

## THE MESSIAH: WHAT A STRANGE IDEA

In this essay I want to examine the messiah concept and in particular its role within Judaism. It is my contention that we have here an idea that is inconsistent with our foundations, as laid out in the Five Books of Moses. Because the messianic promise is not compatible with the earlier encouragement of responsibility, I am not surprised that it has been detrimental to Jewish society. The disappointments, or worse, will continue into the future, because we cannot simultaneously have God's daily trying to persuade us to improve our lives by making the right choices and then promising to fix the world eventually in spite of our negligence. It is pretty clear to me from the Five Books that our decisions are meant to have serious consequences. We face starkly different futures depending on our actions.

I realize that the views I am stating are highly controversial. Belief in the coming of the messiah has risen to be one of Judaism's main tenets. Still, I will argue that adopting such hopes was a mistake that has already cost us much physical and emotional suffering and will continue to hurt future generations, especially by distracting them from their real, long-term, Jewish mission, i.e. to demonstrate that following our laws is THE way to a bright world of peace and happiness for individuals and societies.

### The Messiah Concept Is Inconsistent With The Foundations Of Judaism As They Are Presented In The Five Books of Moses

Judaism is about making choices, as individuals and as a society. We have the laws and they are intended to improve our lives. We choose to either follow them or to ignore them. The former brings happiness and life. The latter results in suffering and death. G-d said, "Choose life" but both paths are available to us. Judaism is a rational religion based on individual and national ethics. There are no shortcuts. G-d didn't say at Mt. Sinai that He'd save us from ourselves; in fact He paints a bleak picture of what happens when we mess up.

It was promised to our forefathers that the Jews will be freed from slavery and given a land of their own. G-d said He will do this Himself and not through His agents. There was no promise that some person would set us free. Moses was very much human and imperfect; he did mostly as instructed. The miracles, the entire rescue, was G-d's. In some biblical events angels are given special tasks, but nowhere is there a hint of a super-human being who by his sheer presence will alter history. Are we supposed to believe that some new hybrid, greater than Moses but not quite angelic, will eventually show up? Furthermore, his special birth (i.e. from the house of David) will set things right when he simply arrives in our world? There is no mention of such creatures in the Five Books.

Should the messiah be considered someone who actually goes about fixing things with G-d's help, who in short order corrects all the problems that our inattention to the laws have brought upon us? This just doesn't seem reasonable to me. Super-man is a very non-Jewish idea. If there was going to be such a major event in Judaism's future, why is it not mentioned in the Five Books? It would be problematic for me if on the one hand G-d says we should choose wisely and on the other, He says he will send someone to clean up if we fail, with the result being that we get the ideal society we didn't earn.

The rabbis realized that there is a consistency problem as described above and therefore suggested that we must perfect the world ourselves in order for the messiah to come. In that case what will he do for us that we haven't already done for ourselves? Is he coming just to reign as king over an already wonderful society? The truth is

that if the Jews followed the laws in the Five Books they wouldn't need a messiah at all. So the concept still doesn't make much sense.

I believe that Isaiah wanted to comfort the Jews and felt that G-d would save us from enemies and ourselves. He would bring us home (to Israel) and install us in a wonderful life there. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned prophet created a serious problem for later generations. Yes, the idea of a messiah makes us feel better but at what cost? In reality, hoping to be saved is an unhealthy, non-constructive attitude for Jews and is definitely contrary to the rational, do-it-yourself, good-behavior-rewarded, sensibilities that the Five Books are trying to instill.

### Messiah Claimants Have Repeatedly Brought Misery

If one studies Jewish history, he will find almost thirty men who either claimed to be the messiah or were called that by followers. Every one of these episodes was a disaster for the Jewish community that mistakenly went along. Some of these false messiahs' leadership cost us very many lives. The harm done by others was felt for many generations after them. How can a concept fail so miserably? There must be something impossible about it.

Religious authorities can say that these were all false messiahs and the real messiah will be different. I say that the idea is so logically flawed that it can't ever be implemented. If G-d wants us to obey His commandments and to demonstrate to the rest of the world that these instructions are the way to perfect human lives, it doesn't seem reasonable that at some point in time, He'll say, "Ok, that's enough of your weakness. I will now send a man who will oversee My rescue of the whole planet."

What was the problem with the false messiahs? They promised an easy road, a shortcut around the commandments in the Five Books of Moses. Followers wanted paradise delivered to them in spite of their lackluster efforts. Of course no-one can deliver the idyllic state of affairs that weakly striving Jews fail to achieve

In Conclusion.

The messiah is either a dangerous illusion, as amply demonstrated by the past, or a serious distraction from our day-to-day business of repairing the world. The less we dwell on the messiah, the sooner we'll obtain, with the guidance of the laws in the Five Books of Moses, the lives that we want. Don't wait and hope to be saved. That is not G-d's plan for the Jews or the world. Rely on yourself, save yourself!

**[Share Article With a Friend](#)**