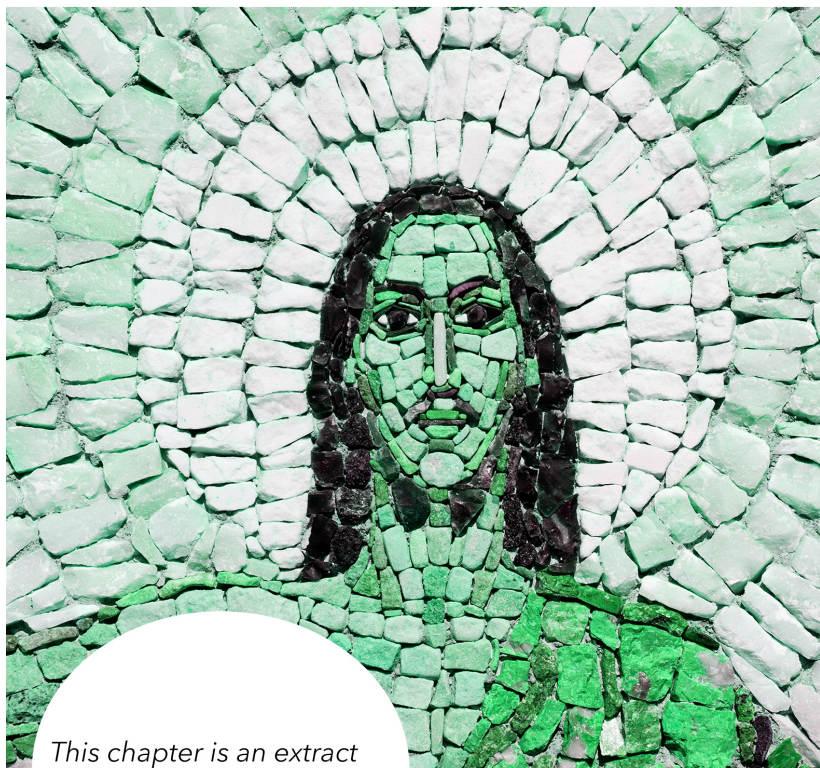


CHAPTER 18  
**THE ATMOSPHERE OF EXCEPTION**



*This chapter is an extract  
from the 6th edition of*

**VERDICT**  

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**ON JESUS**

**LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM**

## About this Extract

This is an extract from the 6th edition of Verdict on Jesus.

Print and ebook editions of the full edition are available from Amazon ISBN 978-1-9163862-0-4 (print book) and ISBN 978-1-9163862-1-1 (ebook). To download and read other chapters visit [www.verdictonjesus.com](http://www.verdictonjesus.com)

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *The Atmosphere of Expectation*

*Prophecy never came by human impulse.*

2 Peter 1

We are following out the possibility that God might reasonably choose to communicate with humanity. On that assumption, what might we expect? Not a sudden apocalypse in the heavens, nor a dramatic take-over of outer space communication, but something more in keeping with the gradual growth of other forms of knowledge, something that might pass for normal, like the gradual deepening of the insights of good people, so that a man like Moses might come from his meditations on a mountain with a revised version of the laws of Hammurabi in his head, or the awakening of a hope that one day an utterly worthy figure might represent God to humanity.

In our last chapter we saw that the Old Testament was just such a record of a long-term, but growing, enlightenment, and after many centuries it did in fact, seem to prepare the way for a supreme Teacher to come among people.

We now come to the strange, but utterly historical fact, of the expectation of the Messiah. It is a phenomenon which

must be judged on evidence, rather than on presuppositions this way or that. The subject calls for open-ended inquiry, avoiding on the one hand the dogmatism of faith, and on the other the equally trying dogmatism of doubt.

As there is artistic inspiration, musical and poetic inspiration, is it unreasonable to speak of prophetic inspiration? Even some scientists have claimed to receive insights beyond their actual knowledge, which later research has enabled them to verify.

Certainly the prophets were by no means merely political and social reformers. They were in their impressive succession people of towering spiritual greatness and moral stature, so that while looking at the contemporary scene they sometimes looked above and beyond it, and speaking to their time, they also spoke truths for all time. It is to them that we owe those flashes of insight, and the illuminating portraiture that impressed upon the Hebrew mind the ideal of the Messiah, and the hope of his coming.

They saw things in new perspectives. While the poetry and mythology of ancient peoples tended to be retrospective, wistfully extolling some golden age in the past, the prophets looked hopefully forward. The Hebrews had had eras of splendour and many notable leaders in their not inglorious past, but these were never idealised by the prophets in the way that they idealised the mysterious figure, whom, they believed, was to shape their future greatness.

The Greeks and Romans, like Eastern philosophy, were without a sense of progressive purpose in the world. Any movement they envisaged was cyclic. Only from the religious

insight of Israel came the conception of a divine purpose running through all things and destined, despite human's rebellion, to final effectiveness.

The picture of the Messiah was fragmentary and composite. It was the work of many hands over a long time. There is wide difference of spiritual tone; earthly hopes and spiritual mission move at different levels. Yet there are large general agreements.

The prophets agree in sharply denouncing the present, yet they are filled with irrepressible hope for the future. They lament the feebleness of their nation, yet predict for it a world-wide mission. They despair of human agencies, yet are confident that a Messiah was coming who would usher in a new era.

The Messiah was to sum up all ideas in himself. He was to be a veritable King of Righteousness, and through him God's will was to be revealed. Peace and a beneficent change in all human relationships were to be the result of his rule, and all nations were to be gathered into his kingdom. A new Covenant was to be established and there was to be an outpouring of the Divine Spirit.

Scholars differ widely in their interpretation of Messianic passages. Some rightly point out that a number of passages formerly counted Messianic are in fact topical references to persons or a person known at the time. Others say, like Dr Westcott, 'God through His Spirit so speaks that words not directly addressed to Christ, find their fulfilment in Him.' Others, again, agree with Dr A. G. Herbert who argues in *The Authority of the Old Testament* that while passages

must not be pressed to detail, yet 'Old Testament prophecies run to Christ as tidal rivers to the sea, only to feel his reflex influence upon them'.

On any reckoning we have to account for the fact that the Messianic hope came to take an increasing place in the Hebrew mind. This cannot be left hanging in the air without reasonable explanation.

If there is no such thing as prophetic inspiration, how did it happen that the idea of a Messiah ever arose? If it was the outcome of 'wishful thinking', how did it happen that some significant Messianic passages allude to things that were far from wished? Some of the ideals voiced in them cut across Israel's material and national aspirations.

Popular hope for example centred round the idea of a Messiah as one who would revive the national glory of Israel, restore worldly power and prosperity, and break off the yoke of oppression. But there were prophets who had a very different message.

The Messiah was to be sought by the Gentiles (Isaiah 11: 10), the Jews were to share their covenant status with the Gentiles and give light to them (Isaiah 42: 6), his followers were to be called by a new name (Isaiah 62: 2), and instead of founding a merely national religion, it was to be 'great among the heathen from the rising up of the sun unto the going down of the same among the Gentiles' (Mai. 1: 11).

Only one acquainted with Jewish history can appreciate how grudgingly the Jews of that time could have entertained the thought of sparing any comfort to the Gentiles. No wonder

Isaiah exclaimed ‘who hath believed our report?’ How bewildered they must have been at the portrait of one ‘despised and rejected of men, brought as a lamb to the slaughter, bearing griefs and carrying sorrows’, a Saviour redeeming humanity at the cost of his own life (Isaiah 53). The author of the Suffering Servant Songs was not afraid to think of suffering as it had been found to be in the Exile, a road to new and larger thoughts of God, a way of showing that evil at its worst can be made to fail before goodness at its best.

Plato, the Greek philosopher, held the view that if a perfect person appeared on this planet, death would be their portion. But the author of the Suffering Servant passages reached the higher truth that such a death might be a refining and saving thing, even perhaps, that the nature of God could be revealed in it.

No wonder, perhaps, despite the voices of the prophets, the more material, the more national idea, held sway, and that the people entrusted with the portrait of the Messiah, refused to recognise him when they saw him.

Yet, is not this just what we should expect, if prophecy were indeed a revelation from God? We would be prepared to find it bigger than the measure of the human mind, purer than ideas mixed with national desires and worldly hopes. We would expect it to contain a challenge to higher and wider thinking.

But the unaccountable sweep of prophetic vision, offering a spiritual mission to the whole world, is not so astonishing as the way the picture of the Messiah tended to encroach even

on the Hebrews' cherished thought of God as one, absolute and transcendent. Such fighters against polytheism as the prophets, vehemently contending for the holiness and oneness of God, undoubtedly on occasion, startle us by pointing to a figure who has the Name of God upon Him. The writer of the book of Daniel, for instance, describes a vision of 'The Ancient of Days' enthroned in fiery flame and with hundreds of thousands standing before Him, and one 'like the Son of Man' receiving from him the promise of a Kingdom wherein all peoples, nations and languages should serve him, a Kingdom that should increase and not pass away (Dan. 7: 13, 14). With a Hebraic assurance of reality Isaiah proclaims, 'Unto us a son is born, a child is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9: 6, 7). What is the significance? To the Hebrew the Name of God was so unutterably holy that none but the High Priest could utter it, and even he but once a year.

It was such thoughts as these that in one form or another entered the Hebrew consciousness, just as they have undoubtedly contributed to the Church's devotion to Christ. They are likely to continue to hold their place in Christian thought, and to be variously interpreted.

As we attempt to sum up five facts seem clear. First, the reality and spread of the great hope in the quantity of Messianic and Apocryphal literature, and the gleams of it in the Qumran Scrolls. 'It shows,' as Professor N. K. Gottwald says in *A Light to the Nations*, 'that the Jews were more keenly aware at the time of Christ of some impending great act of God than they had been at any time in their history.'



Secondly, even if prophecy is taken at its lowest valuation, as merely a 'showing forth' of the ideal man, the perfect servant of God, it is bound to remain significant that only one figure in history, Jesus of Nazareth, has brought that idea to vital reality.

Thirdly, 'filled with the spirit Jesus seemed to have known that he had been called to translate prophecy into history'. To the question, did Jesus accept the Name of the Messiah, or Christ? Dr A. M. Ramsey replied in *God, Christ and the World*: 'Certainly Jesus did and said things appropriate to one who was the Messiah, and his enemies set out to destroy him, because his behaviour added up to a claim to Messiahship and more... The Synoptists record him as avowing Messiahship in his reply to the High Priest in the Sanhedrin when he was at the point of condemnation to death.'

Fourthly, there is much to suggest that Jesus had no idea of Messiahship that was his alone, and it included new elements that even his disciples realised but dimly, if at all. He *was* the Messiah. It explains his agony in Gethsemane; his courageous admission before the High Priest when on trial, when he knew his admission would be taken as blasphemy, and send him to his death; and it explains his first resurrection message to the disciples on the Emmaus road, 'when beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24: 27).

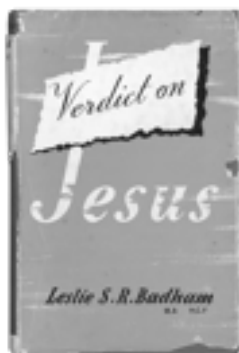
Fifthly, proof-texts were used with powerful effect by the first preachers of the faith. To many scholarly minds today

they were excessively used, and sometimes misapplied. 'To Christ,' said Peter, 'give all the prophets witness' (Acts 10: 43); and the appeal was convincing. By Messianic explanation, Philip converted the Ethiopian (Acts 8: 10); Stephen spoke with invincible spirit at the immediate cost of his life (Acts 6: 10), and Paul was able to throw the Jewish colony into complete confusion by the way he demonstrated that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9: 22).

Finally, it is a generally admitted fact that the Messianic doctrine provided a terminology and background of ideas, without which the significance of Jesus could hardly have been so immediately interlocked with the Old Testament, and so readily interpreted in the primitive Church.

## 7 Decades

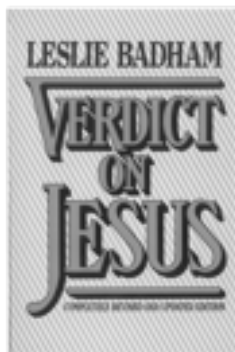
### *Verdict on Jesus through the years*



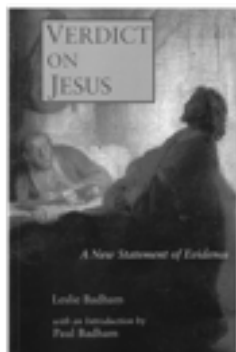
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1971



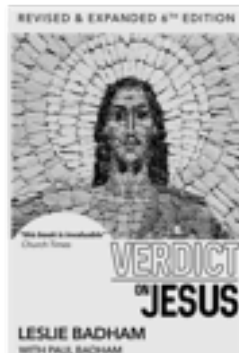
1983



1995



2010



2020

# Leslie Badham

*Author of Verdict on Jesus*

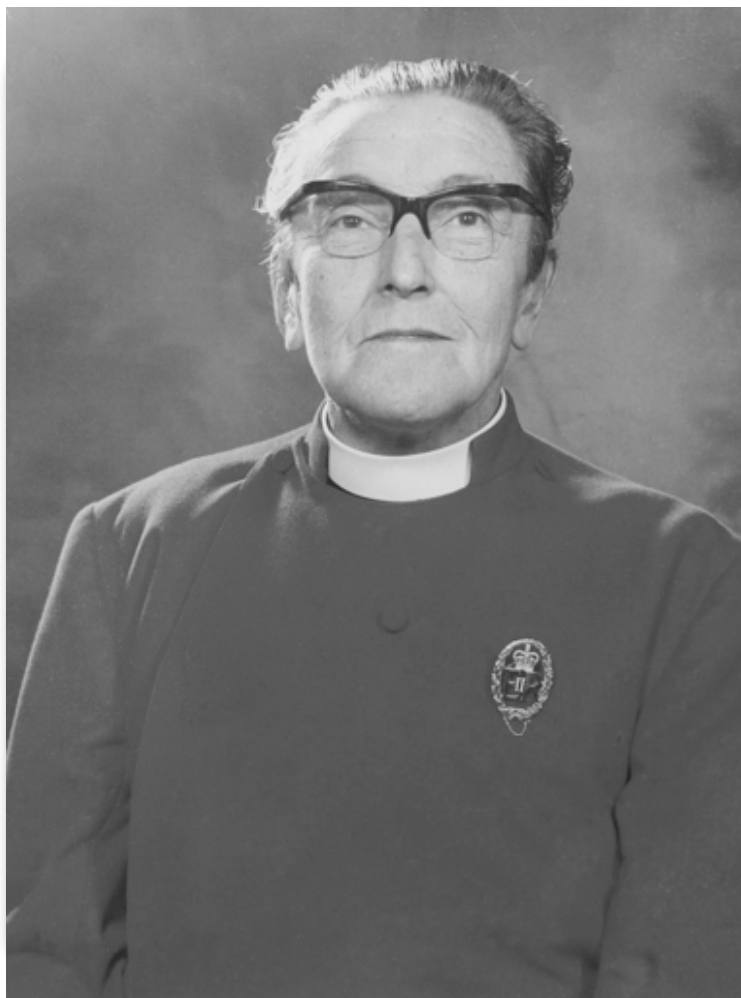


**Top left:** Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

**Top right:** Leslie and Effie Badham with their children David, Christine, Clare and Paul in 1963

**Middle:** Leslie Badham with Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Parish Church in 1965

**Bottom left:** Leslie Badham RAF Chaplain 1940-45



Leslie Badham (1908–75)

Originally published in Great Britain in 1950 Second edition published  
1971 Third edition published 1983  
Fourth edition published 1995 by IKON Productions Ltd  
Fifth edition published in Great Britain in 2010 by SPCK

This edition published in Great Britain in 2020 by The Newson Trust

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-9163862-1-1

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