occasionally it is used of a prophet, frequently of a priest, and most often of an Israelite king. Originally it meant one on whose head oil had been poured to indicate that he was set apart for a position to which God had called him. In a number of cases it is used of individuals who did not receive an actual anointing, so it is clear that the word came to mean simply one set apart by God for a special work. In its only use in Isaiah it designates a king of Persia as one appointed by God to perform the great accomplishment of delivering God's people from the Babylonian Exile.

As we have noticed, a great part of the material from Isaiah 40 to 52 deals with the problem of deliverance from exile.