

BRANCH **צֶמַח** This word is used for an heir or descendant of the Davidic king; **חֹמֶר** (shoot) and **נֹצֵר** (twig, offshoot) are related terms in Isa 11:1. In Jer 23:5, an oracle of Yahweh announces the raising up for David of a **צֶמַח צְדִיק**, that can be translated “righteous branch” or, better, “legitimate branch,” that is, a legitimate heir to the Davidic throne. A third century Phoenician inscription uses the same words to refer to a legitimate royal heir, and a fifth century Phoenician inscription mentions a **בֶּן צֶדֶק** or “legitimate son.” The term in Jer 23:5 may be a pun on the word Zedekiah, the puppet king installed by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah states that the future “legitimate branch” will act wisely and perform justice and righteousness in the land, again in sharp distinction to Zedekiah. The branch is given the name **יְהוָה צְדִיקֵנוּ** “Yahweh is our righteousness” or, better, “Yahweh is the source of our vindication” that may be an ironic pun on the name Zedekiah.

In a secondary passage, Jer 33:14-16 (all of vv. 14-26 are lacking in LXX), a divine oracle announces a Davidic **צֶמַח צְדִיקָה** (“branch of righteousness” or “legitimate branch”). The territory to be ruled by the branch is described as Judah and Jerusalem (Jer 33:16) instead of Judah and Israel (Jer 23:6), and the new name (“Yahweh is the source of our vindication”) is given to the city of Jerusalem instead of to the branch himself.

The term occurs twice in the post-exilic prophet Zedekiah in passages whose meaning is debated. After the high priest Joshua has been ritually purified and confirmed in his office, the angel of Yahweh announces “I am going to bring my servant the branch.” (Zech 3:8). While Zerubbabel, whose name means “seed of Babylon,”

participates with Joshua in building the Second Temple, this promise may refer to a future time when kingship will be reestablished without identifying Zerubbabel as that future royal figure. A divine oracle in Zech 6:12 designates a person, presumably Zerubbabel, as the branch who is to build the temple of Yahweh. The prophet Zechariah is instructed to make crowns and set one of them on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak (v. 11) and store the second one as a memorial in the house of Yahweh, apparently for the king of the future (6:14). *BHS* suggests emending “crowns” to “crown” in v. 11 and changing “Joshua son of Jehozadak” to “Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel.” These changes are based on the assumption that Zerubbabel was deposed by the Persians for aspiring to be king, leading to subsequent editing of the text. An apparently secondary paragraph in Zech 4:6-10a gives pride of place to Zerubbabel while the rest of the context (4:1-4) outlines the diarchic joint rule of Joshua and Zerubbabel.

Several references in the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that the term “branch” had become a messianic title. The messiah is referred to as “the branch of David” (צֶמַח דָּוִד) in 4Q174 1.11 and as “the messiah of righteousness...the branch of David” (צֶמַח דָּוִד) in 4Q252 5.3-4. See PALM TREE; VINE; MESSIAH, JEWISH.

### **Bibliography**

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