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# The Scepter And The Star: Messianism In Light Of The Dead Sea Scrolls



## Synopsis

John J. Collins here offers an up-to-date review of Jewish messianic expectations around the time of Jesus, in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He breaks these expectations down into categories: Davidic, priestly, and prophetic. Based on a small number of prophetic oracles and reflected in the various titles and names assigned to the messiah, the Davidic model holds a clear expectation that the messiah figure would play a militant role. In sectarian circles, the priestly model was far more prominent. Jesus of Nazareth, however, showed more resemblance to the prophetic messiah during his historical career, identified as the Davidic "Son of Man" primarily after his death. In this second edition of *The Scepter and the Star* Collins has revised the discussion of Jesus and early Christianity, completely rewritten a chapter on a figure who claims to have a throne in heaven, and has added a brief discussion of the recently published and controversial *Vision of Gabriel*.

## Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Eerdmans; 2 edition (November 12, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802832237

ISBN-13: 978-0802832238

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #207,251 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #13 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Additional Texts > Dead Sea Scrolls #91 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies > Judaism #159 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > History

## Customer Reviews

"John J. Collins has completely updated his classic book on messianism, interacting with the many discussions on the topic of the last fifteen years, including the newly published *Vision of Gabriel*. This second edition of *The Scepter and the Star* will enlighten a whole new generation. . . . The reference work for years to come." Florentino Garc a-Mart nez Katholieke Universiteit Leuven "This new edition of Collins' classic contains updated bibliography and notes throughout, as well as a very useful and circumspect assessment of the recent work of Israel Knohl. Reflecting a fine command of

the scholarship and characteristically excellent critical judgment, *The Scepter and the Star* is still the best work available on early messianism. *—* Saul M. Olyan Brown University *—* “Yet another of Collins’s must-have books for students of the Bible and early Jewish literature. *—* Mark S. Smith New York University *—* “This second edition updates an authoritative and accessible guide to the messianic figures of the Dead Sea Scrolls and related literature. Collins’s judgments are well balanced, and his conclusions concerning the tantalizing evidence of the fragments of the Scrolls are substantial but healthily tentative. The bibliography alone, some forty percent larger than that of the first edition, is a major resource for all students engaged in the study of early Jewish messianism. Most welcome. *—* George J. Brooke University of Manchester *—* “A must-read for anyone interested in the early history of Judaism and the development of nascent Christianity. *—* Lawrence H. Schiffman New York University

John J. Collins is Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation at Yale Divinity School. His many other books include *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, *Early Judaism: A Comprehensive Overview*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*.

This is John J. Collins’ second edition of “*The Scepter and the Star*.” For reviews of the previous edition of the book, see <http://www.dpbolton.net/dp/0385474571>. I am a recent seminary graduate and now pastor who very much enjoyed reading this book. I picked it up with the intention of finding out what exactly the Jewish understanding of the Messiah was around the time of Jesus because I have heard many modern-day Christians espouse the idea that Jesus was what the Jews expected and that he fulfilled all OT prophecies. This book did not exactly give me the answer I wanted because the premise of my quest was faulty. While there were some shared expectations of what the Messiah would be like, there was no single vision. Simply put, given the multitude of expectations of the day, Jesus probably wouldn’t have been what most people thought of as messiah material. Collins says something to this effect on p. 19, “Jesus is, moreover, an anomaly. Although the claim that he is the Davidic messiah is ubiquitous in the New Testament, he does not fit the typical profile of the Davidic messiah. The messiah was, first of all, a warrior prince, who was to defeat the enemies of Israel.” Overall, I very much appreciated the scholarly analysis of this book. As hinted at above, Collins gives an in-depth portrayal of the messianic expectations of different communities by exploring different literature from the period and attacks the topic from many different angles. As

should be expected from the subtitle, the Dead Sea Scrolls are central. Additionally, he explores the topic by looking at key passages from the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Mishnah, Talmud, and the Old and New Testament. Throughout the book, he explores the evolution of the term messiah throughout Israel's history, the roles of teacher, prophet, priest, and king, as well as the mysterious Son of Man title as found in Daniel. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the topics!

I would like to thank the dear folks at Eerdmans Publishing for providing this review copy of this volume in exchange for my honest review. Anyone interested in Messianism this volume really needs to be in one's library. The book is not an introduction into this topic by any means, so the layperson would be wise to get acquainted with The Second Temple Period as well as The Ancient Near East. Dr. Collins explains his concern in the book is primarily with Jewish messianism both as an interesting phenomenon in the history of religion in its own right and as the context in which the earliest acclamation of Jesus as messiah must be understood. This includes the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves, who may have lived at the site and how the library might have been compiled and providing broader views of what Judaism was at that point in time. Moving forward chapter 2 discusses the possibility the Hebrew Bible may not have been a closed canon per se, with respect to the scrolls, since the first mention of authoritative scriptures mentioned is after 70 CE when Josephus mentions a total 22 (Against Apion 1.7). In addition, there's abundant evidence that there was already some established authoritative writings at this same time period, noting Philo and the New Testament's authors use of "the Law and the Prophets". From this point on in the book Collins begins to unpack the Messianic anticipation through out the Hebrew Bible, The New Testament, Apocrypha & Pseudepigrapha, The Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic Sources. Noting three uses of messiahship, namely the priestly, prophetic and the Davidic. Throughout this amazing body of work one becomes aware of the notion that the Jewish ideas of messianism were not uniform. Dominating was the notion of the Davidic messiah, as the king who would restore the kingdom of Israel. Minor messianic strands, which envisaged a priestly messiah, or an anointed prophet or a heavenly Son of Man. Christian messianism drew heavily on some of the minor strands (prophet, Son of Man) and eventually developed them into a doctrine of Christology that was remote from its Jewish origins. Finally, the Christology of the early church was shaped by various factors. The crucifixion of Jesus led to a searching of the Scriptures and to a new creative exegesis of messianic prophecy. There was a deliberate attempt, (not sinister), to claim more for Jesus than had been claimed for any other agent of God. Despite the divergence of their branches, however,

Christian and Jewish messianism were rooted in common ground.I highly recommend and endorse this book!

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