

THE CASE AGAINST MESSIAH

by Aryeh Naftaly

A world where the dead can walk, where billions of people live together in peace, multiplying at a geometric rate since there is no disease, no strife, no war, no jealousy, no birth control, possibly no death. No one has to work since delicacies are as plentiful as dust. The moon is as bright as the sun, the sun is seven times as bright as it is now, leopards lie with lambs, lions eat straw, babies play with poisonous snakes. Nobody sins, God's truth is known to all and no one has to do anything but bask in the knowledge of God. All Jews live in Israel, Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the world and the Jews are recognized as the superior nation.

All this follows an all-out global war of unprecedented fury and destruction.

And all this happens because a man has come. He is a male Jew from the tribe of Judah, specifically a direct descendant of King David. He rules Israel and always will (or at least his descendants will). He singlehandedly brought all Jews to Israel. He rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. He can tell the good from the evil by sense of smell. He is the greatest statesman, leader and political genius the world has ever seen. He is the wisest man ever to have lived. He used these extraordinary talents to precipitate a worldwide revolution which brought perfect social justice to humanity and influenced all people to serve God with a pure heart. He is the greatest prophet in history, second only to Moses. He teaches all Jews to follow both the Written and Oral Torah. He has his hair cut every day.¹

This is Messiah.

According to Judaism.

Preface

I begin this treatise on Saturday night, the Tenth of Av, 5779. Since the Ninth of Av (Tisha B'Av) fell on Shabbat the fast is postponed. Tonight, the Jewish People mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, and, supposedly, pray for the building of the Third Temple.

¹ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars, 10:5

This year the State of Israel celebrated its 71st year of Independence and the 52nd year since the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount were liberated from Muslim hands. It is 1,949 years since the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans.

It is a Torah commandment to build a temple to the Lord: "And they will make Me a temple and I will dwell among them."² It is also a matter of faith and historic fact that the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is the place intended by God for the Temple to stand.

Despite all this, the movement to reinstate the Temple is a fringe effort, considered by the Jewish establishment the province of wackos and radicals at best, and at worst, pure heresy. At the dedication of the Hurva Synagogue in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City in 2010, then-Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel (and convicted criminal) Yona Metzger quelled the angry Muslim crowd by reassuring them that Israel has no intention of rebuilding the Temple on the disputed Temple Mount.

Why has virtually everyone, from the secular Israeli government to the most devout and powerful rabbis both in Israel and the world over, refused to fulfill this commandment? What is stopping them?

The obvious answer is: The Muslims. The Muslims built the Dome of the Rock, a shrine, over the same spot on the Temple Mount which, according to certain Jewish traditions, is the *axis mundi*, the center of the universe. It is the place attributed by the Jews to the binding of Isaac (or Ishmael, as the Muslims would have it), where according to Jewish tradition Jacob lay his head down and had a vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder to Heaven, where the First and Second Temples stood, and from which, according to the Muslim creed, Muhammad ascended to Heaven on his winged horse. Who are the Jews/Israelis to destroy their beautiful shrine?

But let's be honest - that's not what's stopping the Israeli government. If Israel wanted to, it could go up and bulldoze the Dome of the Rock in less than a day. Or blow it up in less than an hour. Or Israel could simply demand the shared use of the Dome of the Rock, as it does the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Or go up to the Temple Mount and build a Temple on open ground. But then, the argument goes, the Muslims would get angry and try to destroy Israel. Take today's [the 10th of Av] news from the Jerusalem Post for example: "The police said they will determine whether to allow Jews on the Mount Sunday after determining if the situation is calm and risk of violence and confrontation is low." Whatever you do, don't make the Muslims mad.

That's the concern. Let's look at the truth. The Muslim world has tried to destroy Israel time and again and, thankfully, failed. If, at any moment, enough Muslim governments and organizations felt Israel was weak enough to destroy, there's no question they would

² Exodus 25:8

try, and Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to name but a few, make no secret that this is their heart's desire. So it isn't fear of Muslim retribution that's stopping Israel. Then what is the obstacle to establishing the Third Temple? Ask any rabbi and you'll get the same answer:

We can't build the Third Temple until the Messiah comes.

And the building of the Third Temple isn't the only thing the absence of "the Messiah" precludes. Paradoxically, it also serves as a pretext for many so-called ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups to abstain from fulfilling other Torah precepts such as settling the Land of Israel - and the myriad ancillary Commandments dependent on dwelling in the Land of Israel such as serving in the Israeli army.³ But is the Messianic paradigm, as we were all taught, really part and parcel of Torah? Is it part of God's plan? If not, where did it come from and why are we supposed to believe it? I am committed to researching this question and finding the truth, whatever it may be.

Aryeh Naftaly, 10 Av 5779 / 11.8.19

(The following is the result of my research, completed 5.4.20 / 11 Nisan 5780)

³ Numbers 1:3

THE CASE AGAINST MESSIAH

Introduction

That a Messiah King will come and redeem the Jewish people and bring permanent world peace is considered a fundamental precept of Judaism. It is anchored in the twelfth of Rambam's⁴ Thirteen Principles of Faith: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and although he may tarry I will await his coming every day." According to this belief, the advent of Messiah will alter every aspect of life on Earth, from animal behavior to human behavior to the laws of nature, even to life and death themselves.

Jewish Messianism has spread and flourished in recent decades. In particular, the Lubavitch (Chabad) and Breslav movements, as well as Kabbalist movements from the least religiously devout to the most, place Messiah at the core of their beliefs. In Orthodox Jewish circles it's a rare sermon that doesn't end by beseeching the coming of Messiah.

But is Messiah really a fundamental precept of Torah? In this essay I will demonstrate why it is not only not that, it is a negation of the laws of God, Torah and nature and therefore the prime obstacle to the establishment of the Third Israelite Commonwealth and, God willing, world peace.

Five important points before we begin:

One, in this treatise I will only be addressing the Jewish / Israelite approach to Messiah.

Two, throughout this treatise I will refer to God as "He" as is common practice. This is not to say that God is a male being - this is obviously not so - rather, this is due to the fact that the Hebrew language has no neutral gender and the masculine is the default gender. Messiah, on the other hand, is, according to Judaism, necessarily a male.⁵ Also following common practice, I will translate the Tetragrammaton (יהוה) "the Lord" and the other names for God "God."

Three, when I use the word "Torah" I'm referring to the Pentateuch - the Five Books of Moses - and not "Torah" as a general or abstract term.

Four, in this work I am assuming the veracity and sanctity of the Torah and the Hebrew Bible.

Five, I am perfectly aware that the kneejerk reaction of many readers to this treatise will be outrage and name-calling. I only ask that such readers read the work through. Then I will be glad to address any doubts or questions.

⁴ Moshe ben Maimon, a.k.a. Maimonides, 12th century rabbi and philosopher, author of Mishneh Torah - a compendium of the entire halachic tradition. I will be referring to Mishneh Torah extensively since its only parallel work, the Shulkhan Aruch, does not address the concept of Messiah.

⁵ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars, 10:6

1. The Scriptural Case

2. The Logical Case

3. The Historical Case

Conclusion

1. The Scriptural Case

1a. Who or What is Messiah?

Let's begin by seeing how God - meaning the Jewish God as revealed in the Torah (Pentateuch) and the *Tanach* (Hebrew Bible), i.e. the so-called Old Testament - defines "Messiah."

The Mishnah offers the simplest, most precise definition:

"And who is the Messiah? One who is anointed with the Anointing Oil"⁶

In the Hebrew language, the Torah and the Hebrew Bible the word messiah (מָשִׁיחַ , *mashíah*) means no more nor less than "the anointed one," i.e. one who is anointed with the sacred Anointing Oil. The Anointing Oil was made only once, according to a special formula given to Moses by God's command, and was used for three purposes: to anoint the vessels of the Tabernacle in the desert; to anoint the High Priests and the priests officiating at war; and to anoint kings of the Davidic dynasty.⁷ The Greek word for "the anointed one" is Χριστός - Christos - hence the appellation Jesus Christ, Jesus being, according to Christian faith, the Messiah.⁸ Thus the word Christianity literally means "the religion of belief in Messiah." By the same token, the word Judaism literally means "the religion of belief in Judah," Judah being the kingly tribe of Israel and, according to the Messianic paradigm, the forefather of the future Messiah.

So, practically speaking, who or what is this Messiah? The Chabad website Chabad.org claims: "The word messiah in English means a savior or a hoped-for deliverer." This may be what it has come to mean, but the assertion that Messiah is a savior or deliverer, as

⁶ Mishnah Horayot 3:4

⁷ Exodus 30:22-30

⁸ Although it may have been his or his disciples' plan to anoint him as king over Israel, Jesus' actual "anointment" had nothing to do with the Anointing Oil or kingship; a woman simply poured some fragrant oil on his feet. (John 12:3; Luke 7:38; Mark 14:3; Matthew 26:7)

Christians believe, is a gloss which came centuries after the completion of the Tanach - and after the advent of Christianity - as I will demonstrate here.

All in all there are thirty-eight references to Messiah in the Hebrew Bible. All four references in the Torah refer to either the High Priest or the priest officiating at war.⁹ Messiah is mentioned seventeen times in Samuel I and II, always referring to either King Saul or King David.¹⁰ Isaiah mentions Messiah once, referring to Emperor Cyrus of Persia;¹¹ Messiah appears in the book of Psalms ten times, always referring to King David¹² except for 105:15: "Touch not My messiahs and harm not my prophets," which Rashi explains as meaning: "Every mention of 'messiahs' refers to sovereignty and greatness." Daniel mentions Messiah twice, prophesying about Emperor Cyrus and King Herod Agrippa,¹³ both of which prophecies came true. Messiah appears in Lamentations once, referring to King Josiah¹⁴. The three remaining Biblical references to Messiah are in Habakkuk 3:13, Chronicles I 16:22 and Chronicles II 6:42 - all in the plural, referring to powerful men as Rashi explained.

In other words, according to God's revelation through the Hebrew Bible, there is no one "Messiah" nor is the advent of Messiah a mystical future occurrence; on the contrary, the term always refers to flesh-and-blood human beings, albeit important ones, who live and die.

1b. The Scriptural Case - Messiah as King

It is a tenet of Messianic faith that the Messiah will be the King of the Jews. Here too the Torah and the Hebrew Bible not only don't bear out this belief but contradict it in no uncertain terms.

To begin with, even before the Torah is given and the Israelites become a nation with a country of their own, God's sole kingship is already established. The triumphant Song of

⁹ Leviticus 4:3, 4:5, 4:16, 6:15

¹⁰ I Samuel 2:10, 2:35, 12:3, 12:5, 16:6, 24:6, 24:10, 26:9, 26:11, 26:16, 26:23; II Samuel 1:14, 1:16, 1:21, 19:22, 22:51, 23:1

¹¹ Isaiah 42:1

¹² Psalms 2:2, 18:51, 20:7, 28:8, 84:10, 89:29, 89:52, 132:10, 132:17

¹³ Daniel 9:25, 9:26

¹⁴ Lamentations 4:20

the Sea, sung by the Israelites as they left Egypt, concludes: "The Lord will rule forever and ever."¹⁵

The Torah, given at Mt. Sinai before the Israelites enter the land of Canaan, predicts that once settled in the Promised Land the Children of Israel will want a human king like the other nations. The Torah states:

"When you come to the Land which the Lord your God gives you and you inherit it and settle in it, and you say: 'I will place a king over me like all the nations that surround me,' you may place over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose; from among your brothers will you place a king over you; you may not place over you a foreign man who is not your brother. However, he must not have too many horses, so that he doesn't bring the [Israelite] people back to Egypt in order to amass horses, for the Lord told you: 'You must not go back that way ever again.' And he must not have too many wives, so that his heart doesn't turn away; and he must not have exceeding amounts of silver and gold."¹⁶

Regarding appointing a king, the essential phrase here is שׁוּם תְּשִׁים. This doubled form may mean one of three things: "you may," as in מִכֹּל עֵץ הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכְלוּ - "From any tree of the Garden you may eat"¹⁷; "you must," as in עֲשֵׂה תַעֲשֶׂה אֶת כָּל תְּבוּאֹת זֶרְעֶךָ - "You must tithe all of your crops"¹⁸; or "you surely will," as in נָבַל תִּבָּל, "You will surely wear away."¹⁹ JPS 1917 translates this phrase: "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee" (meaning "you will do it anyway"); the Koren Bible translates it: "Thou mayst appoint a king over thee"; the Israel Bible translates it: "You shall be free to set a king over yourself."

We can rule out the possibility of "you may" based on a verse from Genesis:

"And these are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before the kings of Israel ruled."²⁰

In this exceptional passage the "omniscient narrator" who recounts the stories of Scripture informs us that the Israelites will have kings in the future regardless of God's will - and this indeed occurs, but many centuries later.

In contrast, many rabbinic sources, including Rambam, interpret this as meaning "you must place a king over you" and therefore an imperative. Not surprisingly, Chabad's

¹⁵ Exodus 15:18

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 17:14-17

¹⁷ Genesis 2:16

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 14:22

¹⁹ Exodus 18:18

²⁰ Genesis 36:31

"Complete Jewish Bible" translates the phrase: "You shall set a king over you." However, the context clearly does not bear this out, nor does God's reaction to the Israelites actually wanting to place a king over them as we will soon see.

In these few commandments the Torah instructs that the king over Israel must be an Israelite and therefore a human being. He will have weaknesses and lusts that he must overcome. He must not feel superior to his brothers.

This contradicts the statement in the Zohar: "At that time the Messiah King will awaken to leave the Garden of Eden from a place called 'Bird's Nest' and will reveal himself in the Galilee"²¹ since this "Messiah King" would be born fully grown, i.e. superhuman, and not "from among his brothers."

Moreover, although in the Torah God says that the Israelites "may place," "must place" or "will surely place" a king over them, He takes the idea of the Israelites having any king beside Himself as both a grievous error and a personal affront, as illustrated in this dialogue between Him and Samuel the Prophet when the Israelites first ask for a king to rule over them:

"And all the elders of Israel gathered unto Samuel at Ramah. And they said to him: 'Behold, you have grown old and your sons have not followed in your ways; now place a king over us to judge us like all the other nations.' And it displeased Samuel that they said 'give us a king to judge us' and Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel: 'Heed the voice of the people in everything they say to you, for it is not you they have rejected – **it is I they have rejected as their king!**'"²²

God goes on to list all the reasons why they shouldn't have a king but the people don't heed Him and insist on having one anyway. God finally relents and approves Saul as the first king of Israel. To show the Israelites that they've made a grave mistake in asking for a king, Samuel calls on God to destroy the wheat harvest:

"Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord and He will send thunder and rain that day and you will know that **you did great evil in the eyes of the Lord by asking for a king.** And Samuel called on the Lord and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel: Pray for your servants to the Lord your God

²¹ Zohar on Exodus, article 99

²² I Samuel 8:4-7

that we may not die, **for we have added to our sins the evil of asking for a king.**"²³

After this God rejects Saul, who then kills himself. He is followed by David, who is anointed with the Anointing Oil, thus literally becoming a messiah king. David becomes God's favorite and the forerunner and prototype for all future kings of Israel, yet he is a gifted but otherwise normal, imperfect human being who sins and makes mistakes.

The Jewish liturgy is replete with references to God as king - and no other. Listen: "And the Lord will be King over the whole world; on that day He will be one and His name one." "The Lord established His throne in Heaven and His Kingship is over all." "The Lord is King forever and ever." "The Lord was King, the Lord is King, the Lord will be King forever and ever." "O King who helps, saves and protects." "It is true - You are the first and You are the last and besides You we have no King, redeemer and savior." "And we bow and genuflect and thank the King, the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He." And the list goes on.

The service for Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year, virtually revolves around the idea of God as The One King. The word "king" rings out repeatedly throughout the two-day service. In the Amidah (Standing Prayer) God is no longer referred to as "HaEl HaKadosh" - "the Holy God," as during the rest of the year - but as "HaMelech HaKadosh" - "the Holy King." The hallmark prayer of Rosh HaShanah is Avinu Malkenu - Our Father, Our King - in which Jews the world over repeat this phrase dozens of times, adding: "Our Father, our King, we have no king but You." The three stations of the Standing Prayer for Rosh HaShanah are Shofars, Remembrances and Kingship, in which God's sole kingship is recalled from a myriad of verses from the Torah and the Bible.

Clearly, to the God of the Hebrew Bible who calls Himself "a jealous God"²⁴ the idea of any other king over the Jews is abhorrent, as the Jews instinctively know and manifest in their liturgy.

1c. The Scriptural Case - Messiah as Savior, Redeemer or Deliverer

The yearning for a savior is understandable. After all, the human condition is far from perfect. Death and disease know no end, few peoples or nations share the same ideals, and many are willing to harm, abuse, rape, torture and kill those who disagree with their own.

²³ I Samuel 12:17-19

²⁴ (The third of the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8)

Nowhere in the Bible, not even in the Prophets, is there any reference to a savior, deliverer or redeemer besides God Himself. Just as God is jealous of his unique position as King, He is jealous of His unique position as Redeemer and Savior. Case in point is the "go-to proof" of Messiah as redeemer, found in the book of Isaiah, as quoted in the daily Jewish liturgy:

"And a redeemer shall come to Zion and to those of Jacob who repent from willful sin."²⁵

The commentator Etz Yosef offers the common interpretation:

"God pledges that Messiah will come to redeem the city Zion and the people of Israel."

But not only is there no mention of Messiah in this chapter of Isaiah (or any other, except that referring to King Cyrus of Persia), the identity of this "redeemer" is revealed a few verses later:

"...and you shall know that **I the Lord am your savior, and I, the Mighty One of Jacob, am your redeemer.**"²⁶

But this should come as no surprise; Isaiah has already cited the name of this redeemer in verse 47:4, which is quoted in the morning service:

"Our redeemer - the Lord of Hosts is His name - the Holy One of Israel."

Isaiah, whose name literally means "God will save," is absolutely clear as to who the redeemer and savior of Israel is; the Hebrew word לָא (redeem) in its various conjugations appears 21 times in the Book of Isaiah,²⁷ every one refers to God as the Redeemer and all but three mention Him by name. These three are in the first person, i.e. Isaiah is quoting God speaking of Himself. The word שָׁט (save, deliver) in its various conjugations also appears 21 times,²⁸ 14 of which mention God by name or by a nickname such as "the Holy One of Israel." Four refer to gods or people who will not save²⁹, the other three are God speaking of Himself,³⁰ and the message is repeated again and again:

²⁵ Isaiah 59:20

²⁶ Isaiah 60:16

²⁷ Isaiah 41:14, 43:1, 43:14, 44:6, 44:22, 44:23, 44:24, 47:4, 48:17, 48:20, 49:7, 49:26, 52:3, 52:9, 54:5, 54:8, 59:20, 60:16, 63:3, 63:9, 63:16

²⁸ Isaiah 19:20, 25:9, 33:22, 37:20, 37:35, 38:20, 43:3, 43:11, 45:15, 45:20, 45:21, 46:7, 47:13, 47:15, 49:25, 49:26, 59:1, 60:16, 63:1, 63:8, 63:9

²⁹ Isaiah 45:20, 46:7, 47:13, 47:15

³⁰ Isaiah 37:35, 63:1, 63:8

"I, I the Lord, am your savior, there is no other."³¹ And the same is true throughout the Prophets - there is no other redeemer or savior but God Himself.³²

This begs the question: What is Redemption? Redemption is a fancy word for freedom. Liberation. More precisely, the liberation of a slave. This is the unconditional message of Passover - God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Rare is the Jew who can't sing "Avadim hayinu - ata b'nei horin" - "We were slaves - now we are free" from the Passover Seder liturgy. And to quote another classic song from the Haggadah - "Dayenu" - the ultimate purpose of the exodus from Egypt was to bring the Israelites to Mt. Sinai, give them the Torah, bring them into the Land of Israel and build them the Temple. And who, according to the Haggadah, performed this feat of redemption? "I and not an angel, I and not a seraph, I and not an emissary, I the Lord, I and no other."

From the time of the Exodus from Egypt and the acceptance of the Torah, the Israelites are free. Free to do right or wrong, even free to sin, to defy the word of God, and even this is provided for - through the Torah precepts of confession, repentance and retribution. And since the Exodus this freedom was never taken away by God. Only the rabbis could do that; according to the Messianic paradigm, the Jews are never truly free until "the Redemption" - the advent of Messiah. The simple truth is, Jews virtually everywhere are free - unless they choose to be subjugated by their own beliefs and leaders.

1d. The Scriptural Case - The Messianic Era

The term "the Messianic Era" is commonly used to describe the period after the Messiah comes. But where in Scripture does this term come from?

The Hebrew term for the Messianic Era - ימות המשיח (literally "the days of the Messiah") - appears nowhere in the Bible and only once in the Mishnah.³³

The other term used for the same concept is אחרית הימים - the End of Days. But that this is a reference to a future time when a Messiah King rules Israel is a rabbinic gloss which came long after the Biblical Era, as we will now see.

The term "End of Days" occurs four times in the Torah. The first instance is at the end of Genesis, when Jacob gathers his sons to tell them "what will happen to you in the end of days."³⁴ His message, albeit couched in obscure and poetic words, is a description of the

³¹ Isaiah 43:11

³² Jeremiah 14:8, 15:20, 30:10, 30:11, 31:10, 42:11, 50:33; Hosea 13:4, 13:14; Micah 4:10; Zephaniah 3:17; Zachariah 8:7, 8:13, 9:16, 10:6, 12:7

³³ Mishnah Brachot 1:5

³⁴ Genesis 49:1

traits of the twelve tribes and of the first Israelite commonwealth in Canaan populated by them, which begins a few centuries later. There is no reference to a Messiah nor any future era when there is no war, strife or the other troubles to which the Messianic Era is supposed to put an end.

In Numbers the prophet Balaam speaks of the End of Days, predicting ordinary occurrences that are to take place shortly afterward.³⁵ We'll go into this later.

In Deuteronomy Moses, speaking for God, uses the term End of Days twice to describe a future time when the Israelites will be exiled and scattered throughout the world, only to be returned by God Himself.³⁶ This, of course, did occur, and the ingathering took place after the Babylonian exile and is taking place once again in our day. Again, there is no Messiah involved, neither then nor now - on the contrary, the king will also be exiled:

"The Lord will send you and your king whom you place above you to a nation you know not, neither you nor your forefathers, and there you will serve other gods of wood and stone."³⁷

Naturally, the End of Days as an idyllic future era is more prevalent in the Prophets than the other books of the Bible because the Prophets were addressing the woes of their generation and the possible solutions. Perhaps the best-known instance is in Isaiah's vision:

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amotz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."³⁸

³⁵ Numbers 24:14

³⁶ Deuteronomy 4:30, 31:29

³⁷ Deuteronomy 28:36

³⁸ Isaiah 2:1-4

This is the only mention of the End of Days in Isaiah, and once again it is God Himself that brings about this idyllic state, with no mention of Messiah.

Jeremiah, who prophesied during the 70-year Babylonian Exile, uses the expression "the End of Days" four times, but always referring to a time in the not-too-distant future. In 23:20 and 30:24 he speaks of a time when, after God has done away with the false prophets of the time, "in the latter days you will look back and understand." 48:47 and 49:39 also speak of the not-too-distant future when, after being defeated and banished, the nations of Moab (in modern-day Jordan) and Elam (in modern-day Iran) will be allowed to return. There is no mention of Messiah.

Ezekiel mentions the End of Days twice, both in Chapter 38,³⁹ in his description of the so-called "War of Gog and Magog" in which the land of Israel is attacked en masse, after which God intervenes, wipes out Israel's enemies and gathers in the exiles:

"Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog: Thus says the Lord Adonai: Is it not true that on that day, when My people Israel dwells in security you will know, and you will come from your place, from the far north - you and many nations with you; horse-riders all, a great gathering and many soldiers. And you will mount over My people Israel like a cloud covers the land; in the End of Days this will be, and I will bring to you My land so that the nations will know Me through my sanctification of you before their eyes, Gog."⁴⁰

Ezekiel's vision is a tricky one. Writing from the Babylonian Exile, on one hand he foresees the resurrection of all Israel in his vision of the Dry Bones⁴¹ and predicts a time when David - not a descendant but the late King David himself - will be king of Israel forever after and the Israelites will no longer worship false gods;⁴² on the other hand he says that this will happen soon,⁴³ that God Himself will build the Temple, and that the Israelites will still sin.⁴⁴

The Prophet Hosea mentions a king in his vision of the End of Days - but not as a goal; on the contrary, although the Israelites seek a king it is God Himself they are to be given:

"For the children of Israel shall sit solitary many days without a king, and without a prince, and without sacrifice, and without

³⁹ Ezekiel 38:8, 38:16

⁴⁰ Ezekiel 38:14-15

⁴¹ Ezekiel 37:1-14

⁴² Ezekiel 37:21-28

⁴³ Ezekiel 36:8

⁴⁴ Ezekiel 42:13

pillar, and without ephod or teraphim; afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall come trembling unto the Lord and to His goodness in the end of days."⁴⁵

Hosea is the classic fire-and-brimstone prophet of doom; his vision has no happy ending at all. And not only doesn't he ever mention Messiah, he indicates how futile it is to seek one.

Finally, the Prophet Micah also mentions the End of Days once, repeating Isaiah's vision of a peaceful world almost verbatim and ending the passage with the famous words:

"And it will come to pass in the end of days... And they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken. For let all the peoples walk each one in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever."⁴⁶

A beautiful vision? Certainly. Messianic? Not according to Micah.

The only place in the Bible that speaks of a future king who will perform the miraculous deeds attributed to him by the Jewish sages and rabbis is Isaiah 11:

"And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a twig shall grow forth out of his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land; and he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den. They shall

⁴⁵ Hosea 3:4-5

⁴⁶ Micah 4:1, 4-5

not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse, that stands as a banner for the peoples, him shall the nations seek; and his resting-place shall be glorious."⁴⁷

Yet even here there is no claim that this figure will ingather the exiles; on the contrary, Isaiah continues, saying:

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, that shall remain from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth."⁴⁸

To sum up the Scriptural case, from the standpoint of the Hebrew Bible, the idea of another king over the Israelites is abhorrent to God, and the idea of a redeemer or savior other than God Himself is anomalous and unacceptable. Besides Isaiah 11 there is no promise or even mention in the Hebrew Bible of a future Messiah King or Savior who will bring about an era of world peace. The implication is that if we want peace on Earth, it's up to us and God.

2. The Logical Case

2a. Nature and Human Nature

Jewish Messianism has spread and flourished in recent decades. Chabad and Breslav, the neo-Hassidic and born-again Jew (Baal Tshuva) movements, as well as the Kabbalists or would-be Kabbalists, from the least religiously devout to the biggest Halachic sticklers, place Messiah at the core of their belief. It's no surprise that these are esoteric and often ecstatic movements with miracles and miracle-workers at their core. The same people who will drink the ritual bathwater of their Rebbe, expecting it to help them bear children, earn money or recover from illness, or who travel hundreds or thousands of miles to visit a man who promised to do these things from beyond the grave, are looking for supernatural solutions to natural problems. The laws of nature - of logic, chemistry,

⁴⁷ Isaiah 11:1-10

⁴⁸ Isaiah 11:11-12

economics or simple cause and effect do not apply here. This is the realm of superstition. This is where Superman is real. And Messiah is Superman.

A world where the dead can walk, where billions of people live together in peace, multiplying at a geometric rate since there is no disease, no strife, no war, no jealousy, no birth control, no death. No one has to work since delicacies are as plentiful as dust. The moon is as bright as the sun, the sun is seven times as bright as it is now, leopards lie with lambs, lions eat straw, babies play with poisonous snakes. Nobody sins, God's truth is known to all and no one has to do anything but bask in the knowledge of God.

Putting all the Jewish eschatologies together, this is the Messianic Era.

What is the source of this belief? Mainly, prophecies scattered throughout the Biblical Prophets, and specifically Isaiah 11.

This is a difficult point for any believer to address, since on one hand it is an article of faith that the words of the Prophets are the Lord's own truth, yet the things described here defy the laws of nature, as do many other things which are supposed to occur with the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic Era.

There are only two ways to reconcile this discrepancy. One is to accept the idea that in the Messianic Era the laws of nature and human nature will be suspended. However, the idea that the laws of nature will change in the Messianic Era is a refutation of a fundamental principal of Torah; when God created the universe "He saw that it was very good."⁴⁹ Furthermore, after the Flood, God states that the basic laws of nature will never change:

"As long as the Earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."⁵⁰

This has in fact proven to be true, global warming/climate change notwithstanding.

The other way is to assume that the words of Isaiah and the other Prophets are simile or hyperbole, which certainly isn't foreign to Scripture; when God says "I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me"⁵¹ He doesn't mean that eagles actually picked up a few million Israelites and flew them to Mt. Sinai. This is a simile and is clearly meant to be understood as such. God's promise to Abraham: "I will make your seed as plentiful as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore,"⁵² another impossibility, is obviously

⁴⁹ Genesis 1:31

⁵⁰ Genesis 8:22

⁵¹ Exodus 19:4

⁵² Genesis 22:17

hyperbole and meant to be understood as such, and there are many, many such examples throughout Scripture.

Surprisingly, although Rambam lists belief in the Messiah and resurrection among his Thirteen Principles of Faith, he regards the idea of a miracle-making Messiah as ridiculous and states that although there will be a Messiah King he will not contradict or change the laws of nature, and that simile or allegory is exactly what these prophecies are:

"Do not imagine that the Messiah King will perform wonders and miracles, and create new things, or resurrect the dead, or any of the other things that the fools say... "⁵³ "Do not imagine that in the days of the Messiah anything will change in the way the world works. Or that anything about Creation will be new. Rather, the world will function as it always has. And the fact that it is written that 'the wolf will dwell with the lamb' is an allegory and a riddle... And this is true of all the things that are written about Messiah - they are allegories."⁵⁴

This is a blatant contradiction of Rambam's own 13 principles. And resurrection - the reconstitution of a living human from dust - would require a miracle and a suspension of the laws of nature, as would lions eating straw (this would kill a lion and dead lions stink), the sun being seven times brighter⁵⁵ (this would fry the Earth to a crisp) and the moon being as bright as the sun⁵⁶ (meaning no sleep for humans - or won't humans need to sleep any more?). Likewise the opposite scenario in which Isaiah contradicts himself and says that neither the sun nor the moon will shine at all⁵⁷ - the Earth would freeze over and everything on it would die.

The same is true of human nature; according to prize-winning physicist Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's "Handbook of Jewish Thought (Vol. 2)," paraphrasing Rambam:

"In the Messianic Era, jealousy and competition will cease to exist, for all good things will be most plentiful and all sorts of delicacies will be as common as dust."

There is no evidence whatsoever that prosperity eliminates jealousy and competition. On the contrary, God Himself declares that evil is intrinsic to human nature: "For the nature

⁵³ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 11:6

⁵⁴ *ibid* 12:1-2

⁵⁵ Isaiah 30:26

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Isaiah 60:19-20

of man's heart is evil from childhood."⁵⁸ Furthermore, God states in the Torah that "the land (or 'the Earth') will never be free from poverty."⁵⁹

Indeed, the Messianic vision entails a total suspension of human nature, including free choice, as Rambam emphasizes:

"And when Messiah truly stands and succeeds and is risen up and exalted - everyone will immediately repent."⁶⁰

According to Rambam, not only will man not be able to sin but all Jews will be subject to the Oral Torah⁶¹ - an ambiguous concept if there ever was one, since much of the Oral Torah is a reaction to the very exile that Messiah is supposed to put an end to. Many laws were invented expressly to make up for the fact that the Temple was destroyed and the Jews are in exile (the entire prayer system with its hundreds of rules, to begin with), and many others were added in order to "place a fence around the Torah," i.e. to discourage transgression (such as the prohibitions against women singing or showing their hair in public), which should no longer be necessary since man would not be able to sin. But even among the rabbis there are thousands of disagreements and discrepancies and it is impossible for anyone to keep all of the laws.

2b. The Logical Case - Contradiction of Torah Precepts

Besides the defiance of external or objective logic mentioned above, there is the question of internal logic - the logic of Torah as handed down by God. Surely any belief in Messiah must chime with the Torah, not contradict it. Yet this is patently not so.

To begin with, the multiplicity of Halachic rules described above contradicts a basic and essential Torah precept - doability - as set forth in Deuteronomy:

"For this commandment which I command you this day is not too difficult for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who will cross the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us hear it, that we may do it?' Rather, the word is very nigh unto you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it."⁶²

⁵⁸ Genesis 8:21

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 15:11

⁶⁰ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 11:13

⁶¹ ibid 11:8

⁶² Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Another fundamental and self-evident precept of Torah and one of the so-called 613 Torah Commandments is:

"This whole thing which I command you, you will be sure to do; you will not add to it nor subtract from it."⁶³

Yet although belief in the Messiah and belief in the Resurrection are not included in these 613 Commandments, they are among Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith. Furthermore, Rambam states:

"Whosoever does not believe in him (Messiah) or does not await his coming - not only is he committing a heresy against the other prophets but against the Torah and Moses our Teacher, as it is written: 'And the Lord your God will bring you back and have mercy on you; He will gather you from among all the nations...'⁶⁴ ⁶⁵

If anyone is committing a heresy according to Rambam it is he himself; by making the belief in Messiah and the Resurrection mandatory according to the Torah he violates the Torah precept of not adding to the Commandments - of which he himself warns:

"Whosoever adds or subtracts, or who takes matters of the Commandments out of their simple meaning (context) - is certainly an evildoer and a heretic."⁶⁶

In fact this is a double heresy; in his zeal to ascribe Godly qualities to his Messiah figure, Rambam attributes God's own promise of ingathering the exiles to the Messiah,⁶⁷ misquoting Deuteronomy 30:3-5 which states unequivocally:

"Then the Lord your God will return you from captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples whither the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you be dispersed in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord your God gather you and from thence will He fetch you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed..."

⁶³ Deuteronomy 13:1

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 30:3

⁶⁵ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars, 11:2

⁶⁶ *ibid* 11:7

⁶⁷ *ibid* 11:2

More fundamentally, the human right and responsibility to choose good or evil is the whole point of the Torah. In the same chapter God lays out the options and their consequences, concluding:

"I call upon the Heavens and the Earth as witnesses today; I have placed life and death before you - the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life so that you may live, you and your descendants."⁶⁸

Indeed, the conception of good and evil and the ability to choose between them defines the human condition. Without it we would be dumb animals or zombies, our actions would be meaningless and so would the laws of moral cause and effect which lie at the very heart of the Torah. If this is what God ultimately had in mind - a human race with no choice but to follow His rules - why would He create man in the first place?

Once the Pandora's Box of logic is opened, the theory of Messiah and the Messianic Era becomes more and more questionable. Here are a few logical conundrums among many:

If death and disease are eradicated and thousands, or millions, or billions of people are resurrected (depending on the eschatology), and there is no birth control, where will everyone fit? How will water, food and shelter be provided to the billions upon billions of people who will eventually populate the Earth? Or is that yet another magic act that God (or the Messiah) will perform?

If people are raised from the dead, how old will they be? Will they start again as babies, and if so, with no parents, who will raise them? Or will they be as old as they were when they died, meaning the world will be repopulated with old people? And will they be able to reproduce if they were too old to do so when they died?

What about Heaven and Hell, or the Afterlife? If no one dies any more, does that mean there is no reward or punishment for those on Earth? Does everyone in Hell get pardoned and sent back to the perfect world? Is Heaven better or worse than Earth in the Messianic Era?

If God is, as He claims, the sole savior, why pray to Him to send a savior? Why not pray to Him to save us directly, if that is what we seek? Why does God, the all-powerful, need a middleman?

If, as the sages of the Talmud, the Kabbalah and Hassidism believe, souls are reincarnated again and again, which of the incarnations gets to be resurrected? Or do they all, and different people share the same soul?

⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 30:19

If, as the sages of the Talmud, the Kabbalah and Hassidism teach, the Messianic Era is inevitable, why did God go through the whole charade of giving man free choice, only to take it away? Is He some kind of sadist, playing with His creations until He gets tired of the game and takes away our independence? If so, what is the point of the Human Race?

Even if someone comes along who seems to fulfill the requirements of Messiah, what are the chances that all Jews will accept him? What if he doesn't wear a black hat? What if he isn't white? What if it can't be proven that he's a direct descendant of King David? And since the Christians and Muslims also believe in Messiah, what are the chances that they'll accept a Jew as their king and master? He would have to pull off some pretty miraculous tricks to gain universal acceptance.

In conclusion of the logical case, the literal fulfillment of the visions of the Messianic Era is a physical impossibility in the world as we know it, as the laws of nature and human nature would have to be miraculously suspended, contradicting fundamental principles not only of science and reality but of Torah as well. The only other possibility is that the words of the Prophets are hyperbolic or symbolic and not to be taken literally.

3. The Historical Case

If, as I have demonstrated here, the God of the Jews does not want His people to have any other king, savior or redeemer than Himself, then where, historically, did the concept of Messiah come from?

3a. The Historical Case - the Biblical Era - Pre-Commonwealth

According to Rambam and those who follow him, Messiah as Savior is an essential element of the Jewish faith. To quote the Chabad website on Messiah:

"The Scriptures are replete with messianic quotes. In Deuteronomy 30:1 Moses prophesies that, after the Jews have been scattered to the four corners of the earth, there will come a time when they will repent and return to Israel, where they will fulfill all the commandments of the Torah. The gentile prophet Balaam prophesies that this return will be led by Moshiach [Messiah] (see Numbers 24:17-20). Jacob refers to Moshiach by the name Shiloh (Genesis 49:10). The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel and Hosea all refer to the messianic era."

Let's examine these claims. In Deuteronomy Moses does indeed prophesy the ingathering of the exiles, but there is no mention of Messiah; on the contrary, it is God Himself who is to perform this feat:

"Then the Lord your God will bring back your exiles and He will have mercy upon you. He will once again gather you from all the nations where the Lord your God had dispersed you."⁶⁹

Balaam's prophecy mentioned here is that:

"A star has gone forth from Jacob, and a staff will arise from Israel which will crush the princes of Moab and uproot all the sons of Seth."⁷⁰

Moab, and in fact all of the peoples mentioned in Balaam's prophecy, were contemporaries of the Israelites in his time and in fact Israel did "crush the princes of Moab" a short time later (Numbers 31:7-8; the Moabites and the Midianites were united at this time). Once again, no mention of Messiah, nor any indication Balaam was referring to a messiah.

As for Genesis 49:10, the key word here is "Shiloh." Shiloh was the city in Canaan where the Tabernacle was erected when the Israelites entered Canaan. The verse comes from Jacob's obscure and mysterious blessing to his sons on his deathbed. The JPS 1917 translation of this verse is: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet as long as men come to Shiloh; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be." Chabad, on the other hand, translates: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the student of the law from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him will be a gathering of peoples." Rashi, following Onkelos, explains that "Shiloh" is "the Messiah king." Although grammatically this makes sense, it is completely out of context and nowhere else in the Bible is Messiah referred to as Shiloh.

3b. The Historical Case - the Biblical Era - the First Commonwealth

As we have seen, the concept of Messiah as redeemer-king is absolutely foreign to the Pentateuch. What about the rest of the Bible? Before we answer this question we must recall two things: One, while the Books of Kings I and II take place at the same time as the prophetic books, they recount objective realities, not subjective, personal experiences; and two, the non-historical books of the Bible, including the Prophets, were chosen from a larger number of works in the time of Rabbi Akiva - after the destruction of the Temple and at a time when Judaism as a religion rather than a national culture was being established. For example, both the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes were candidates for expurgation, the Song of Songs because of its content and Ecclesiastes because of the

⁶⁹ Deuteronomy 30:3

⁷⁰ Numbers 24:17

allegation that it wasn't written through "the divine spirit."⁷¹ Yet the Book of Job was not disputed. In other words, the rabbis had an agenda.

Not surprisingly, in the historical books of the Bible (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles) there is no mention or even conception of savior or redeemer and all kings are flesh-and-blood and all have their faults.

As for the prophetic books, Rambam's claim that "all of the Prophets said that the Messiah will redeem Israel and deliver them"⁷² is patently false, which only shows how weak his argument is. There isn't the remotest mention of a Messiah, redeemer or future king in Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi, Hosea, Amos, Haggai, Joel or Nahum, and Zephaniah totally contradicts the idea:

"The King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of thee... a mighty one who will deliver."⁷³

This is not to say that there are not references to a future king and/or redeemer in the Prophets. However, these references are so disparate, even contradictory, that they invite more disbelief than belief. Messiah is never referred to by the same name twice. Daniel calls him Michael.⁷⁴ There is the ambiguous name Shiloh mentioned above. Other theories name him Yinnon,⁷⁵ derived from a passage in Psalms but clearly referring to Solomon (who was in fact a Messiah King by the literal definition); Haninah ("favor"), derived from a passage in Jeremiah⁷⁶ which states, absurdly, "I will **not** grant you favor"; and Nehira ("light"), from Daniel 2:22 which clearly refers to God Himself, not a future messiah. In an oft-cited passage, Malachi decrees:

"Behold, I send you Elijah the Prophet before the day of the Lord, the great and awesome day."⁷⁷

However, he doesn't mention a Messiah anywhere.

In a passage from Isaiah which seems to have no connection with what precedes it or comes afterward, he proclaims:

"For a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele-Yoetz-El-Gibbor-Avi-Ad-Sar-Shalom ("Wondrous-Advisor-Mighty-God-Eternal-Father-Minister-of-Peace"). That the

⁷¹ Mishnah, Tractate Yadayim 3:5, see Ovadia of Bartenura's commentary

⁷² Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars 11:10

⁷³ Zephaniah 3:15-17

⁷⁴ Daniel 12:1

⁷⁵ Derived from Psalms 72:17

⁷⁶ Jeremiah 16:13

⁷⁷ Malachi 3:23

government may be increased, and of peace there be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to prepare it and uphold it through justice and righteousness now and forever; the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this."⁷⁸

In fact the only place in the Prophets in which a messiah is named specifically and unambiguously is in Isaiah 45:1 - referring to King Cyrus of Persia:

"Thus says the Lord to His anointed one, to Cyrus."

Perhaps the instance closest to the accepted vision of a future messiah king is found in Jeremiah:

"Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise to David a righteous scion, and he will reign as king and prosper, and will execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in safety and this is the name by which he will be called: Our righteous Lord'."⁷⁹

However, this refers not to a superhuman king or redeemer who will change the way of the world in some later age but to a contemporary king who will rise up at the end of the Babylonian Exile - a prophecy which did indeed come true after 70 years, as described in Jeremiah 29:10 - except for his name, which is no name at all; rather a statement of fact or declaration. And of course it was God Himself who gathered in the exiles. The same is true of Ezekiel's prophecies mentioned above.

3c. The Historical Case - the Post-Biblical Era

The first time Messiah is mentioned as a savior or redeemer in the Jewish canon - as opposed to the basic definition according to the Hebrew Bible as presented above - occurs in the 2nd century CE at the very earliest, in two places. One is the Zohar, a fundamental Kabbalist work, which is attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai who died in the year 160 CE, 130 or so years after the advent of Jesus as a Messiah-savior. (The Zohar is also the work that gave us Hell, Heaven and the spilling of seed as the worst transgression in Judaism,⁸⁰ none of which comes from the Torah or Bible).

The other place is in the Mishnah, which also coincides with the period after the destruction of the Second Temple and the exile of the Israelites by the Romans when Judaism morphed, by necessity, from a national culture into a religion. No doubt the

⁷⁸ Isaiah 9:5-6

⁷⁹ Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁸⁰ Zohar Genesis 188A

rabbis of the period felt a need to create some kind of construct to preserve the hope for the future, something to look forward to until conditions should arise when the Jews could return to the Land of Israel and rebuild the Temple. Yet here, too, the definition of Messiah as a future redeemer is the exception, not the rule. "Messiah" is mentioned 31 times in the Mishnah and 29 of them refer to the High Priest. The other two do indeed refer to a future occurrence involving a messiah. The first is in Tractate Brachot 1:5:

"The Exodus from Egypt is mentioned at night. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria said: I am like a man of seventy years old, yet I did not succeed in proving that the exodus from Egypt must be mentioned at night until Ben Zoma explained it: It is said, 'That you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life;' 'the days of your life' refers to the days, and the word 'all' indicates the inclusion of the nights. The sages, however, said: 'The days of your life' refers to the present-day world; and 'all' indicates the inclusion of the days of Messiah."

The second instance is in Tractate Sotah 9:15. This passage is particularly significant as it lays the foundation for the concept of *yeridat hadorot* - the "decline of the generations" - the belief that subsequent and contemporary Torah scholarship and spirituality is inferior in comparison to that of the past. It essentially describes how all spiritual goodness among the Jewish people ceased as the sages died one by one, then goes on to describe the woes that will befall the world before the Messiah comes:

"When R. Meir died the composers of parables were no more. When ben Azzai died there were no more industrious scholars. When ben Zoma died there were no more interpreters. When R. Joshua died goodness ceased to exist in the world. When Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel died the locusts came and troubles multiplied. When R. Elazar ben Azaria died wealth departed from the Sages. When R. Akiva died the glory of the Law came to an end. When Chaninah ben Dosa died men of great deeds ceased to exist. When R. Jose Katnutha died the pious ceased to exist. And why was he called Katnutha? Because he was the very least of the saintly. When Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai died the glory of wisdom ceased. When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died the glory of the Law ceased and purity and restraint died. When R. Ishmael ben Pabi died the splendor of the priesthood ceased. When Rabbi died humility and the fear of sin ceased. R. Phineas ben Yair says: When the Temple was destroyed the Fellows and freemen were put to shame and went about with lowered head, and men of great deeds were

enfeebled; but men of violence and men of glibness waxed strong; and there is none that expounds and there is none that seeks and there is none that enquires. On whom must we lean? On our Father in Heaven. R. Eliezer the Great says: Since the day when the Temple was destroyed the Sages began to act like schoolteachers, and schoolteachers like synagogue beadles, and synagogue beadles like the peasants [ignoramuses] and the peasants waxed feebler and feebler, and there is none that seeks. On whom should we lean? On our Father in Heaven. With the advent of the Messiah presumptuousness shall wax great and produce shall soar in costliness; the vine shall yield its fruit but the wine will be costly; and the heathen shall be converted to heresy and there shall be no rebuke. The house of meeting shall become one of profligacy. And Galilee shall be devastated and Galilee shall become desolate; and the people of the border shall wander from town to town and none will show them compassion. And the wisdom of the Scribes shall be decadent and those who fear sin shall be loathsome; and truth shall be absent. The young shall put the elders to shame, and elders shall rise up before little ones - the son dishonors the father, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. The face of the generation is like the face of a dog, and the son will not be shamed before his father. And on whom are we to lean? On our Father in Heaven. R. Phineas ben Yair says: Zeal leads to cleanliness, and cleanliness leads to purity, and purity leads to self-restraint, and self-restraint leads to sanctity, and sanctity leads to humility, and humility leads to the fear of sin, and the fear of sin leads to piety, and piety leads to divine intuition, and divine intuition leads to the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection of the dead shall come through Elijah of blessed memory. Amen."

This, then, is the reality that the sages of the Gemara (the latter part of the Talmud, compiled approx. 300 to 550 CE) inherited and then perpetuated. A world in which the Jew is intellectually, spiritually and morally inferior to his ancestors and will remain so until the Messiah comes, the Temple is rebuilt and the dead are resurrected. Note the repeated phrase: "And on whom are we to lean? On our Father in Heaven." Yet these selfsame rabbis and sages and their successors didn't mean this at all. Instead they instituted a concept that contradicts this explicitly - *emunat hachamim* - "belief in the sages," i.e. themselves. Jews are supposed to not only believe the sages but believe *in* them as if all their words are divinely inspired and tantamount to those of the Bible and the

Prophets; if not, they are considered heretics, doomed to immersion in boiling excrement in Hell,⁸¹ even though these sages are inferior to their predecessors by their own admission.

At this point the Gemara - a commentary on a commentary on Scripture (with thousands of digressions) - becomes an unquestionable truth which overrides the primary source, like the New Testament and the Quran. At this point Judaism becomes an "ism," an independent religion with a complex and binding set of rules and laws, most of which are not stated in the Torah. And at the heart of this religion is Messiah - the single goal to which all must aspire, the reward for good behavior as defined by the sages themselves. Thus it is no surprise that in the rabbinic world the study of Gemara and Halacha (religious law) are considered paramount while Scripture is sidelined or used to "prove" a point - regardless of context - if not completely ignored.⁸²

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, and with very little evidence in support, the rabbis of the Talmud insist that the coming of the Messiah is inevitable, and when discussing the when, how and why of it they cover every conceivable possibility. This is like betting on every number on a roulette wheel; you can't lose but you don't win either. Listen:

"In (the month of) Nisan they (the Israelites) were liberated and in Tishri they will be liberated in the future"⁸³

"In Nisan they were liberated and in Nisan they will be liberated in the future"⁸⁴

"The only difference between this world and the Messianic Era is that the Jews will no longer be subject to other rulers"⁸⁵

"The moon and the sun will no longer shine"⁸⁶

"The moon will shine like the sun and the sun will shine seven times brighter"⁸⁷

"In the generation in which the Messiah comes, Torah scholars will be few and the rest will yearn with torment and sighing; troubles will multiply and cruel decrees will be reinstated"⁸⁸

⁸¹ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin 57A

⁸² see Mishnah Avot 5:21

⁸³ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Rosh HaShanah 10B

⁸⁴ ibid

⁸⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 63A

⁸⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 91B

⁸⁷ ibid

⁸⁸ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 97A

"The Son of David (Messiah) will not come until informers are plentiful"⁸⁹

"The Son of David (Messiah) will not come until they (the Jews) lose all hope of redemption"⁹⁰

"If the Jews keep two Sabbaths according to the laws they will immediately be redeemed."⁹¹

"The world will last for 6,000 years and for one millennium it will be destroyed"⁹²

"For two millennia it will be destroyed"⁹³

"The world will exist for 6,000 years: 2,000 years of chaos... 2,000 years of Torah, from the era of the Patriarchs until around the end of the Mishnah; and 2,000 years of the Messianic Era"⁹⁴

"Due to our many sins the Messiah hasn't come after 4,000 years"⁹⁵

"The world will not exist for less than 85 jubilees (half-centuries), which is 4,250 years. And in the last jubilee the Son of David (Messiah) will come"⁹⁶

"The world will end 4,291 years after it was created"⁹⁷

"God will only recreate His world after 7,000 years"⁹⁸

"(God will only recreate His world) after 5,000 years"⁹⁹

"The final exile will last three and a half times as long as the Egyptian exile"¹⁰⁰

"The final exile will last three times as long as the Egyptian exile"¹⁰¹

"There is no knowing how long the exile will last"¹⁰²

"When the Jews repent - they will be saved"¹⁰³

⁸⁹ ibid

⁹⁰ ibid

⁹¹ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 118B

⁹² ibid

⁹³ ibid

⁹⁴ ibid

⁹⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 97B

⁹⁶ ibid

⁹⁷ ibid

⁹⁸ ibid

⁹⁹ ibid

¹⁰⁰ ibid

¹⁰¹ ibid

¹⁰² ibid

¹⁰³ ibid

"They (the Jews) will be saved even if they don't repent"¹⁰⁴

"If the Jews repent they will be saved, if not, they will not be saved"¹⁰⁵

"The Jews will repent against their will"¹⁰⁶

"(The Jews will be saved) not through repentance and good deeds but by God's will alone"¹⁰⁷

"(The Jews will be saved) with no conditions at all"¹⁰⁸

"Redemption will come either way, even if (the Jews) don't repent"¹⁰⁹

"There is a predetermined time for the end (of exile) even if (the Jews) don't repent"¹¹⁰

"When the Land of Israel produces fruit abundantly, that is a sign that the Messiah is coming"¹¹¹

"Do not delay the End by trying to calculate it"¹¹²

All of these disparate and contradictory theories are based on verses from the Bible, many or most taken out of context. Clearly, the sages of the Talmud were desperate to believe in a messiah-deliverer.

The final and perhaps most important point concerning Messiah and the Redemption from the historical perspective is that no Messiah-Redeemer was necessary or present for the building of the First Temple - in fact, King Solomon, who built it, was such a sinner in God's eyes that his kingdom was torn in two after his death; nor for the Second Temple, nor when the Maccabees wrested Jerusalem from the Greeks and rededicated the Temple.

To sum up the historical case, by the time of the Gemara, Rabbinic Judaism, having delegitimized all other forms of Judaism, including Samaritan, Christian and Karaite (and in our day, Ethiopian), is essentially the only practiced Judaism; the religion of a people in exile whose hope depends increasingly on the advent of a savior. And although the sages of the Gemara are divided on the specifics, by this time it is an established belief and tenet of Judaism that there will come a redeemer - a man, not God - who will ingather

¹⁰⁴ ibid

¹⁰⁵ ibid

¹⁰⁶ ibid

¹⁰⁷ ibid

¹⁰⁸ ibid

¹⁰⁹ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 98A

¹¹⁰ ibid

¹¹¹ ibid

¹¹² Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 97B

the exiles, resurrect the dead and save humanity from itself. This belief was then translated by Rambam into actual laws (Halacha) which he considered to be binding and incumbent on all Jews to uphold.

Conclusion

So is Messiah really a fundamental precept of Judaism? Well, yes and no. It is certainly not a fundamental precept of Torah. Judaism, on the other hand, is a religion based on the Torah which morphed over the centuries into a complex entity in itself. Just as the meaning of the word "messiah" morphed from "the anointed one" to "savior," the word "Judaism" morphed from "the religion of the Jews" to "the religion of belief in Judah." Who is this Judah? Clearly it is Judah son of Jacob, forefather of the ruling tribe of Israel, whose territorial inheritance in the land of Israel was chosen as the site of the Holy Temple and whose descendant David was God's favorite and the prototype for all kings of Israel. It was of Judah that Jacob prophesied: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet."¹¹³

Who you gonna call?

In all eschatologies the Messiah figure is God-like or godly if not, as the Christians have it, an actual divinity - the Son of God or an essential element of The Godhead. Yet the second of the Ten Commandments, and the first to set forth an imperative, is: "You shall have no other gods before Me... You will not bow down to them and you will not serve them."¹¹⁴ The watchword of the Jewish faith is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Faced with the choice between an invisible God and a God-like superman - the greatest leader and wisest, most influential man who ever lived on Earth, a man who can change the way humans think; the man who precipitated world peace and built the Third Temple; a man who, unlike Jesus, for instance, will have access to everyone in the world through the internet and the media - who do you think the Jews will choose? If, in every church and cathedral the Christians pray to the image of Jesus, the Christian Messiah, what guarantee is there that the Jews won't do the same?

So what is the answer? When I bring these ideas up to my contemporaries I almost inevitably get the same answer: We need something to hope for, and a false hope is better than no hope. But although this hope may have been useful for keeping the Jews as a people over the past two millennia, we no longer need it. Just as all children must grow out of the belief in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, the Jews must grow out of the belief in Messiah. The Jewish people now has everything it needs in order to bring about as

¹¹³ Genesis 49:10

¹¹⁴ Exodus 20:2-4; Deuteronomy 5:6-8

good a world as there can be. Its greatest wishes have been fulfilled - sovereignty in the land promised to the Patriarchs, freedom of religion, ingathering of the exiles. All that remains is to fulfill our destiny vis-à-vis ourselves, the world and God. And that is a hope that really can be fulfilled.

I rest my case.

Afterword: I complete this treatise a few days before Passover, the Festival of Freedom, 2020/5780, and at the height (or so we all hope) of the coronavirus epidemic. More than ever the world is crying out for salvation, and apocalyptic/Messianic prophecies run rampant. But at the same time millions of people everywhere are realizing how free they really are, certainly here in Israel, if only because some of their freedom has been taken from them in an attempt to curb the epidemic. In contrast, Rabbi Yaakov Litzman, Israel's Minister of Health (who himself is infected), is reassuring the people that all will be well, not because the government is taking the proper measures and the people are following suit, but because "the Messiah is coming soon." This is precisely how the so-called representatives of rabbinic Judaism keep the people in line - by making promises for the future as if they have some inside information or a hotline to God and dangling the Messiah like a carrot before their eyes. Well, here's a little prophecy of my own: No Messiah will come this Passover, but God will be just that little bit closer to those who believe in Him.

Aryeh Naftaly

5.4.20 / 11 Nisan 5780