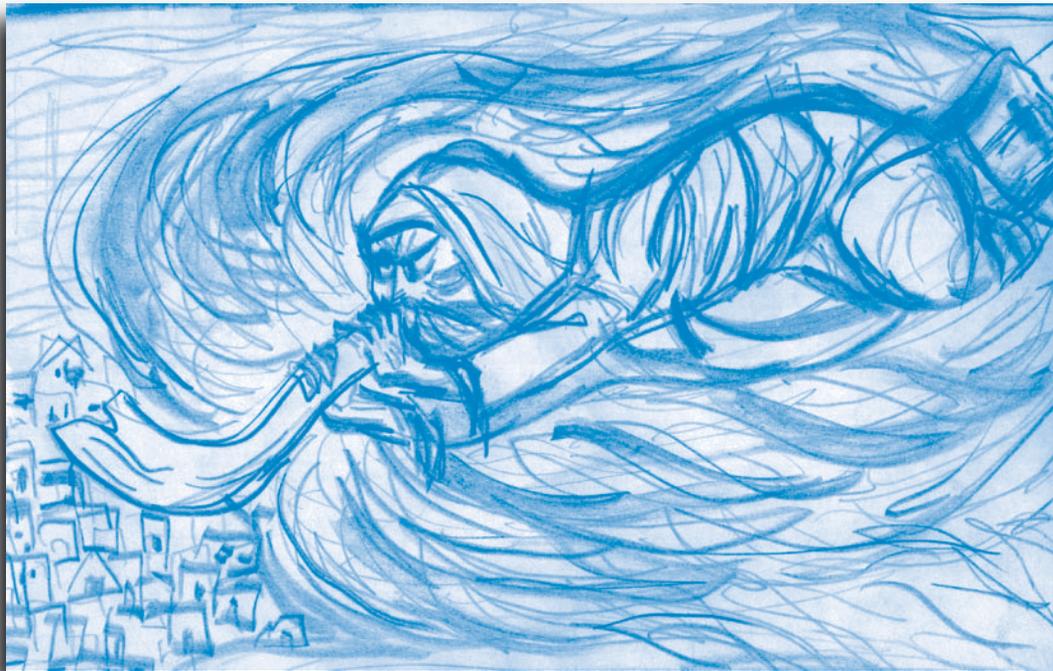


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# Shabbat Shalom

April 1997 / Nisan 5757



## *The Messiah*

### *Interviews:*

*Rabbi Harvey H. Spivak*

*Rabbi Morley T. Feinstein*

*Dr. Raoul Dederen*

*The purpose of this journal is “to promote a climate of respect, understanding and sharing between Jewish and Christian communities; not only for the exercise of love and appreciation of the other, but also for the discovery of truths and values which surpass the genius of both traditions.”*

*This is the hope dreamed in the name of our journal, SHABBAT SHALOM: hope of reconciliation, hope of SHALOM, inspired and nurtured through a common reflection anchored in the experience of the SHABBAT.*

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### Shabbat Shalom

A Journal of Jewish-Christian Reflection

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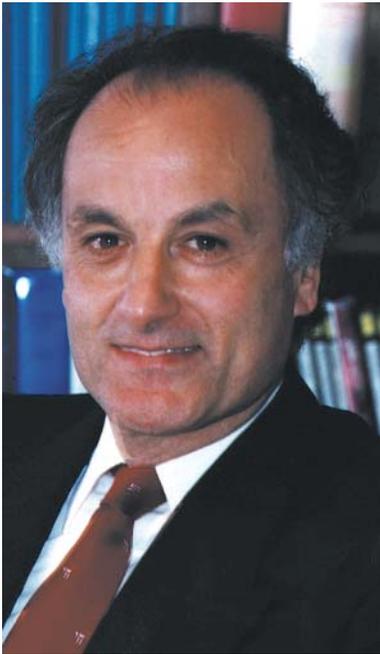
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Vol. 44, No. 1

## Editorial

# “Who is the Messiah?”



Jacques B. Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

**T**here is an anecdote about Martin Buber who was addressing an audience of Catholic priests:

He said something like this: “What is the difference between Jews and Christians? We all await the Messiah. You believe He has already come and gone, while we do not. I therefore propose that we await Him together. And when He appears, we can ask Him: were You here before?” Then he paused and added: “And I hope that at that moment I will be close

enough to whisper in his ear, ‘For the love of heaven, don’t answer.’”\*

“The Messiah will come.”

The song resonates throughout Israel and echoes Mamonides’ creed: “*yavo hamashiah*.” “He will come” claims the New Testament, and Christians follow its lead when they call for it by saying “*Maranatha*.” All declare the same hope; yet they are divided on the Messiah’s identity. For the Jews, it remains mystery. Is it King David? Is he a suffering leper like Joseph, or maybe a prophet like Elijah? Could he be Israel the nation, or more

simply an era? For Christians, it is a settled matter: he is Jesus of Nazareth who died on a cross in 31 C.E. and was risen from the dead three days later. So the question remains at the core of the unfolding Judeo-Christian drama: if the Messiah is one and only, then who is he?

Arguments rage on because we still have not understood that what matters is not whether we have recognized him but whether he will recognize us.

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\*Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 354-355.

## Interview

# Rabbi Harvey H. Spivak



*The difference between the Jewish and the Christian expectations of the Messiah.*

**S**habbat Shalom\*: In many religions, a very important topic is the expectation of the Messiah or Savior. How does Judaism differ in this aspect?

**Spivak:** It is important for Judaism, also. It has been important for many centuries and it continues to be an important topic. The longing for a Messiah and the longing for the period of time that this

figure represents goes back all the way to biblical times and has been important in the generations after that also. It is still important; it is part of our prayers. In every service there are prayers which contain an explicit wish for the Messiah to come, in which God is petitioned to bring the Messiah as He sees fit to do so.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Why do we need a Messiah? Couldn't God

have accomplished this by Himself without the need of a Messiah?

**Spivak:** God could have accomplished this without the need of a Messiah. In the Jewish point of view, it is not the Messiah who brings the era of peace at the end of time. It is God, the Creator, who does so. In the Jewish view, the Messiah is the messenger of God, something like a prophet, who has a message from God about this time and who will do the necessary actions. But the transformation of history to an era of peace will be God's action. So it is not the Messiah who brings the end of days, but it is God who does so.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Is there a

*Rabbi Harvey H. Spivak works as a full-time rabbi at the Congregation of Moses, Kalamazoo, Michigan. Graduated from The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and from Cornell University (with a science degree), Rabbi Spivak has also been the recipient of various awards and prizes such as the Dr. Michael Higger Prize in Talmud (1978) and the Lamport Homiletics Prize for best sermon by a senior in the Rabbinical School (1983).*

**difference between the Jewish Messiah, as described in Old Testament scriptures, the *Tanakh*, and the Messiah described in the New Testament scriptures?**

**Spivak:** There is a difference and it is an important difference. It is one of the most important differences between Judaism's and Christianity's concept of Messiah. For Jews, the Messiah is a human being and not a God, not a divinity. That would be completely contrary to traditional Jewish beliefs. The biblical prophets spoke about a Messiah and talked about the Messiah as a human being.

The word "Messiah" in Hebrew means "anointed." An anointing with oil is an ancient ceremony for coronation of a king, so, essentially, the title "Messiah" is "king," a national leader. That's how the prophets imagined the Messiah. They believed the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. They believed the Messiah would accomplish an independence for the Jews in the land of Israel, and sovereignty in that land. They believed that, at that time, Jews from all over the world would come to this liberated land and would worship God together, and people of all nations would worship God and live together peacefully. That's the image of the time of the Messiah.

So, it's not only a description of the Messiah, it's also a kind of acid test. So, for a Jew, if you say, "Has the Messiah come?" a Jew would say, "Well, has the description of the messianic time been fulfilled?" The answer, obviously, is "no," therefore, the Messiah has not come.

Both before the time that Jesus lived and after the time that Jesus

lived, Jews—this is of course postbiblical time—still held to this idea, basically. The idea of a Messiah as someone who might come any year, any day, was very much alive during the time that

*In the Jewish point of view, it is not the Messiah who brings the era of peace at the end of time. It is God, the Creator, who does so.*

Jesus lived. The Jews imagined the Messiah as someone who would be a national hero, even a military figure. It's no insult to the figure of Messiah to call him a military figure. Indeed, a century after Jesus lived, there was an important revolt of the Jews against the Roman authorities led by a man named Bar Kokhba. Bar Kokhba was not a rabbi. He was not a particularly religious or spiritual figure, although he was a friend to rabbis, notably Rabbi

*The person you would least expect to be the Messiah will turn out to be this great prophet and messenger from God.*

Akiva, who was one of the greatest rabbis at that time, one of the greatest rabbis in history.

Rabbi Akiva believed that Bar Kokhba was the Messiah. That

didn't mean that Rabbi Akiva thought that Bar Kokhba was a holy man in the sense that we would use that term, but Bar Kokhba was the one who would free the Jews from the Roman authority, liberate the land of Israel for Jewish sovereignty and initiate this time of peace, which is the time of the Messiah. Rabbi Akiva followed Bar Kokhba in the revolt against the Roman authority. The revolt was crushed. Bar Kokhba was killed and Rabbi Akiva said, in essence, "It looks like I made a mistake." Quite an admission for such a distinguished figure, but through the logic of his own beliefs, he had to say that. He had to say that Bar Kokhba is not the Messiah, because he didn't do what the Messiah is supposed to do, and this was obviously not that period of history. So we had to continue to wait.

There have been other messiahs, false messiahs in Jewish history, some of whom caused tremendous stir among Jews around the world, or at the very least locally and in some cases internationally. But in every case, of course, it became clear that this person was not the Messiah, and the Jews had to adjust to that fact. That phenomenon has continued as recently as this day. You may be familiar with the Lubavitcher Rabbi, the late Lubavitcher Rabbi in Brooklyn, whose followers believed he was the Messiah. He lived to be an old man and they were continually waiting for him to reveal himself in his full identity as the Messiah. He died, and they had to adjust. It was quite a radical adjustment. It was so difficult that some of them still have not made it and still believe that, even after death, the Lubavitcher Rabbi will find some

way to reveal his identity as the Messiah. It's a kind of—they would never say this—but it is a kind of belief in the second coming, although most of the followers of the Lubavitcher Rabbi, by now, have probably reconciled themselves to the fact that he was not the Messiah.

So, in any case, the Messiah is a very important figure in Jewish history, from ancient times right into contemporary times. But it is significantly different from the Christian concept in that the Messiah is not a divine figure and is not, in essence, different from other human beings.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Reading in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, it would seem that in the thirteenth century it was thought the Messiah, when he would come, would not bring an immediate difference, but would begin a process. Is that a currently held view, or if the Messiah were to come, would it bring an instantaneous change?

**Spivak:** There are actually differences of opinion among Jews, depending on what their personal theology is, and there has been for a long time. Nowadays, many Jews do not think of the Messiah as being an individual person, but think of the Messiah as being a time, a time of peace, for example. So that's apt to be gradual. You can't declare peace after one day. That's something that is still a matter of opinion to this day. Many Jews, particularly orthodox Jews, conceive of the Messiah as being an individual figure.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Who or what is the Messiah? Is he a man, a people?

**Spivak:** Traditionally, the concept of the Messiah is that he is a man. Nothing more than a man. Some people would rather think

of the Messiah as a time, an era, rather than an individual. There are differences of opinion about the matter.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What, if anything, would make the Messiah different from any other person? Could anybody be the Messiah?

*We don't know when the Messiah will come, but there is a very ancient tradition that people can do something to hasten the coming of the Messiah. It usually goes under the term of Tikkun Olam.*

**Spivak:** It's an interesting question. People have asked that for time out of mind. How are we going to recognize the Messiah when he comes? The most basic answer to that is that when all of the prophetic descriptions are fulfilled, then we know that the time has come, even if we can't identify the individual.

Many legends have grown up about the Messiah. One of the popular legends, an ancient one which has persisted, is that the Messiah will be somebody who is an outcast of society. The person you would least expect to be the Messiah will turn out to be this great prophet and messenger from God.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Is that based on Isaiah 53, the suffering servant?

**Spivak:** No. Jews read Isaiah 53 in a different way. The suffering servant is Israel, rather

than an individual, but it is an ancient legend.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Do the Jewish people still wait for the Messiah and specifically, what do they expect from the Messiah?

**Spivak:** They expect the messiah will be a genuine messenger from God, assuming that they believe in an individual Messiah rather than a messianic era, and that it would be a time of true peace, when Jews will be gathered from the four corners of the earth to the land of Israel. Jews will have sovereignty over the land, and everybody will harmoniously worship God together.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Martin Buber had said, "When the Messiah comes, Jews and Christians will recognize him, and he will be the same Messiah." What do you think of this statement?

**Spivak:** Where did you get this statement, do you know? It's interesting. It would be interesting to see it in its context, because I don't understand it.

**Shabbat Shalom:** I think in its context, it is saying is that, ultimately, the Messiah the Christians expect and the Messiah that the Jewish nation, the Jewish people, expect would turn out to be one and the same. If that is what he is saying, what is your reaction to this?

**Spivak:** As I said, I don't understand it. Buber was a very learned man, and if he made a statement that doesn't make sense to me, it means there is something about the statement that I don't understand, so I really can't answer that question.

**Shabbat Shalom:** When and how will the Messiah come and can the Jews individually or corporately do anything to hasten or delay the Messiah's coming?

**Spivak:** We don't know when the Messiah will come, but there

is a very ancient tradition that people can do something to hasten the coming of the Messiah. It usually goes under the term of *Tiqqun Olam*. *Tiqqun Olam* means repairing the world. In other words, when we make the world fit for the Messiah to come, then the Messiah will come. When we do our part, then God will respond by bringing the time of the Messiah. Many people feel, this is a bit theoretical and you can't prove it, but many modern commentators feel that the widespread Jewish participation in the reform movements around the world in the last couple of centuries, participation that proportionately is far in excess of their percentage of the population, is a kind of expression of this ancient Jewish belief that we need to do something.

Traditionally this is balanced by a belief that we shouldn't, we don't have to, and needn't do everything. That is, we don't have to make the world into the Garden of Eden; we can't. So we need to expect that God will do His share.

Among the secular reformists, revolutionaries, and so on in the past couple of centuries in various countries, that balance has not been there. The underlying feeling, although they may not have expressed it this way, is that we have to do everything; we will make the worker's paradise, or whatever, by ourselves.

More traditionally, within the religious framework, is a balance between those two beliefs, that God will do His part, but we also have to do ours.

***Shabbat Shalom:* Personally, what do you most look forward to when the Messiah comes and why?**

**Spivak:** I have never asked myself that question. Maybe be-

cause it is hard to imagine exactly what that period of time would be like. So I don't know, although I wouldn't mind trying to get used to it.

***Shabbat Shalom:* So you are saying that for most Jews, the concept of the Messiah is more one of time, at least that's the emphasis? The Messiah would be a person, but what is more important is the time of what would happen after the Messiah comes?**

**Spivak:** That's right, that's right. It's true that if the Messiah is flesh and blood, then he will die. But presumably, that era that was initiated would continue, so it's the period of time more than the individual.

There is an interesting dichotomy in Jewish belief, you could call it balance, you could call it a tension, depending on how you want to look at it. One is the eagerness for the Messiah to come. The other is a feeling that, well, we have to be patient, because it may be a very long time.

Even back in ancient times, there was an old legend from one of the classical books, *Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai*; he lived in the first century, was one of the prominent figures in Jewish history. He said, if you are planting a young tree and they come and tell you "the Messiah has come," first, finish planting the tree and then go to greet the Messiah.

That says a couple of things to

me. First of all, it says there may be a hint of skepticism in his voice. If they say the Messiah has come, you are not yet sure that it is true.

Secondly, even if it is true, the coming of the Messiah does not mean the end of the world. You are still going to need trees. We are still going to have to do our part. We are still going to have work to do and responsibilities to fulfill, so don't think it's the end of the world or the end of what you need to do. Go ahead and

finish your work and wash your hands.

***Shabbat Shalom:* So, how do you see his coming as affecting both the Jews and Christians; people in general?**

**Spivak:** In general, Jews

do not speculate about the details of that time. It's also a Jewish trait about the afterlife. We have a strong belief in a life after death, but we don't do much in the way of speculating about what that life would be like. We leave it in general form and leave the details for whenever that time may come.

***Shabbat Shalom:* What would you like Christians to understand most about the Jewish concept of the Messiah?**

**Spivak:** Probably very few Christians understand the basic difference between the Christian and Jewish ideas of the Messiah. I think it would be educational for Christians to understand that, that it's a basic difference in Jewish belief.

It might also be helpful for

*It's pretty clear both from the Christian Gospels and from other historical records that the Roman authorities probably reacted to Jesus in exactly that way, assuming that he was either a military or political figure, or both.*

*There are prayers in every Jewish service—there are prayers for the Messiah, and the prayers are strictly prayers to God. . . . They are strictly prayers to God that He may bring this period of peace as soon as possible.*

Christians to understand what the Jewish idea of the Messiah probably was at the time Jesus lived. It's not clear whether Jesus, himself, thought he was the Messiah or not. He may have. Assuming, and this is a pretty safe assumption, that Jesus' values were essentially standard rabbinic Jewish values, he may well have called himself the Messiah, but he would have done so without calling himself a divinity, or saying that "I am somebody you should worship," because if he did call himself the Messiah, or think of himself as the Messiah, he was thinking of himself as a national Savior, a national hero, which might—not might, but very likely—could be interpreted in either political or military terms.

It's pretty clear both from the Christian Gospels and from other historical records that the Roman authorities probably reacted to Jesus in exactly that way, assuming that he was either a military or political figure, or both. They would naturally be antagonistic to him, be-

cause the last thing they wanted was any kind of political unrest among any of the provinces of the empire. I think it would be good for Christians to understand that.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So you are saying the Messiah would be a man, an ordinary person, who, by his example, by his teaching, perhaps through his military and political leading, would usher in a new period. But I don't see any divine intervention in that concept. Considering God's constant intervention in the history of ancient Israel, why isn't there a presence of divine intervention in the Messiah?

**Spivak:** There is. The understanding is that God will bring this period when He sees fit and, consequently we, to this day, pray for that period of time. There are prayers in every Jewish service—there are prayers for the Messiah, and the prayers are strictly prayers to God. They are not prayers about a person or to create the right kind of person, or prayers that any person should do

whatever magic things need to be done to usher in that period. They are strictly prayers to God that He may bring this period of peace as soon as possible.

**Shabbat Shalom:** With this period of peace, will the work continue in the sense that it's not a new beginning of time, but rather a continuation of time, with the hearts of people being changed?

**Spivak:** Well, the hearts of people will apparently be changed if it's going to be an era of peace. Whether it's through education or not, I don't know, but something will happen. The world will be the same, and we still, presumably, will have to work for a living.

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\*Michael Wise conducted this interview while a graduate theology student at Andrews University.

“Better is one hour of bliss in the world to come [*Olam ha-ba*] than the whole of life in this world [*Olam ha-zeh*]” . . . “Better is one hour of repentance and good works in this world than the whole life of the world to come” (*M. Avot* 4:17).

# Rabbi Morley T. Feinstein



*A reform Rabbi explains a modern meaning of the Jewish faith in the Messiah.*

**S** *habbat Shalom*\*: One of the most important beliefs of almost every religion, at least of Judaism and Christianity, is that of a liberating leader, Messiah. Do you believe in the Messiah?

**Feinstein:** This is a critical question here, and for us as Reform Jews, we do not believe in a physical, human being, personal Messiah. There is for us the notion of a Messianic Age, which is a little bit different. The best example for this is that in the first prayer, which is used in the *Tefilah*, and refers to the God of our ancestors, the

Orthodox and Conservative prayer books use the word “*Goel*” for a redeemer. On the other hand, for the last one hundred and fifty years or more, the Hebrew reform prayers changed that, from

“*Goel*” a personal redeemer, to “*Geulah*,” a time of redemption.

***Shabbat Shalom*:** What is the Messiah? Could you define the term?

**Feinstein:** The word Mes-

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*Author of the Jewish Law Review and coauthor of the Jewish Values Game, Rabbi Feinstein has been published in Midstream, The Jewish Spectator, The American Rabbi, Keeping Posted, the Journal of Reform Judaism, Brotherhood, and Judaica. He is listed in Who's Who in American Jewry and Who's Who in Religion.*

*Rabbi Feinstein has lectured at many universities including the University of Notre Dame and Indiana University-South Bend, and served on the faculty of the Department of Theology at St. Mary's University in San Antonio*

siah comes from the Hebrew “*Mashiach*” which means anointed by God. We had kings who were anointed by God to be the kings, as in the case of Saul or David, and there were also special men set aside by God for certain tasks. We have the concept of what the Messiah was in the biblical age—the *Mashiach* was the one who was designated by God to fulfill a certain task. When the biblical age ended, there was also the notion that others may have actually been *Mashiach*, “appointed by God.” In the second century of the Common Era, the Rabbi Akiva Ben Yoseph considered Bar Kokhba, who was a great military leader and was planning a rebellion against the Romans in 135 of the Common Era, as a “messiah.” But we might call this “messiah” with a small “m” as opposed to “the” Messiah as it would be with a capital “M,” that is when one refers to the person who would come in the age of Messianism.

**Shabbat Shalom:** With this wide understanding of the concept of “Messiah,” could Jesus of Nazareth be considered as one of the Messiahs in Jewish history? Maybe a failed Messiah? Could you explain your answer?

**Feinstein:** I certainly will. I am not convinced that

Akiva was right when he proclaimed Bar Kokhba as a Messianic figure. I think that too often our people through history have put their faith in a particular individual leader and sadly that has not led to a better world. *Shabbethai Tzevi* was a false Messiah. People thought he was

*Now, I don't think it is for a Jew to say that the Christian Messiah either was or wasn't, will or won't be, considered a failure.*

going to change the world; and when he did not, it led to a great sadness and tragedy among our people. Akiva, I believe, made a mistake in believing that this one person was going to be the leader of the people that would bring in the Messianic Era. He was purely a political leader, a military leader. It would be a stretch of the concept to think that Bar Kokhba, or even the zealots at Masada, or a modern political leader in Israel, would be considered Messianic.

We have to understand that the Messiah was thought to be the person who would have arrived when the Messianic Age had arrived. So the proof of the Messiah was that the Messianic Age was here. How was that proven? By knowing that there would be a time when, according to the prophet Isaiah, “nation would not lift up sword against nation, nor would they train for war; swords would be beaten into plowshares and spears into prun-

ing hooks.” That’s the proof that the Jewish Messiah would have arrived.

Now, I don’t think it is for a Jew to say that the Christian Messiah either was or wasn’t, will or won’t be, considered a failure. I think it is inappropriate for a Jew to comment on a Christian belief, because in an interreligious dialogue we have to understand from where the other person comes, and if I am sitting with Christians who believe that Jesus is indeed the Christ, which is the translation of the word Messiah, then that is their truth and for them it is important. It may not be my truth, but I understand that what people believe is valid for them. It is not for me to comment on the validity of another person’s beliefs.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Why do we need a Messiah? Could not God do Himself what the Messiah is going to do?

**Feinstein:** In the modern world, it would be seen as impossible for one person to change the course of human events. For example, this century we have seen that Martin Luther King, Jr., may have begun the task of changing civil rights for blacks, but it did not end with him and everything is not perfect today. Gandhi may have done a great job in liberating India, but it is not a country where you can find peace and tranquility today. Mother Teresa may have done her part, but there is still poverty around. In such a world, in a small way, each

*We believe that God can inspire us to perform actions, but we do not pray only that people get better, we have to act on those beliefs.*

of us has to act in a Messianic way. Each of us has to work to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to house the homeless, and to shelter the poor and the needy. We have to be the ones to act in a way to bring about a Messianic Age. So that is critically important for me, as a Reform Jew. We have a goal which is called "*Tiqqun Olam*." This is the notion that we try to repair the world, to make the world that is, into the world we want to be, to build the Kingdom of God that we pray about, into the Kingdom of God that exists, and in that way we do work to better this world.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Which aspects does this reform include—spiritual, political, social, all of them?

**Feinstein:** In some ways, it begins at a spiritual level when we ask for a prayer for healing, for example. We ask God's blessing upon those who are ill. That's one level, the spiritual level. It can become a level that deals with health in society by making certain that we act on those beliefs by investing in the work of an AIDS min-

istry, or by ensuring that a homeless person can receive health care, or by ensuring that someone who is without food has food available. Our Temple acts on our values by making certain that we have tutors at the local elementary school, by working at the Center for the Homeless, and providing meat and all kind of products to local food pantries.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Does this Messianic Age, in which every one of us should take part, presuppose a supernatural intervention of God?

**Feinstein:** We believe that God can inspire us to perform actions, but we do not pray only that people get better, we have to act on those beliefs. A Hasidic teacher said, "We have to worry about our own souls, but at the same time we have to be concerned about other people's bodies." In other words, for us it is not only prayer, but actions that are merged together in creating a better world, a Messianic Age.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Is this better world of the Messianic Age only for Jews?

**Feinstein:** Absolutely not. We know that the problems that beset our society are problems that affect all of us. AIDS is not purely an illness for non-Jewish people; it affects Jews as well. Cancer affects Jews as well as those who are not Jews. Homelessness and illiteracy are plagues upon our society that in a Messianic Age will

be eliminated. And until that time, we have to work very diligently to make certain that we do what we can now to make our heaven on earth.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Talking about this "heaven on earth," is there any relationship between the Messianic Age and the actual Jerusalem?

**Feinstein:** I am one who believes much more in the world of the "here and now" than in the world that "might be" some day. And I

*To see that people today, as we sit here, are burning the churches of African-Americans in this country is not a sign that the Messianic Age is at hand.*

want to work diligently now. So for me, the actual Jerusalem is reflected in the following story. There is a poem by Yehudah Amichai, in which someone says, "Do you see over there, next to the vegetable vendor selling his fruits and vegetables? You see, the Messiah has just landed." "We will know that the Messianic Age is really here," says Amichai, "when someone says: 'Do you see right there, next to the Messiah? There is a father talking to his children who's selling fruits and vegetables.'" We have to be concerned

about the real world that is, not just the world of the future.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Popular comments say that the entering into the 7th millennium could have some connection with the Messianic Age. Do you think that the Messianic Age is going to happen soon?

**Feinstein:** I think that the time when all “swords are beaten into plowshares” is not at hand. There’s too much pain and suffering in this world today for us to say that a world of peace, of wholeness, of *Shalom*, is here. We recognize that there is famine in this world, there is intolerance in this world, there is mistrust and anti-Semitism; to see that people today, as we sit here, are burning the churches of African-Americans in this country is not a sign that the Messianic Age is at hand.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Are the Jews, or people in general, expected to do some kind of preparation for the Messianic Era?

**Feinstein:** It’s interesting that for us as Jews, the Messiah traditionally is heralded by the prophet Elijah, as the prophet Malachi teaches in chapter three [Malachi 3:19-24, Hebrew; Malachi 4:1-6, English], that the prophet Elijah will come “before the awesome day of God, in order to reconcile parents with

children, and children with parents.” We see family reconciliation as part of the way in which people prepare for a Messianic Age. Another story is told that the Messiah had arrived and how did people know that? Because the Messiah was sitting outside the gates of the city, binding the bandages of those who hurt and were in need of healing. We need to model our own behavior based on those teachings, to care for those who are in need.

**Shabbat Shalom:** As is very well known, the *Torah* has a very important role for Judaism. What role will the *Torah* have in the Messianic Era?

**Feinstein:** We think that in the world to come, in that Messianic time, the *Torah* will still play a role for us, in our relationship to God. For us, the *Torah* is the “marriage contract,” the document that connects Jewish people to God. It connects people who hold the *Torah* dear to them; people of other faiths may cherish the Jewish Scripture as well, so it still has a role to play in teaching us values, ethics, and morals, and so surely it will have a role in the Messianic Era as well.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Martin Buber said: “When the Messiah comes, the Jews and the Christians will recognize him and he will be the same Messiah.” What do you

think about that?

**Feinstein:** Well, if someone is ill in a hospital room, I may visit the hospital room because for me it is a “*mitzvah*.” To visit the person in need is a commandment that expresses my relationship to God. If a Christian visits the same person in the hospital room, it may be because he is imitating Jesus and his miracles of healing. It doesn’t matter to me what the reason is, what is important is visiting the person in the hospital room. So both Jews and Christians may understand the Messianic Age in a different way, but the proof that the Messianic Age has arrived is that it is a time for health, well-being, and peace for all. We know we share this goal toward which we are both working. Though the reasoning may be different, both Christians and Jews have the desire to change this world into a better world; not to sit back and watch the pain and suffering go by, but to act in the world as God’s agents for change. For that we can be grateful that we are both working for the same universal God.

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\*This interview was conducted by Gerardo Oudri, a graduate theology student at Andrews University.

# Dr. Raoul Dederen



*A Christian theologian ponders what it means for Christians to believe in Jesus the Messiah.*

**S**abbat Shalom\*: Dr. Dederen, we are very thankful that you are willing to give us your time for this reflection on a very important topic. Certainly, one of the most important questions in religion is the expectation of a Messiah. In what way is Christianity different from other religions in the expectation of the Messiah?

**Dederen:** There are similarities and dissimilarities. When you refer to other religions, I assume you have in mind worldwide religions.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Yes.

**Dederen:** One of the basic differences, even between Christianity and Judaism, is the understanding of the role and the person of the Messiah. In my opinion, the role of the Messiah in the Scriptures—whether Jewish or Christian—seems to proceed from a different understanding of the person of the Messiah. Indeed, one should remember that Jesus was

more interested in having people understand him in terms of who he was as a person, rather than in terms of what he taught. Rarely, if ever at all, did he ask his disciples, “What do people think about what I teach?” The question he raised, a question central to the Gospel according to Matthew was, “Who do people say that I am?” So the *person* of Jesus is central to Christianity—Christ as

God’s Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth does not sustain the same relation to Christianity that other founders of worldwide religions sustain to the faith which they initiated. Though exceptional for his teaching, he is significant primarily for his person.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Tell us more on the relationship, more on the knowledge of the person.

**Dederen:** In most other reli-

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*Before coming to the United States in 1964, Dr. Dederen served seven years in the pastoral ministry in Belgium and ten years on the theological faculty of the French Adventist Seminary in France. The author of numerous articles, he has also served some twenty years as a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.*

gions the emphasis is on what the founder has taught. For instance, if I understand Islam correctly, the true Muslim is one who faithfully follows and practices the teachings of Mohammed, among other things ritual prayers several times a day, almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. For the Christian Scriptures, however, the true Christian is one who, while faithfully following the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, does so because he or she has developed a close and personal relationship with him. The fundamental question for the Christian is, "How do I relate to the *person* of Jesus Christ?"

**Shabbat Shalom:** The who is more important than the what.

**Dederen:** Very much so. Now, that makes an immense difference in one's understanding of the role of the Messiah. He is not just one teacher among others; for the Scripture-centered Christian he is fully God.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So this brings us to the next question. Why do we need a Messiah? Why, from the Christian perspective, do we need a Messiah? Wouldn't God be able to fulfill His mission without the Messiah?

**Dederen:** Much depends, in my opinion, on what you understand by God's mission. The role of the Messiah is essential because of the sinful condition in which humanity finds itself. Jesus is not just a prophet. What his contemporaries lacked was not so much another prophet, sent to tell us about the will of God. There had been a long line of them from Abraham to John the Baptizer. What we needed was a personal self-disclosure of God, one who would reveal to us the person and charac-

*In my opinion, the role of the Messiah in the Scriptures—whether Jewish or Christian—seems to proceed from a different understanding of the person of the Messiah.*

ter of God, who He really is, who would reveal God's answer to the tragedy of sin, His solution to the alienation between us and God, i.e. the sacrificial Messiah, the substitutionary conqueror of sin and death, who would call us back to God. I can't sufficiently underline this. The secret of Christianity is not so much a connection to a set of teachings as it is a relationship to a person.

**Shabbat Shalom:** In that sense, this definition of the relationship of a Messiah is very close to the Jewish one. What is important here is not necessarily what you think, but how you relate to God. In Judaism, they go beyond; they are more specific, and they say what is important is what you are and what you do in relation to that . . .

**Dederen:** Yes. In genuine Christianity, likewise, what matters most is to understand who we are, how we relate to God and what we do on that basis.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Yes. How would you see the Messiah from a Christian point of view in the Hebrew Bible? Do you think it is possible to see the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible?:

**Dederen:** Oh, yes, definitely so. It may be that our insistence as Seventh-day Adventists on the need to encourage people to study the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Testament has contributed to our awareness of the Messianic dimension of the Hebrew Bible. I think it is not difficult to find the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. God was concerned about the ability of His people to

meet and recognize Him when the time would come. Hence He gave us the Hebrew Scriptures.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Do you see any difference in the way the Messiah is presented in the Hebrew Scriptures and the way he is presented in the New Testament or in Christian tradition?

**Dederen:** In the Hebrew Scriptures, if I understand them correctly, "Messiah," i.e. "the anointed one," was a term applied preeminently to the king. He was designated to office by an anointing ceremony. Like the priest, who was consecrated to his office in a similar manner, the king was regarded as God's representative. Among the Hebrew anointed kings, David came to have a special significance, which lasted long after his death. Amid the vicissitudes that followed his reign, various prophets exhorted their faithless countrymen to return to their God and to seek "David their king." In Isaiah's writings, for instance, a series of Messianic passages portray him as a military hero, the king of justice and peace who will reign in righteousness among his people. Later on, in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the idea of a kingly ruler gave place to another concept; the Messianic king gave place to a shepherd, reminiscent of the shepherd and the suffering servant that Isaiah too had announced.

Though centuries later, in the days prior to Jesus of Nazareth, David the king will clearly reappear, the disappointed expectations of postexilic Judaism, and a new conception of the promised Messiah through whose humiliation and sorrow God's sinning people would find salvation, proved to be a leaven working powerfully the Messianic ideal of the "Son of Man" in the consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth and that of his follow-

*One should remember that Jesus was more interested in having people understand him in terms of who he was as a person, rather than in terms of what he taught.*

ers.

**Shabbat Shalom:** This particular aspect, then, will be the suffering aspect. There is not another one you think which . . .

**Dederen:** I think the Messiah-King is also very much present in the New Testament.

**Shabbat Shalom:** The Messiah has come according to Christians 2,000 years ago. Are the Christian people still waiting for the Messiah?

**Dederen:** You mean the Messiah-King?

**Shabbat Shalom:** Messiah-King. In your view, what is the situation of Christianity with regards to this hope of the Messiah?

**Dederen:** Many Christians believe in a second coming of the Messiah, this time as Messiah-King. How many among them really cherish it as a hope that determines their lifestyle, I don't know. It reminds me of something that occurred a few years ago. My wife and I were spending three months in Israel, part of a community of scholars of various denominations concerned with

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Christian unity. I shared in various presentations, dialogues, meditations, vesper services, etc. At the end of our stay I was rather surprised to hear my colleagues tell us that we seemed to really believe in the second coming of Christ. When asked what they meant, they told us, "Well, we too hold that belief, but in your case, it seems to be a conviction, a motivation, that determines your way

of looking at things."

**Shabbat Shalom:** So what you are observing among Christians in general is that they still believe, in theory, in the coming of the Messiah which, of course, for Christians would be the second coming of Christ, but for them it's not relevant for their life?

**Dederen:** I may not be prepared to say that, yet it doesn't seem to have affected their lives very much. Let me add that Seventh-day Adventists run the same risk.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So, more and more Christians do not believe in the historical coming of the Messiah which they allegorize or . . .

**Dederen:** I had a conversation a couple of months ago with one of the most outstanding Christian theologians in North America. He told me that he had given up the hope in a literal coming of the Messiah-King. He argued that though Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of God, which indeed was a leitmotiv of his preaching according to the synoptic Gospels, we could not be sure that he ever called himself a king. Hence he said, "Why should I today expect from him something that he hasn't even led me to believe was one of his concerns?" Yet he assured me that he still put his faith in Christ's return.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What is the second coming of Christ for him?

**Dederen:** His own conversion. In his view the first coming of Jesus occurred some 1,900 years ago, when he was born in Bethlehem. "His second coming," he added, "took place when I accepted him as my Savior and Lord, and passed from death to life."

**Shabbat Shalom:** This is then just an existential experience . . .

**Dederen:** He is a sincere Christian, who strikes me as having undergone a genuine conversion.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So it is possible, then, to be a Christian and not believe in the historical, effective coming of the Messiah?

**Dederen:** Obviously it is. I have encountered Christians who no longer regard a literal, visible second coming of the Messiah as a

central point of their faith, but have "demythologized" it.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Let me now ask you more in the wake of that observation. Do you think, from your own perspective, it is possible to be a Christian and not believe in the coming of the Messiah? I mean, the word Christ, after all, is in the root of the Christian identity.

**Dederen:** Allow me to say that though it may sound arrogant, I have great difficulties in understanding how one can be a Bible-centered believer and declare untrue the historical return of the

*God, who from the  
first created me after  
His image, longs for a  
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with me.*

King-Messiah.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Why?

**Dederen:** Because it is one of the core teachings of the Scriptures, not to mention of Jesus of Nazareth himself.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So, this is a part of his teaching, this is not necessarily a part of his person?

**Dederen:** I'm coming to that. A Christian, to me, is by definition a disciple of Jesus Christ. His or her main concern should be what he has taught, so that through what he has taught he or she may find out who he is. When I say what he taught, I mean what he said and did. Assuming that one accepts the Christian Scriptures as dependable sources of information, I can hardly avoid the conclusion that the second coming of Jesus of Nazareth is of unusual importance.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Why is it so important?

**Dederen:** Because of both its content and its implications, this scriptural teaching leads me to a closer and deeper understanding of God. Here I learn that God, who from the first created me after His

image, longs for a personal relationship with me. King-Messiah will come back to put an end to sin and evil on this earth and to reestablish the original relationship. I was 19 years old, attending an electric school, when World War II came to an end. During those years, the devastation and death, the wickedness and viciousness of human beings, left me deeply disturbed. Why did God allow such things to happen? What was the meaning of life? Grasping the great-controversy theme in the Scriptures tore the veil down and gave new meaning to life. At least in my case.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What do you mean by great controversy?

**Dederen:** What I mean is that the struggle we witness today between good and evil is a struggle between two beings, two persons, God and Satan. The Messiah will return and, overcoming evil, will bring things back to what God had in mind from the beginning. This will be a joyful day.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So, it's interesting that your awareness of this importance of the Messiah caught you in the aftermath of the Holocaust of the Second World War.

**Dederen:** The Holocaust among other dreadful tragedies. Unquestionably.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So, in other words, your reemphasis on the mission of the Messiah comes as the result of a Holocaust reflection, am I correct?

**Dederen:** Certainly parallel to it.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So it's very important that the Messiah come, because one of his missions is to change things?

**Dederen:** Yes. And it had such an impact on me that I changed careers and became a student of

Scriptures and a minister of the gospel.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Well, then, if I ask you what Christians expect of the Messiah, you already gave the answer: they expect a change in the world; it means an external, historical reality, not just an existential conversion.

**Dederen:** Very much so. At the same time it is not just the end of what is evil. It is also meeting personally the Messiah. It is the return of a person with whom I'm invited to get into relationship by faith. It is not merely mountains shaking and

islands rolling in the sea, or rocks falling down the mountains—it's also the return of Messiah-King, the return of Jesus Christ.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Let me ask you a question in relation to the Jewish-Christian polemic discussion. Is it possible to recognize the Messiah—it's a very difficult question—is it possible to recognize the

Messiah as Jesus Christ without having heard about this Messiah being Jesus Christ?

**Dederen:** Do you mean without having heard or read about him? I suppose it would be most difficult. Which brings us back to the importance and role of the Scriptures.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Martin Buber made a little humorous midrash which I will not tell here, but one of the principles, one of the ideas of this in the story was that he said when the Messiah will come the Jew and the Christian will recognize him, and this will be the same Messiah. We are talking about the good Jew and the good Christian, of course.

**Dederen:** Yes, I think so. Especially if he is referring to Jews

and Christians familiar with the Scriptures.

**Shabbat Shalom:** That's right. Yes. I think we have understood as we are listening to you that, indeed, the Messiah is a very central and crucial topic in Christian thinking, Christian life.

**Dederen:** He certainly is.

**Shabbat Shalom:** And so we are coming to the end of our interview, and I would like to ask you if there is something important you have not said that you want to say about it.

**Dederen:** I don't know. Maybe I would go back to what I have referred to several times in our conversation. Christianity is not simply a compilation of laws and ordinances to be followed. It transcends that. Those laws and precepts have been given not as an end in themselves, but as a means to reach a relationship with Jesus.

**Shabbat Shalom:** So you mean doctrines and the beliefs.

**Dederen:** Yes. Because Christianity is Christ, the Messiah. Christianity is the Messiah.

**Shabbat Shalom:** And as implied earlier, there is a close bond between God and the Messiah. So Christianity is a theology, then, in that sense, a Messianic theology.

**Dederen:** I think so. Christian, and I assume Jewish, theology without a study of the person of God, and of the person of the Messiah, would be rather empty and without much meaning for human life. It would be merely an academic, intellectual transaction, not too different from a philosophical exercise.

**Shabbat Shalom:** It was very enlightening. Certainly many of our readers will think over this interview and beyond this interview. Thank you, Dr. Dederen, for your willingness to spend some time with us.

**Dederen:** Thank you.

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\*Dr. Jacques Doukhan conducted this interview.

*Christian, and I assume Jewish, theology without a study of the person of God, and of the person of the Messiah, would be rather empty and without much meaning for human life.*

## Jesus, A Jewish Messiah?

Jacques B. Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

*Can we be Jewish and believe in Jesus? Can we be Christians and reject the Jewish roots of Jesus?*

Since the schism which split Judaism, producing the church and the synagogue, Jesus has become the Messiah venerated by Christians and abhorred by Jews. Christians accuse the Jews of having rejected him while the Jews accuse Christians of having forged him; the very name of Jesus would become synonymous with blasphemy and betrayal. Jesus could not be the Messiah simply because he was the Messiah of the Christians.

But are these accusations and assumptions really justified? Are the Christians correct when they accuse the Jews to have rejected and even killed

Jesus? Are the Jews right when they assume that Jesus is the Messiah only for the Chris-

*The great majority of Jews (and in certain places their totality) had recognized Jesus as their Messiah.*

tians? Today, we do not dare to address such divisive and confrontational issues. To be sure, these questions were too much abused and distorted in phony Jewish-Christian dialogues. Yet this should not

prevent us from the consultation of the evidences, for they may lead to interesting and quite surprising conclusions.

### A Recognized Messiah

If we believe the story told by the Gospels and the New Testament book of Acts, when Jesus came into Galilee and Judea, he was listened to, acclaimed and followed by Jewish crowds. "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all" (Luke 4:14, 15).<sup>1</sup> "Then He arose from

there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And the people gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again” (Mark 10:1). “For all the people were very attentive to hear Him” (Luke 19:48). Jesus’ popularity lasted until the very end. Just before the fateful Passover which would see Jesus being taken away, Luke reports as a final note, as if forever marking the memory of his passage in Israel: “Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him” (Luke 21:38). Jesus’ popularity was such that his judgment was done expeditiously and at night (Matthew 26:31; 27:1).

After Jesus’ death the book of Acts talks about the presence of numerous disciples. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 disciples could be counted in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41), then later the number would swell to 5,000 men plus women and children (Acts 4:4). Shortly thereafter, the book notes that: “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). The term “multitudes” is then used to designate those that came “from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem” (Acts 5:16). Later, the book of Acts notes again

that “the number of the disciples multiplied” (Acts 6:7).

Based upon the figures given in the book of Acts and other historical information, scholars

*Jules Isaac concludes: “The Gospels give us good reason to doubt that this [the rejection of Jesus by the Jews] ever happened.”*

estimate that at the time of Stephen’s death the number of Jewish converts to the Christian faith was around 25,000.<sup>2</sup> Even after Stephen’s stoning and the ensuing persecution,

the number never ceased to increase. The story of Acts is regularly punctuated by the same recurrent observation, noting the always increasing success of the gospel among Jews (Acts 8:5-12; 9:31, 35, 43; 11:20-21; 14:1; 16:5; 19:9, 20, etc.). At the end of Acts, the brethren of Jerusalem are glad to count in Palestine “many myriads of Jews . . . who have believed” (21:20). We know that the Greek word “myriad” used here actually means 10,000. Therefore, we can very easily estimate that the number of Christian Jews had exceeded at least three times 10,000. This represents more than half the number of inhabitants of Jerusalem at that time. This signifies that the great majority of Jews (and in certain places their totality) had recognized Jesus as their Messiah.

Therefore, we can say both that the Christians contending that the Jews failed to recognize Jesus and that the Jews who

think they had all the reasons to reject him are wrong. The historian Jules Isaac would have a good reason to note his embarrassment: “With rare exceptions, wherever Jesus went the Jewish people took him to their hearts, as the Gospels testify. Did they, at a given moment, suddenly turn against him? This is a notion which has yet to be proved.”<sup>3</sup> Later in his demonstration, Jules Isaac concludes: “The Gospels give us good reason to doubt that this [the rejection of Jesus by the Jews] ever happened.”<sup>4</sup>

### A Predicted Messiah

Actually, this Jewish welcome should not be surprising. Since the beginning, the Gospels present Jesus’ coming as the ultimate fulfillment of the lasting hope of Israel.

First, *the time* was ripe. In Jesus’ time, there was a strong expectation for a Messiah. This is known not only through the testimony of the Gospels and the historians of the time but also through the Dead Sea Scrolls, which show that the Jews oppressed under the Roman yoke were expecting the Messiah to come soon.

By consulting the Scriptures, particularly the prophecy of the 70 weeks found in Daniel 9, they could easily conclude that the time had come.<sup>5</sup> This passage in Daniel is the only one which speaks directly and absolutely about the Messiah and also indicates chronologically when he should come. “From the time when the word was announced that Jerusalem will be built again to the Messiah, the Prince, there are seven weeks and 62 weeks” (Daniel 9:25, literal translation). Two landmarks are given here which allow us to situate this

*Christians were very much within a Jewish framework when they identified Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, their Messiah as: “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*

event in history:

1. The word that announces the reconstruction of Jerusalem. This refers to Artaxerxes' decree in 457 B.C.E. This was the third and last of such decrees (following those of Cyrus and Darius, see Ezra 6:14). This decree was the decisive one and the only one to be followed by a blessing (Ezra 7:27-28).

2. The subsequent time period of 69 weeks (7 plus 62) which, in the prophetic context

*The fact that Jesus is the only Jewish Messiah that we still talk about, the only one to have exceeded the frontiers of space and time, constitutes an interesting fact which merits consideration.*

of Daniel and according to the most authoritative and ancient Jewish interpretations like those of Saadia Gaon, Rashi, and even Ibn Ezra,<sup>6</sup> must be understood as weeks of years. This period of time comes out to be 69 times 7 equals 483 years long.

This means that the coming of the Messiah was predicted to occur 483 years after 457 B.C.E. which brings us to the 27th year of our era. It is superfluous to remind ourselves that this date coincides with the appearance on history's stage of Jesus of Nazareth as he began his messianic ministry to the people of Israel (Luke 3:21-23). This is also the year when

Jesus introduces himself as the anointed Messiah, the one that fulfills the prophecy:

As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. . . . And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled" (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus here identifies himself as the Messiah awaited by all. His numerous miracles, his exemplary and extraordinary life, his exaltation of the *Torah*, and his teaching being so deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, confirm it. This is the response that he gave to John's disciples when they came to him in order to inquire whether he was indeed the Messiah announced by the prophets: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them'" (Matthew 11:4, 5).

Even Jesus' *death* carried a special meaning; it was understood in relation to the sacrifices offered on the altar of the Temple. Indeed, this interpretation was already indicated in the promise of the first pages of Genesis. In the very heart of the curse that follows the fall of Adam and Eve, God sows a word of hope. Someone born from the seed of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent, the archetype of evil, while being at the same time hit at the heel (Genesis 3:15).

The principle of salvation through sacrifice is here suggested. It is not an accident that right after the curse, God makes this symbol concrete through the clothes of skin (Genesis 3:21). In a dramatic gesture, God comes down and Himself cuts garments for Adam and Eve. For that purpose, God does not choose linen or cotton or another vegetative material. He chooses the animal. A specification that implies the death of the animal, the first death, the first sacrifice designed to relieve Adam and Eve from their feelings of shame, to help them survive before God, before themselves. The function of the sacrifice was then to point to the future event of messianic salvation.

It would be an error to try to interpret Israel's sacrifices from a magical perspective. They were not a simple ritual gesture meant to appease an angry God. We are also in the wrong if we attempt to interpret them from a psychoanalytical perspective, as a transference device allowing repressed violence to be expressed. In biblical thinking, the salvation process does not move upwards from the human

sphere to the divine, but on the contrary downwards from God to mankind. In that perspective, the institution of the sacrifices should be understood along the lines of Yehezkel Kauffman's demonstration, as a symbol of the divine movement towards humans, as humans of the *hesed* (grace) of God.<sup>7</sup> Hebrew thought is events-centered. In the Bible, the sacrifices are part of the covenant ceremony through which God binds Himself for the future and promises hope (Genesis 8:20-22; Genesis 15; Exodus 12:22, 23). The sacrifice therefore is not magical nor psychological in nature but is a sign announcing an event to come. Hope in Hebrew is essentially of a historical nature.

It is therefore not surprising that Isaiah 53 uses a reference to the Levite sacrifice in order to describe the coming of the Messiah, savior of Israel and humanity: "Surely He has borne our griefs . . . But He was wounded for our transgressions, . . . as a lamb to the slaughter, . . . His soul an offering for sin, . . . for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:4-7, 10, 11).

A passage in the Midrash alludes to a tradition according to which, because of Isaiah 53:4, the Messiah was to call himself a leper: "The masters [Rabbana] have said that the leper of the school of the Rabbi . . . is his name, for it has been said: 'He has borne our diseases and he has borne our suf-

ferings, and we have considered him as a leper, smitten by God and humbled."<sup>8</sup> A characteristic invocation in the Midrash refers to this same text: "Messiah of our justice [*Mashiach Tsidkenu*], though we are Thy forebears, Thou art greater

*By rejecting the law and oppressing the Jewish nation in the name of Jesus, we can say that probably Christianity has sacrificed a great deal of its own identity.*

than we because Thou didst bear the burden of our children's sins, and our great oppressions have fallen upon Thee. . . . Among the peoples of the world Thou didst bring only derision and mockery to Israel. . . . Thy skin did shrink, and Thy body did become dry as wood; Thine eyes were hollowed by fasting, and Thy strength became like fragmented pottery—all that came to pass because of the sins of our children."<sup>9</sup>

We can also recognize a similar correlation in the wording of the prophecy of the 70 weeks which links the coming of the Messiah and the atonement of sin (Daniel 9:24). This process was directly tied into the ritual of the sacrifices (Leviticus 4-7; 17:11). This affinity has also caught the eye of the rabbis of the Talmud: "R. Eleazar in the name of R. Josei: 'it is a halakha [a principle] regarding the Messiah'; Abbai answered him: 'we then do not need to teach all the sacrifices because it is a halakha which concerns the messianic era.'"<sup>10</sup>

Therefore Christians were very much within a Jewish framework when they identified Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, their Messiah as: "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of

the world!" (John 1:29; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7; Apocalypse 5:6, 9; Hebrews 9:28; etc.).

He had come at the fullness of time and in the appropriate manner as was announced by the prophecy and symbolized by the sacrifices at the Temple. It is noteworthy that this is the only Messiah of history who so consistently has been related to the prophetic statements of the Hebrew Bible concerning the Messiah. Jewish scholar Schonfield boldly recognizes: "It is needful to emphasize that neither before nor since Jesus has there been anyone whose experiences from first to last have been so pin-pointed as tallying with what were held to be prophetic intimations concerning the Messiah."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Jesus of Nazareth was recognized by many Jews, maybe even the majority of his contemporary Jews, as the Messiah that they had been awaiting. Certainly this historical fact does not prove in an absolute manner his messianic identity, but it does show that the events which had just occurred had won the Jewish people over.

### A Messiah Who Has Survived

There were a great number of Messiahs in Israel's history. From Bar-Kokhba to Shabbathai Tzevi, and nowadays to Rabbi Schneerson, a multitude of Messiahs drew crowds to themselves. Yet history does not retain them as Messiahs anymore. Each movement was a short-lived flame which did not extend its light beyond the space and time of those Messiahs. The fact that Jesus is the only Jewish Messiah that we still talk about, the only one to have exceeded the frontiers of space and time, constitutes an inter-

esting fact which merits consideration. We can recall here the point made by the Pharisee Raban Gamaliel, disciple of the great Hillel, who made reference to the Messiahs of his time in order to set a quality standard: "If this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:38, 39). Gamaliel called upon an old rabbinical principle, traces of which can also be found in a proverb pronounced by Johanan, a sandal maker of the twelfth century: "Any community that is inspired from heaven will establish itself but what is not inspired from heaven will not."<sup>12</sup>

To the question we asked at the beginning, whether a Jew could believe in Jesus as the Messiah, we can therefore without any doubt answer with a yes. This can be done at least for three reasons:

1. Jesus was recognized as the Messiah by the majority of Jews of his time.

2. Jesus' identity as the Messiah is based upon holy Scriptures and fits Jewish tradition perfectly.

3. Jesus is the only Jewish Messiah to have survived and outgrown his respective space and time.

The belief in Jesus as the Messiah is therefore not incompatible with the Jewish identity. The reason for its rejection during the better part of the past 2,000 years is therefore to be sought outside Judaism and more precisely in regards to Christianity. According to Jules Isaac, it is the rejection of the law by Christians which prompted the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. "The Jewish rejection of Christ was triggered by the Christian rejection

of the Law. . . . The rejection of the Law was enough: to ask of the Jewish people that they accept this rejection . . . was like asking them to tear out their heart. History records no example of such a collective suicide."<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Albert Memmi suggests that the Jewish resistance to the Christian message is a natural reaction to the Christian anti-Semitism:

I was telling to my school comrades the story of a Jesus that betrayed his people and his religion . . . But also I had just received, because of him, a serious beating in a small church situated in a mountain town. For 2,000 years Jesus has represented for Jews the continual pretext of a continual beating they received, a drubbing in which they often found death.<sup>14</sup> . . . When you are oppressed you cannot completely accept the customs and values of your oppressor, unless you abandon all pride and trample upon your own heart. And this rejection may occur despite the fact that those customs and values may be beautiful in themselves and even superior to one's own.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, Christianity, whose goal was to witness for the Messiah to the world and primarily to the Jews, has become, through Christians' abandoning of the law and their rejection of Jews, the main obstacle to their acceptance. Furthermore, by rejecting the law and oppressing the Jewish nation in the name of Jesus, we can say that probably

Christianity has sacrificed a great deal of its own identity.

If we can be Jewish and accept Jesus, how could we be Christians and reject the roots which have nourished Jesus? Paradoxically, with regards to Jesus, it is not so much the Jewish identity which should be questioned as the Christian one.

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<sup>1</sup>All biblical quotations are from the New King James version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>Richard L. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 311.

<sup>3</sup>Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>This Jewish consciousness of the plentitude of time is most powerfully exhibited by the Essenes. See William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), pp. 89-93.

<sup>6</sup>See *Miqraoth Gdoloah*, ad loc.

<sup>7</sup>*Toledot haemunah hayisraelit*, vol. 3, book 1, p. 80 (cf. pp. 443, 444).

<sup>8</sup>*Sanhedrin* 98b.

<sup>9</sup>*Pesiqta Rabbati*, *Pisqa* 37.

<sup>10</sup>*Zebahim* 44b, *Sanhedrin* 51b.

<sup>11</sup>H. J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot. A New Interpretation of the Life and Death of Jesus* (New York: Bernard Geis, 1966), p. 36; quoted in Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), p. 248, n. 93.

<sup>12</sup>*Pirge Aboth* IV:14.

<sup>13</sup>Jules Isaac, *Genèse de l'Antisémitisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1956), p. 147; as translated in Jacques Doukhan, *Drinking at the Sources: An appeal to the Jew and the Christian to Note Their Common Beginnings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Memmi, *La libération du juif* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1972), p. 215.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

## The Messiah in Late Judaism



Robert M. Johnston, Ph.D.  
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*How it came to pass that in the first century C.E. everyone was expecting the Messiah.*

**I**n Matthew 22:42, Yeshua poses a question to the Pharisaic scholars: “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?”<sup>1</sup> The scholars answer right off, “The son of David,” but the question had been presented in such a way as to suggest that there yet could be some debate about it. When this discussion took place, a Jewish tradition that had been long in forming was just coming to maturity.

“Messiah” is the Anglicized form of Hebrew *mashiach*, which is rendered in the Greek

Testament as either *Messias* (a transliteration) or *Christos* (a translation). It means “anointed,” but especially a certain person who is anointed. In ancient Israel a person was made king not by coronation, but by anointing—pouring oil on his head.<sup>2</sup> Priests were also anointed, but the expression is used far more frequently of kings.<sup>3</sup> This expression was really only one of several that were used to refer to the great hope of Israel.

The time of David was regarded as the Golden Age of Israel, a time long past but

longed for. The Jewish people believed that the Lord is in control of history and that He will restore the fortunes of Israel in a glorious new Golden Age, the Kingdom of God. What made this hope vivid and poignant was that it contrasted so dramatically with their actual situation. They had been given over into the hands of sinners or alternately of their enemies. They were humiliated; they were suffering. Already in Psalm 72 there is a prayer that there may be a king’s son who will “judge your people with righteousness, and your poor

with justice” and “crush the oppressor,” a king who will have dominion over the heathen. For to tell the truth, even most of Israel’s own kings came far short of the ideal. But even worse, they were often under the heel of heathen conquerors.

The prophets foretold that there would be a dramatic reversal of Israel’s fortunes, a great time when Israel would be gathered and restored in a kingdom of peace, justice, brotherhood, and righteousness.<sup>4</sup> This new Golden Age would be associated with a righteous king who was variously referred to as the son of David, the Branch (or Shoot), and the Messiah.<sup>5</sup> As time went on, this figure was

*“Messiah” is the Anglicized form of Hebrew mashiach, which is rendered in the Greek Testament as either Messias (a transliteration) or Christos (a translation).*

viewed by the seers in ever more glorious light. Embodying in his own person the nation of Israel, he was the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14. The Targum of Isaiah even identifies him with the Suffering Servant pictured in the last part of Isaiah.

Called by various titles, this Messianic figure and the fulfillment of the Messianic hope were subject to diverse expectations that were often disappointed. After the return from Babylonian exile, some looked to Zerubbabel to fulfill the role.

He was a descendant of David, and the Persian king appointed him governor of Judæa. But it was folly to suppose that he could challenge the might of the Persian Empire.

The Persians were followed by Greeks, and the Greeks by Romans. A work dated from the last decades before the Common Era (Psalms of Solomon, chapter 17) hymns the expected Son of David, who would rule in righteousness, restore Israel, defeat enemies, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He is pictured as a mortal man, but larger than life and sinless. Significantly, the hymn concludes with the declaration, “The Lord Himself is our King for ever and ever.”

The people of the Qumran community, who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, also had a lively hope in this future righteous king. He would be the Messiah, but lower in rank than the priests. One passage in the Scrolls (Rule of the Community 9.11) seems to speak of two Messiahs, “the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel”—a priestly Messiah and a royal Messiah.

Other literature produced in the first century C.E. describes a Messianic figure, either priestly or royal, but at the same time affirms that the coming kingdom will be ruled by God Himself.<sup>6</sup> A work called 2 Esdras (chapters 11-12, 13) identified the Messiah with the Son of Man (see Daniel 7), who will die but then be resurrected.

All these lines of thought and

expectations converged in the first century of the Common Era to produce fervent anticipation and heightened hopes that were too often dashed to pieces. There arose many false Messiahs and impatient men who thought to bring in the reign of God by violence. Such was Judas the Galilean and his father Hezekiah, and his descendant Menahem. Such was a man named Theudas, and an unnamed Jew who hailed from Egypt, and no doubt many others whose names are now forgotten. The Romans crushed them all. Early in the second century, the great Rabbi Akiva hailed Bar Kokhba as the long-awaited Messiah, but both were killed by the Romans. Untold thousands of the people perished in the rebellions sparked by all these men.

The hopes were only intensified by the difficulty of the situation and the seeming improbability of their fulfillment, for had not Daniel the prophet predicted: “There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1)? The present troubles were but the “birthpangs of the Messiah”! The Messianic expectations were white-hot in the first century of the Common Era also partly because of calculations based on the time prophecies of the book of Daniel. Evidence

*The Messianic expectations were white-hot in the first century of the Common Era also partly because of calculations based on the time prophecies of the book of Daniel.*

*Rabbi Johanan: "The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked"!*

for this conclusion comes from an unexpected source: the Babylonian Talmud.

In a celebrated passage beginning near the end of Bavli Sanhedrin 96b<sup>7</sup> we find remarkable speculations about eschatology (the end of time). They are remarkable because the Rabbis who produced the Talmud were not keen on Apocalyptic ideas, which had only produced disaster in the past, as far as they could see. They did not want to give aid and comfort to another Bar Kokhba. And then, there was the matter of Yeshua and the claims of his followers. The presence of this passage in the Talmud, then, is exceptional, and it probably represents the tip of an iceberg. It is the meager remnant of a widespread way of thinking that was common in the age of the Tannaim. And since the Rabbis had long since put eschatology on the back burner, it must come down from an earlier age.

It begins with an allusion to Daniel 7:13, for it identifies the Messiah with "Bar Nafle"—a Greco-Aramaic expression meaning "Son of the Clouds." Then follows a long discussion of the "Messianic woes," the troubles that will precede the coming of the Messiah, which will occur when it is not expected. The unexpectedness of the coming of the Messiah is insisted upon by Rabbi Zera in opposition to scholars who were calculating the time of the Messiah's coming (97a). Examples of such calculations are then presented. One method is

based on the "Cosmic Week"—six millennia of history followed by a sabbatical millennium. Another counts the number of Jubilees. Yet another relies on the prophecies of Daniel (specifically that in Daniel 7:27), or of Haggai, or the Psalms. But all this is interrupted by the dictum of Rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: "Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come."

The importance of such calculations in the first century is hinted at by some of the language of the New Testament. The Gospel of Mark thus summarizes the message of Yeshua when he began his preaching ministry in Galilee: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news*" (Mark 1:15). Paul said, "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman*" (Galatians 4:4).

Our Talmudic passage transits from the question of *when* the Messiah will come to that of the necessary preconditions. "Rab said: All the predestined dates have passed, and the matter depends only on repentance and good deeds." There follows a debate by Tannaim. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus argues that the coming of the Messiah can be hastened by repentance, while Joshua ben Hananiah insists that all depends on the sovereign purpose of God, and human beings

can do nothing to hasten or delay it.

Perhaps the most astute remark is credited to Rabbi Johanan: "The son of David will come only in a generation that is either altogether righteous or altogether wicked"!

The Messianic hope in late Judaism, then, was an object of keen interest and the subject of considerable debate. As to Yeshua's question, "What do you think of the Messiah?," early Christians had their own answer.

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<sup>1</sup>All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:1, 12-13.

<sup>3</sup>The noun *mashiach* occurs 39 times in the Tanach. Of these occurrences about 27 refer to a king, 6 to a priest, 2 to patriarchs, and the rest to various others (people, Cyrus, Saul's shield).

<sup>4</sup>See passages such as Amos 9, Isaiah 11, and Hosea 3.

<sup>5</sup>Some of the passages that speak of this ideal king and his reign are Isaiah 11:1-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:20-31 and chapter 37; Micah 5; and Zechariah 9:9-10.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, the Testament of Daniel 5:10-13.

<sup>7</sup>Quotations are taken from translation in the Soncino edition of the Babylonian Talmud, except that some of the supplied words (those placed by the translator in square brackets) are sometimes omitted here.

## A Dramatic Encounter

A. Hadas

### *Moses and Jesus*

*In dream I saw two Jews that met by chance,  
One old, stern-eyed, deep-browed, yet garlanded  
With living light of love around his head,  
The other young, with sweet seraphic glance.  
Around went on the Town's satanic dance,  
Hunger a-piping while at heart he bled.  
Shalom Aleichem mournfully each said,  
Nor eyed the other straight but looked askance.*

*Sudden from Church out rolled an organ hymn,  
From Synagogue a loudly chanted air,  
Each with its Prophet's high acclaim instinct.  
Then for the first time met their eyes, swift-linked  
In one strange, silent, piteous gaze, and dim  
With bitter tears of agonized despair.*

**I**srael Zangwill (1864-1926), born in London of a poor Russian family, was a child of two worlds. Embracing both the broadness of secularism and the depth of Judaism, he became the product, although not the synthesis, of two irreconcilable dualities. This unresolved tension is the essence of Zangwill's work from whence comes his art of unblemished twofold description void of preconceived ideas.

This poem, taken from *Dreamers of the Ghetto*<sup>1</sup>—a series of sketches of Diaspora characters torn between their heritage and acquired notions of modernism—is imbued with dualities, some antagonistic, some parallel, some interwoven, though never united and never resolved.

### **The Old Man and the Boy**

The meeting is by chance, it was not to be, it is not to be; the eyes do not meet, weighed down by some mysterious burden. They seem related only in essence—in the aura of goodness

*A macabre setting of  
interplay between life  
and death, in which  
the two men seem  
strangely out of place.*

they emanate, and in their common Jewish origin—though not in expression. One well-encrusted in earthly concerns, bearing the weight of ages, features carved by the fingers of suffering, his eyes reflecting a concern with

Justice. The other, of an almost otherworldly aura, the idealism of a youth still unmarred, bearing the fragile flower of Hope; everything in him respires Grace.

### **The Carnival of Death**

Surrounding the two men is a bizarre round, simultaneously mocking and desperate, a premonition of our epoch's cynicism as opposed to nineteenth-century utopianism. Where dancing and music are commonly associated with a celebration of life, we witness here a haunting procession of halloweenish overtones. Dancing to forget, a-piping to mock, to scoff, even in the face of Death. Even the old greeting of life *Shalom Aleichem*, "Peace on you," is said mournfully. A macabre setting of interplay between life and death, in which the two

men seem strangely out of place.

### The Church and the Synagogue

Where is then their place? Which is their abode, the Church, the Synagogue? But wait! Are these not also, shockingly, entering this chorus of voices, the organ a-piping, the chanted songs a-swaying? The incoming tide is, however, much stronger and holds mores vitality. In contrast to the primitive aspect of the first scene, we have here the pompous and self-as-

*An encounter  
occurred in the  
silence of two glances  
sharing the same  
profound sadness.*

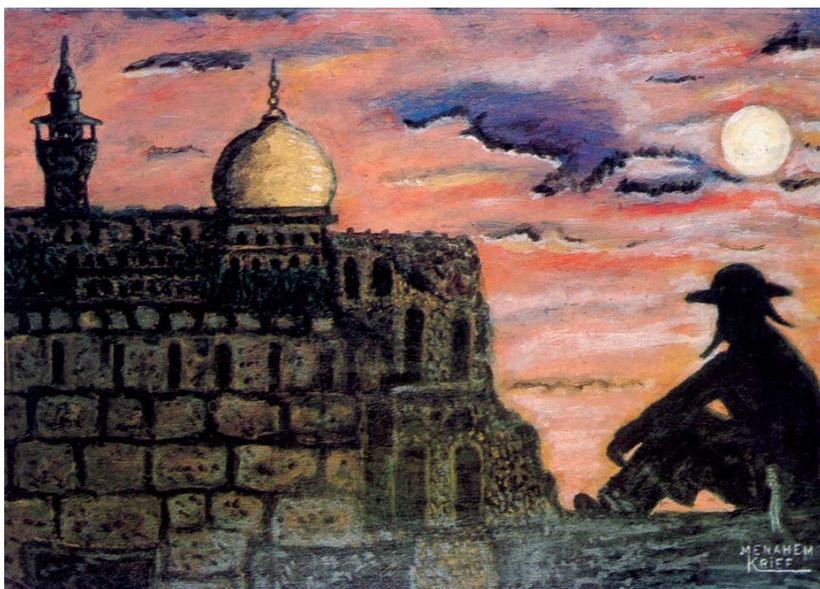
sured belches of the organ. And the breathless tunes of the pipes are smothered by the “loudly chanted” songs, and in their midst, two men, of muted solitude, all the more accentuated by the surrounding cacophony.

### The Voices of Silence

For the first time, the two men see each other. Their glance is strange as each mirrors the other, realizing that their despair is mutual. Alone and silent, they had carried their shame as they wandered through the voices of the city, through the voices from behind the edifices of the church and the synagogue, oblivious to each other and to the world. Where confusion remained on the sonorous level, an encounter occurred in the silence of two glances sharing the same profound sadness.

The golden thread of this

*Where words either dissimulate or destroy,  
silence only does not scorch the ear.*



poem is clearly the muted encounter between the persons of Moses and Jesus. A bizarre encounter indeed: It occurs by chance, is overcast with shame, and takes place through the medium of silence.

The chance element should come as no surprise to any lucid observer of Judeo-Christian relations of the last 2000 years. Indeed, has not everything been done to keep the ways apart? Have they not been avoiding each other? As one looks back on the history of hatred where words crusaded against words, and not just words, from the Inquisition to the pogroms, culminating in the gray shadow of the Holocaust, it is no wonder that in the case of an encounter, shame is the first emotion to surface.

But there is yet a deeper shame, the one carved out in the walls of silence erected by the Church and the Synagogue, in their ongoing effort to cloister themselves from the “sinful world” or from the “impure *goyim*.” Too often the curtains have been drawn, the impudent light from outside tolerated only

through stained-glass windows. While the world rages, the Church and the Synagogue cheer with a vitality hardly apropos.

*Too often the curtains  
have been drawn, the  
impudent light from  
outside tolerated only  
through stained-glass  
windows.*

Where words either dissimulate or destroy, silence only does not scorch the ear. In this case it is the silence of despair, of nihilism, where nothing more can be said. Maybe also a silence of piercing lucidity, where one suddenly grasps the other’s essence, where one pushes beyond the words, the labels, the myths to the true encounter, to the true *Tiqqun*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Israel Zangwill, *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (New York/London: Harper & Brothers, 1898).

<sup>2</sup>The old Jewish hope of “repairing” the broken world.

# The Coming of the Messiah and the Temptation of Babel

*Forces of Babel are in the way of the hope of Jerusalem.*

Benjamin Attal

**F**rom all corners of the earth the same clamor rises, the same stubborn frenzy to build the tower, the same excited desire to possess the gates of heaven (Babel). It is the same ambition to become the God of one's life, house, town, and world. It would be unnecessary to draw out the precise design that these powers are tracing on the face of the earth in order to accomplish this purpose.

Events explode in the news all over the globe, terrible symptoms of the growth of Babel. We can see Babel on the left with its call for unity of the forces of the people. It can be seen in its policies of world conquest and desire to establish the socialist paradise. The god who is worshiped is perfectly tailored to man's needs and dreams for he is man himself. A god ascending from man's inwards whose chant can only satisfy and please, a god that softly rocks us and slowly distills the opium of the masses.

We can also recognize Babel on the right where more and more groups in the West scream an ideology perched upon history's black

boots. Natural forces, genius, and culture are exalted. At the same time, we witness a resurgence of nostalgia of the pagan and mystical past of the European people while concurrently there is a rejec-

*Christians no longer seem to believe in a heavenly Kingdom because they are busy constructing another one with their own thoughts, morals, politics, and epiphanies.*

tion of anything which reminds us of a Judeo-Christian culture. There is not a single political party which does not harbor the desire to conquer the world. Of course, the wording is different, immediate objectives differ, and the declared intentions are noble and in the interest of humanity. But the underlying objective is similar: dominating the world through human

power following a Babel mentality. Efforts are spent and resources are pooled to try and build the Kingdom on Earth.

And in our time, the arms race, the slaughters in Rwanda and Burundi, the wars in the Gulf and everywhere else, the independence movements, the land claims—they all point to the same motive and goal of the Babel movement: possess the earth and build its Kingdom.

Paradoxically, Babel appears also among the religions stemming from a Judeo-Christian origin. Because of circumstances, Judaism has become a community which concentrates itself on the politics, the security, and the future of Israel. The Messiah expected to come from above has now nested himself within the walls of Jerusalem. Of course, we can explain why such a mentality has come about in a nation which has often found itself alone and constantly threatened. It is a nation's reflex of self-defense. But, regardless of which historical factors have brought the current situation about, the fact remains that in the midst of Israel's city may reside the spirit of Babel.

Politics, tradition, religion made culture, the army, and the country have come ahead of *YHWH's* Kingdom and have even replaced it.

Babel can also be found within Christianity in the form of theologies. Under the influence of existentialist philosophers, the *raison d'être* of the Christian hope has been lost. The Kingdom of God is now relegated to the category of myths. All that is left is *kerygma*. The Kingdom of God is now clothed by the newer and brighter cloak of the *intelligent* modernism. It is now paraded as culture, ethics, and politics. In Marxist fashion, the Church is now involved in social and political action or just plain old politics. The Christian banner is now a mere pretext for the building of a city reminiscent of the one Saint Augustine spoke of. The difference is that its ideal is not the expectation of a heavenly Kingdom but of an earthly one. Also, the weight of tradition has anchored the institution to its history and has given it complete power. Everything is justified and is given the seal of infallibility. Even God has to follow as He automatically rubber-stamps the initiatives from below. God has been replaced by the Church, and His Kingdom has been rendered useless since it has been replaced with the organization of the Church.

We can also find Babel in those sects coming out of a Christian tradition that are multiplying today. They contend that the Kingdom of God is already at hand, and it is our duty to build the earthly paradise. The Messiah is here under human form carrying the hopes of the world. Finally, it is also Babel we are dealing with when we witness the success Oriental religions are having in our society. Their practice of meditation and other spiritual techniques have the sole goal of deifying man and allowing him to access a spiritually superior para-

dise. Christians no longer seem to believe in a heavenly Kingdom because they are busy constructing another one with their own

thoughts, morals, politics, and epiphanies. The Church has become merely militant. It confines itself to self-exhibition instead of pointing to the sky and identifying the essence of its vocation: the Kingdom of God. The Church has become merely that: a church. In *God's Jesters*, one of Morris West's best-sellers, this embarrassment is illustrated. A pope at the end of times is forced to step down because he dares to preach the end of the world. His message cannot be acceptable because it does not fit within the Church's design; and therefore, he must be declared insane. In the end Morris West himself would balk from going all the way, and Christ's second coming metamorphoses itself into the appearance of a man who would help others prepare and wait for the real thing.

It is no longer conceivable in our Christian city to believe in a Messiah from above. All we have to do is look at the declarations our leaders make. They are heavy on calls to fraternity, unity, love, and peace among people. These are laudable causes but we cannot stop wondering whether behind these ecumenical desires there isn't an unseen and unconscious dose of *Babel's complex*. Its main symptom is that the desire for unity overshadows the desire to attain the higher truth which is external to all.

Today, there is hardly a single church that does not claim to be free of any trace of Babel. This mentality is not determined by doctrines or political colors. It

*It is more important to build up the house than to open the building towards the sky.*

*What is offered is not a life of floating spirits evolving among fluffy clouds in a mythical paradise. What is promised is real life.*

crosses all confessional barriers and no community could keep it away. It is more important to build up the house than to open the building towards the sky. The concern for power and authority has taken precedence over faith and hope. We must not deceive ourselves because behind good intentions resides a spirit that is concerned with a worldly kingdom. This kingdom is full of ambition and jealousy and ignores the higher hope.

### The Far-Away Kingdom

The coming of the Messiah is supposed to bring a different order: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. . . . I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, . . . The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," says the Lord" (Isaiah 65:17-25, NKJV).

This describes a place where life will be radically different from anything we know. A place of peace, love, and joy. There will be no more death, war, or sorrow. It will be a place of true happiness. A

place where the God of life, love, and justice will live with us. Our experience with Him on this earth has been dimmer than a shadow. We will eternally be sons and daughters of God, members of His family, and completely dependent on Him.

This is unbelievable and unreasonable to some. It is inconceivable because it is not the order we have experienced. By saving man, God pulls him out of the reach of evil and death which invariably

await him on earth. Through salvation, God rips man out of the Beast's claws. What is offered is not a life of floating spirits evolving among fluffy clouds in a mythical paradise. What is promised is real life. The kingdom that is promised is one which can be touched, felt, and enjoyed. It will be the only Kingdom not to be ephemeral and to withstand the test of time. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14, NKJV).

This is where the rubber meets the road. In our space age, we have a hard time imagining an actual place where God and His chosen people would live. The idea of a Heavenly Kingdom seems appealing and worth meditating upon as long as it remains a spiritual or moral concept. It can be fiction or myth but not history. It is hard to imagine a place far away from here where we would live differently. We are used to our life and environment and have a hard time picturing different surroundings. We are so comfortably adapted to our homes and our world that we cannot imagine anything different could exist. Babel is in the way of the New Jerusalem. We like the city of men so much that its sight obscures that of the city of God. This is why the Messiah's coming will be a surprise. We have our language, our supermarkets, our TV dinners, our habits. Those have become our reality. Through endless repetition, these small events and familiar sensations have become an integral part of ourselves.

We slowly become them, and we live only through them.

The daily routine, denounced by the movements of the sixties, has made us into what we are. To try to imagine something radically different would be like killing a part of us. Even our thoughts have become stereotyped; we blend in with a collective smile of complacency and follow along. Sometimes we get a sudden insight and realize this life's absurdity, but we quickly hurry back onto the paved road called prudence. We trek along the well-traced road; we follow the majority. Man has lost his freedom.

*The reason the world today does not believe any longer in the Kingdom of God is because it is too absorbed with building its own. We literally have our feet firmly planted on the ground.*

We cannot believe today in the world of God. Of course, we still have our religion, our party, our ideals. But it is all carefully charted in the natural course of our lives. To think that it will all come to an end and make place for something completely new seems absurd. Who in their right mind would dare believe in such a great collapse?

The reason the world today does not believe any longer in the Kingdom of God is because it is too absorbed with building its own. We literally have our feet firmly planted on the ground. The well-to-do relax in their reclining chairs, sure of themselves and of their truth. After all, "reality" is on their side. To believe in the end of the

world? They allow themselves a small chuckle. Civilization is well established, men are well prepared to hold it in place. Science progresses and peace is not threatened seriously because we are guarding it. And with those reasonable words we discard the problem.

It is true that we have been more active than ever to control weapons and guarantee peace. Summit meetings follow each other at a dazzling pace. Humans seem full of good intentions. And upon these reassuring thoughts our man appeases himself and turns back his

attention towards the football game.

Among those who still believe, more than one has become weary of waiting and the once passionate expectancy turns itself into a bored "How much longer . . ." Time stretches out, and we become complacent. We stop waiting and start living in the present because it is getting to be too long. We start going about our business like everyone else; and finally, we no longer believe. Today's people are caught up within the walls of Babel. And whether they live in Jerusalem, Rome, or Chicago, they stop looking ahead. And the less they look, the more of a surprise they will receive.

### The Unexpected Messiah

The rabbis taught: "The Son of David will not come until Israel despairs of being redeemed." It was also taught: "The Son of David will come when no one expects him. Three things come unexpectedly: the Messiah, a discovery, and a winning" (*Sanhedrin*, 97-99).

## Modern Messiahs

*What is the meaning of this strange phenomenon?*

Clifford Goldstein  
Editor of *Liberty*

**H**egel, looking at the state of the world, once said, “Only God can save us.”

Though in today’s postmodernist milieu Hegel’s assertion would seem woefully inadequate, even antiquated, one could take another look at the world today and agree that he has a point, which is perhaps why so many people have over the years reached out to some of the strangest beliefs regarding God and how He will save mankind.

Unquestionably, one manifestation of the desire for salvation is found in the various modern messiahs. Indeed, if there’s one thing that the tragic deaths at Waco should teach us, it’s that the belief in the coming of the Messiah, far from being some antiquated Jewish teaching, is still firmly entrenched in the minds of many people. And though most people should have had enough sense to see through the obvious sham and falsity of David Koresh’s claim to be a “sinful messiah” (a claim that allowed him to sleep with his followers’ wives), many are still open to the messianic pretensions of those who would be king.

There is Sun Myung Moon, for example, whose devoted followers believe he is the Messiah. According to Moonie theology, Jesus Christ blew it by dying on the cross, and Moon is now the re-

turned Christ who will usher in God’s kingdom, the task that Jesus failed to do.

Back in 1982, New Agers spent half a million dollars advertising in twenty of the world’s foremost newspapers that the Messiah had returned and was living in obscurity, only awaiting the right time to make his grand entrance.

Lubavitcher Jews were convinced that Rabbi Menachem Schneerson was the “Mosiach” and earnestly expected him to usher in the Messianic age.

*Even in our modern day and age, the belief and the hope of a Messiah are still strong.*

The Aum Shinri Kyo sect in Japan, which made world headlines by its gas attacks in the subways of Tokyo, was headed by Shoko Asahara, who his followers believed is Christ.

What this says is that even in our modern day and age, the belief and the hope of a Messiah are still strong. Why? No doubt various complex factors are involved, but if history is any lesson, Messianic movements have always been the strongest during times of great strife and upheaval. And though

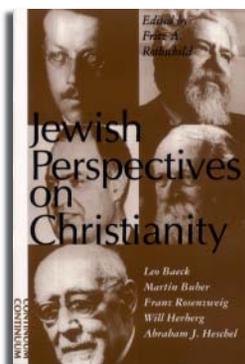
that doesn’t necessarily fit our time, at least in the West, we are indeed living in an unstable age, socially, economically, and spiritually. One doesn’t have to be in the midst of war or of a vast social revolution to feel overwhelmed, shaken, and uncertain about his existence. Life is changing so fast; technology is moving at speeds people are unable to keep up with; there is unease, fear, tension in a world where all it would take is one terrorist group to get hold of one atom bomb or chemical weapon to wreak great havoc.

And, of course, people are always looking for hope, for certainty, for stability in the world, which offers—even in the best of times—few eternal things. These messiahs—however different in style, theology, and manifestation—all spread to their followers the promise of hope, certainty, and stability that people crave. However, those who will follow them inevitably learn just how false those promises really are.

Of course, there’s only one way to be protected from these false messiahs, and that’s through a personal and intellectual knowledge of the True one.

Indeed, Hegel was right after all.

# Recent Books



*Jewish Perspectives on Christianity: Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Will Herberg, Abraham J. Heschel*, edited by Fritz A. Rothschild (Continuum Publishing Company, 1996), 367 pp., \$24.95 paperback.

Ironically, after the horrors of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, the Jewish-Christian dialogue has never been so active; for the first time in history, Jews are listened to by Christians.

This book is a part of this process. The views of five authoritative Jewish thinkers (Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Will Herberg, and Abraham J. Heschel) are presented and discussed by five Christian theologians.

Issues such as “the person and significance of Jesus,” “the polarity of law and gospel, works and faith,” “the place of the Hebrew Bible in Christianity,” and “the role of the church as the New Israel” are dealt with, making this book a very important contribution to what Fritz Rothschild calls “Judeo-Christian mutuality.”

Fritz A. Rothschild is the Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Professor Emeritus of Jewish Philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, where he has taught since 1960.

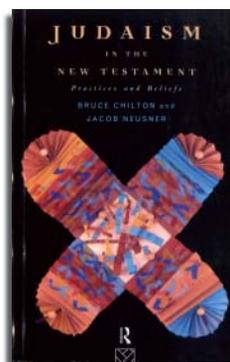


*Jesus of the Gospels: Teacher, Storyteller, Friend, Messiah*, by Arthur E. Zannoni (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996), 205 pp., \$12.95.

“The Jesus whom we discover in the Gospels is both elusive and complex. The Gospel writers cannot agree completely on whether to present him as a carpenter, a rabbi, a storyteller, a party-goer, a miracle-worker, a healer, an exorcist, a poet, a mystic, a revolutionary, the Messiah, a prophet, God’s Son. The reason for this is that Jesus, like all persons, remains to some extent a mystery. He defies both definition and easy explanation.

“Exploring who Jesus is, as portrayed in the Gospels, is the purpose of this book” (p. vii).

Arthur E. Zannoni is an award-winning free-lance writer, teacher, workshop leader and consultant in the areas of biblical studies and Christian-Jewish relations. He is a two-time recipient of the Uhrig Foundation award for excellence in teaching and has received the Temple Israel Interreligious Award for his work in promoting interfaith dialogue in the Twin Cities.



*Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs*, by Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner (Routledge, 1995), 203 pp., \$17.95.

*Judaism in the New Testament* explains how the books of the early church emerged from communities which defined themselves in Judaic terms even as they professed faith in Christ.

The earliest Christians set forth the Torah as they understood it—they did not think of their religion as Christianity, but as Judaism. For the first time, in *Judaism in the New Testament*, two distinguished scholars take the earliest Christians at their word and ask: “If Christianity is (a) Judaism, then how should we read the New Testament?”

The Gospels, Paul’s Letters, and the Letter to the Hebrews are interpreted to define what Chilton and Neusner call “Christianity’s Judaism.” Seen in this way, the New Testament will never be the same.

Bruce Chilton is Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion at Bard College, New York. He has taught and written extensively on early Christianity and Judaism and the historical Jesus. Jacob Neusner has published more than 550 books and is an expert on the history of Judaism. He is Distinguished Research Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida and Visiting Professor of Religion at Bard College. He is also a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge.



רֹאֵנוּ וְלֹא עַתָּה.  
 אֲשׁוּרֵיוּ וְגֹלָא קְרוּב  
 דִּירָךְ כּוֹכַב מִיַּעֲקֹב  
 וְקֶסֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

במדבר כד, י"ז  
 קי"ן

*"I see Him, but not now;  
 I behold Him, but not near;  
 A Star shall come out of Jacob;  
 A Scepter shall rise out of Israel."  
 Numbers 24:17, NKJV*