



DISCOVERY SERIES

The Jewish Tradition Of Two Messiahs



CONTENTS

Tradition	2
The Tradition Of Messiah	5
<i>One Endtime Deliverer</i>	6
<i>A Messianic Anticipation</i>	7
The Tradition Of Two Messiahs	9
<i>A Messiah Who Suffers</i>	10
<i>A Messiah Who Delivers</i>	15
<i>The Tension Reconciled</i>	16
What Do The Scriptures Say?	22
<i>Intermingled Promises</i>	22
<i>One Messiah In Two Missions</i>	23
Was Yeshua The Promised One?	28

THE JEWISH TRADITION OF TWO MESSIAHS

In a culture that so often claims Judeo-Christian roots, there is often a curiosity—even a fascination—with “things Jewish.” The Jewish people had thousands of years of history with God, a relationship that formed the foundation upon which the New Testament was introduced to the world. As we read the Bible, we can’t help but encounter Jewish places, names, and traditions.

In this booklet, staff writer Kevin Williams helps us explore one of those traditions—the Jewish expectation of two Messiahs. It’s our prayer that this examination will help us find similarities, and differences, that challenge both cultures toward a more open dialogue around the timeless wisdom of the Scriptures.

Martin R. De Haan II

Managing Editor: David Sper

Cover Photo: Terry Bidgood

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2004 RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in USA

TRADITION

One of the most memorable songs from the musical *Fiddler On The Roof* is in the Prologue of Act One. “Tradition” introduces the story of a Jewish family and community living in the small village of Anatevka, Russia, during the harsh era of Tsarist rule. The main character, Tevye, complains to God about the difficulty of being a “chosen people” during an era of pogroms—the systematic elimination of Jewish villages. He concludes, however, that without tradition their lives would be as unsteady as a “fiddler on the roof.”

Tradition plays a role in the Jewish community and in all of our lives. Customary ways of thinking and acting give structure to daily living and a sense of connection from one generation to the next.

To help keep in perspective the Jewish traditions we explore in this booklet, we need to ask ourselves, “What would our lives be without traditions?” From birth to death, traditions touch nearly every area of life. Yet they often take on special significance in our houses of worship. From the highly liturgical to the very contemporary worship service, tradition plays a part in how we approach the King of the universe and how our theology is molded. The prayers we pray, the songs we sing, the creeds we recite, and the calendar we use are all influenced by tradition to some degree. No less is true in the synagogue.

If one word could describe Judaism, many would agree that it is *tradition*. It has been cultivated like a fine art by the Jewish community. Especially during periods of

exile, the family customs of diet, dress, holidays, rest, and worship became extremely important. Even when scattered among the nations of the world, the people of Israel have retained a sense of identity and shared history by passing on customary ways of living and thinking from one generation to the next.

If one word could describe Judaism, many would agree that it is tradition.

Judaism has many forms and branches, from the ultra-Orthodox to the extremely liberal: Hasidic, Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, and Reconstructionist. Among nonreligious Jewish people, there is often a special awareness of tradition—even if it's only reflected in the dusty menorah on the

bookshelf, or the Star of David kept in a jewelry box. Such faint remembrances stand in contrast to the disciplined, highly observant Hasidic man who wears his black hat, curled sidelocks, and a long black coat. Whether placed at the center or outer edge of a Jewish person's life, these traditions reflect a community's often-expressed need for identity, even when living away from their historic homeland.

Wearing a skullcap, which is called a *kippah* by some or a *yarmulke* (*ya-ma-kah*), is an example. There are no records as to the origin of this tradition. An Orthodox rabbi will tell you that, as important as this masculine head covering is to shared Jewish identity, it is not required by the Scriptures. Yet the *kippah* also shows how one custom can give birth to others. In an attempt to explain why Jewish males wear a head

covering, traditional explanations are handed down from one generation to the next. Some Jewish fathers tell their children that the *kippah* is a reminder of the separation that exists between man and God. Others explain that the tradition is a symbol of the turbans the Levites wore in the temple, as a reminder of the Jewish person's role as priest (Ex. 19:6). Even among cherished traditions, there is not always agreement on what they mean or how they are to be applied.

One of the most cherished traditions in an observant Jewish home is the Sabbath meal, which is held on Friday evenings after sundown. According to the collected oral traditions of the Talmud, one rabbi held that the Sabbath candles must be lit first, followed by the blessing over the bread and wine. Another rabbi

held that the bread and wine must be blessed first, and then the candles should be kindled. The Talmud itself does not set down the law but offers opinions from which the student determines his own opinion. In the majority of Jewish homes, however, the practice of lighting the candles first became the time-honored tradition that has held its own for hundreds of years.

Tradition plays a significant role in Jewish life and thought. Sometimes traditions provide structure and continuity. Other times they take on a life of their own and become ways of explaining beliefs, even though many no longer remember or understand why. The latter seems to be the case with the traditional belief in two Messiahs. Yet, as we shall see, the tradition has an understandable explanation that is grounded in the Jewish Scriptures.

THE TRADITION OF MESSIAH

Faith in the coming Messiah is deeply rooted in historical Judaism. Rambam (1135–1204), one of their most-read sages, wrote, “Whoever does not believe in him [the Messiah], or does not await his coming, denies not only the other prophets but also the Torah and Moses, our teacher, for the Torah attests to his coming.”¹

The New Jewish Encyclopedia defines the Messiah as “a modified form of the Hebrew word *Mashiah* meaning ‘anointed,’ applied in the Bible to a person appointed for special function, such as High Priest or King. Later the term *Messiah* came to express the belief that a Redeemer, that is a divinely appointed individual, will in the end bring salvation to

the Jewish people and to the entire human race” (p.317).

The Dictionary Of Jewish Lore And Legend encapsulates the term *Messiah* a bit more succinctly: “The anointed king of the House of David of Bethlehem who will be sent by God to inaugurate the final redemption in the end of days” (p.132).

For the Christian reader, there will be many familiar themes that surface between these two views of Messiah. For the Jewish reader, we can only attempt to paraphrase and summarize hundreds of years of theology into a few pages. In an attempt to do this, and before looking more closely at the Scriptures themselves, let’s take a look first at some of the extrabiblical Jewish writings that reflect messianic themes of the Hebrew prophets.

ONE ENDTIME DELIVERER

One view of the Jewish anticipation of the last days, for instance, is summarized by Raphael Patai in *The Messiah Texts*:

The pangs of the messianic times are imagined as having heavenly as well as earthly sources and expressions. From above, awesome cosmic cataclysms will be visited upon the earth: conflagrations, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, hail and snow, thunder and lightning. These will be paralleled by evils brought by men upon themselves: insolence, robbery, heresy, harlotry, corruption, oppression, cruel edicts, lack of truth, and no fear of sin. All this will lead to internal decay, demoralization, and even apostasy. Things will come to such

a head that people will despair of redemption. This will last seven years. And then, unexpectedly, the Messiah will come (pp.95-96).

As seen above, the messianic expectation in Jewish literature is very real. This anticipation is based on the Hebrew prophets who saw a time of terrible tribulation called the "time of Jacob's trouble." In the midst of that darkest of ages, the Messiah will come, the conquering King who will sit on His throne in Jerusalem and establish the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

The *Apocalypse Of Abraham*, an extrabiblical book, says:

Then I will sound the trumpet out of the air, and will send mine Elect One [the Messiah], having in him all my power, one measure [of each of my attributes]; and this one shall

summon my despised people from the nations, and I will burn with fire those who have insulted them and who have ruled over them in this Age (ibid, p.96).

Jewish sources are consistently clear that King Messiah will be known as the “Prince of Peace,” and during His reign, “there will be a resurrection of the dead, followed by the great day of judgment for all mankind. The way to the Garden of Eden will be revealed.” ²

A MESSIANIC ANTICIPATION

The anticipation of national deliverance through a person anointed by God has been a theme of Judaism throughout the ages. Sometimes this shared expectation became a hope in false messiahs. At other times, the title of messiah came to rest on men who reflected characteristics

of the great King and hope of Israel.

The word *messiah* literally means “anointed,” as does the word *Christ*. In Israel, priests were anointed, kings were anointed, and some

The anticipation of national deliverance through a person anointed by God has been a theme of Judaism throughout the ages.

theologians believe God divinely anointed others for the purposes of redeeming Israel from some calamity. Therefore, rabbinic tradition has often seen messianic characteristics in the deliverers of Israel. Here are just four in a long list of persons referred to as “messiah” in extrabiblical Jewish literature.

Enoch. “That angel came to me, . . . saying, ‘You are the Son of man [i.e., the Messiah] who art born for righteousness, and righteousness has rested upon you. The righteousness of the Ancient of days shall not forsake you’” (1 Enoch 70:17-18).

Moses. “My beloved is like a gazelle” (Song 2:9). Rabbi Yitzhaq said, “Just as this gazelle can be seen and then again hides itself, so the first Messiah [Moses] revealed himself to the Children of Israel and then again hid himself from them.”³

Hezekiah. “The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to make Hezekiah [king of Judah] the Messiah.”⁴

Menahem ben 'Amiel. “This is the Messiah of the lineage of David, and his name is Menahem ben 'Amiel. He was born during the reign of David, king of Israel.”⁵

Often, however, the anticipation of a deliverer allowed the people of Israel to put their faith in persons who raised their hopes without being able to deliver. According to *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, “Most leaders of messianic movements are known as false messiahs. The most important of these were David Alroy in the 12th century; David Reubeni in the 16th century; Shabbetai Tzevi in the 17th century; and Jacob Frank in the 18th century. It is important to note that some of the so-called false messiahs had the support of the great intellects and spirits of their day. Shabbetai Tzevi was accepted enthusiastically by scholars, rich men, and poor men alike” (p.318).

The list goes on and on. In short, in Judaism there is room for many potential “candidates” spanning the entirety

of Israel's history. Most recently, a sect of ultra-Orthodox (Lubavitchers) in New York believed (and still believe) that Chief Rabbi Menachem Schneerson was the messiah. When he died in 1994, they turned to Isaiah 53 to predict his resurrection and ascension to the throne in Jerusalem. To this day, this sect has not chosen another chief rabbi as they await Schneerson's resurrection.

THE TRADITION OF TWO MESSIAHS

Within Judaism, however, there is another way of approaching the anticipation of Messiah that deserves special attention. This idea is not simply messianic in principle, but is a way of explaining descriptions of the great King Messiah that is deeply rooted in the

Jewish Scriptures. An often-repeated concept within the tradition of Israel is that there is not one Messiah but two: *Moshiach ben Yosef* and *Moshiach ben David* (Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David). Like the *kippah* and the candles we've already mentioned, this is a tradition established by the rabbis long ago and a matter we shall examine in closer detail.

Pick up almost any Jewish dictionary or encyclopedia, look up the word *messiah*, and you will find references to not one messianic figure but two: Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David. But why? How did such a dichotomy come to be?

In the years following the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Jewish sages looked at the Scriptures and saw two distinct characteristics of the promised Messiah in the texts. As they

studied these dissimilar characteristics, they saw promises so divergent as to be seemingly incompatible.

A MESSIAH WHO SUFFERS

According to Isaiah 53:2-8,

He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;

the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

Some modern rabbis insist that this passage has nothing at all to do with the Messiah. They say the unidentified “He” in this passage should be interpreted as the people of

Israel. In other words, the end of verse 3 might read, “And we [the Gentile nations] hid, as it were, our faces from *Israel*; *Israel* was despised, and we did not esteem *Israel*. Surely *Israel* has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”

This explanation has its own difficulties, as it would suggest that Isaiah was not written for the Jewish people but for the Gentiles. Even if that were true, this interpretation views the chosen people as an innocent sacrifice for the sinning nations of the world. Yet the prophecy of Isaiah begins with the words of a God who is brokenhearted over the sins of His people Israel. Isaiah begins with the following words:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the

ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward (Isa. 1:2-4).

Further complications arise by interpreting Isaiah 53 as a people and not a person. To suggest that all of Israel must die as a sin offering would contradict the promises of Jeremiah 31:35-36.

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The Lord of hosts is His name): “If those ordinances depart

from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.”

God’s promise is that Israel shall never cease to exist—that they will never be cut off from the living. To suggest that the people of Israel must die for the sins of the nations is problematic because biblically, whenever Israel suffered, it was invariably because of her own sin, not for the sins of others.

Israel’s experiences teach all of us, Jew or Gentile, about the character of God. Israel’s history is a word picture for all people to better understand who God is and what the consequences of sin are. But to insinuate that the Jewish people as a whole must suffer and die as an atonement for the iniquities of the Gentiles is without biblical precedence.

In contrast to the thought

that Israel is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel from early in the second century wrote:

Behold my servant Messiah shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase, and be exceeding strong: as the house of Israel looked to him through many days, because their countenance was darkened among the peoples, and their complexion beyond the sons of men.⁶

This disciple of Hillel, one of Israel’s most renowned and respected rabbis, saw the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 as being the Messiah.

The *Babylonian Talmud* agrees:

The Messiah—what is his name? . . . The Rabbis say, the leprous one; those of the house of Rabbi say, the sick one,

as it is said, “Surely he hath borne our sicknesses.”⁷

The 16th-century scholar Rabbi Moshe Alshekh wrote:

Our Rabbis with one voice, accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of king Messiah.⁸

***A disciple of Hillel,
one of Israel’s
most renowned and
respected rabbis,
saw the suffering
servant of Isaiah 53
as being the
Messiah.***

Alfred Edersheim (1825–1889), noted scholar and author of a number of books on Jewish life and worship in the years before the destruction of the

temple, wrote:

As the Old Testament and Jewish tradition taught that the object of a sacrifice was its substitution for the offender, so Scripture and the Jewish fathers also teach that the substitute to whom all these types pointed was none other than the Messiah.⁹

To entertain the notion that the people of Israel would have to become an “offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10) breaks with the simple meaning of the text and departs from their own traditions concerning Isaiah 53. For the Jewish people to become a sin offering, or *asham* in the Hebrew, would mean becoming a substitutionary atonement for a repentant sinner—an offering without spot or blemish. Without repentance by the sinner, there could be no atonement for him. For

a substitutionary sacrifice to be acceptable, it had to be made in the temple in Jerusalem by the sinner or there could be no atonement. At no time in human history have Jewish people died as an *asham* (a sin offering in the temple) to atone for Gentile sins.

It seems more practical and in keeping with the text that the prophet is speaking of a unique person, the Messiah. This continues to be the interpretation in many Jewish circles today. Consider the following prayer offered in synagogues around the world on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement:

Our righteous Anointed is departed from us; horror has seized us and we have none to justify us. He has borne the yoke of our iniquities. He bears our sins on his shoulder that we may find pardon for our iniquities. We

shall be healed by his wounds, at the time that the Eternal will bring him anew. Hasten the day when he will assemble us a second time by the hand of the one who shall endure forever. ¹⁰

The overtones of Isaiah 53 cannot be missed. The fact that the Jewish people pray for “him” to accomplish all these deeds leaves one with the impression that they are not praying for Gentile atonement but for their own, by the hands of the Messiah.

While many modern rabbis believe Isaiah 53 to be about Israel, the older tradition, that the suffering servant is the Messiah, is no less respected. Judaism is also known for having more than one opinion. As the story goes, you can have two Jewish men and three Jewish opinions—and they can all be accepted as legitimately “Jewish.”

So Isaiah 53, from a traditional Jewish perspective as well as a plain reading of the text, appears to say that someone—a unique person—is going to suffer and die, and that this suffering servant is the Messiah.

A MESSIAH WHO DELIVERS

If you were an oppressed and dispersed people hoping for a conquering king (as the Jewish people were in AD 70), then Isaiah 53 would not be very encouraging. Passages like Daniel 7:13-14 would be much more appealing:

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory

and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

This regal and victorious description of Messiah has been the expectation of many people for millennia. Jewish people of faith have clung to the tradition and promise of a deliverer, a Savior who would throw off the yoke of oppressive governments and establish an indestructible kingdom on earth.

Certainly, the Bible appears to support such a king:

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from

that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:7).

In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness (Isa. 16:5).

Even the New Testament mirrors the hope of a Messiah seated on a throne:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David (Lk. 1:32).

THE TENSION RECONCILED

These scriptural dichotomies between a suffering and a conquering Messiah were so discordant that for at least some Jewish students and scholars, there was only one way it could be reconciled—there had to be two

Messiahs: one who suffers and dies, and the other a great king who conquers all of God's enemies.

In the 10th century, as Catholicism had spread throughout Europe, and Islam had taken root in the Middle East, there was a great deal of discussion about who the Messiah would or should be. The Jewish people were feeling pressed on both sides and yearned for a Savior.

The collective oral traditions of the Talmud had been recorded 400 years earlier but gave no single and clear expectation. In fact, the oral tradition of the rabbis presented many views, some of which appeared contradictory to one another and spurred great debate. One highly regarded rabbi during Europe's Medieval Period was a Babylonian rabbi, Sa'adiah Gaon (882–942), who attempted to narrow

the scope of the debate with a two-Messiah position.

According to Michael Brown:

[Rabbi Sa'adiah Gaon] explained that there would actually be *two* Messiahs, the Messiah son of Joseph (mentioned explicitly in the Talmud in b. Sukkah 52a), who was associated with a time of victory mixed with hardship and calamity, and the Messiah son of David, who would establish God's kingdom on the earth.¹¹

Apart from the singular Talmudic reference, Rabbi Gaon is the earliest known Jewish scholar to articulate this two-Messiah position, and one of the only people to develop it into the "Messiah son of Joseph" theology. However, for Rabbi Gaon, the coming of the Messiah son of David was contingent entirely on the

work of the suffering servant, Messiah son of Joseph. Rabbi Gaon appears to have been a lone voice in an era of upheaval, persecution, and Jewish assimilations into the Christian and Muslim world.

His work was picked up a few decades later by Rabbi Hai Gaon because the Jewish community in what is now modern Iraq was still looking for clarification on what to expect about the coming Messiah.

The biblical references to Joseph as a type of Messiah are mysterious yet understandable in light of all that the patriarch Joseph endured in order to become the eventual deliverer of his people. Joseph's redemptive suffering and life story was thought by some to be a parallel to those messianic passages that spoke of a suffering servant.

The extrabiblical book *Joseph And Asenath* is

based on the two biblical characters. Asenath, according to Genesis, became Joseph's wife in Egypt and bore him two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 46:20). *Joseph And Asenath* was originally written in Greek, likely in Alexandria, Egypt, and adopted by both Jewish and Christian movements for its many rich pictures of pagans becoming faithful believers and a holy bride.

In the years during the formation of the Talmud, *Joseph And Asenath* was still quite popular, though later rejected as nonbiblical. Its influence presenting Joseph as a type of a redeemer during such a historical juncture cannot be overlooked.

But the Bible alone demonstrates many clear and godly characteristics of Joseph, certainly suitable for a comparison with the expected Messiah. The same

is true of King David, who through a covenant with God founded an everlasting dynasty, expanded the borders of Israel, and planned to build "a house" for God.

In the two-Messiah approach, some texts point to Messiah son of David, yet other texts of Jewish tradition speak of another mighty warrior who more closely reflects the experience of Jacob's son Joseph. Raphael Patai, in *The Messiah Texts*, writes:

He is the warrior-Messiah whose coming was predicted to his first ancestress, Rachel. When, after years of barrenness, Rachel finally gave birth to a son, she called his name Yosef, saying, "May the Lord add [yosef] to me another son" (Gen. 30:24). A Midrash fragment explains: "Hence [we know] that the Anointed

of War will arise in the future from Joseph.”¹²

This warrior in whom much hope was placed, however, suffers and dies. As noted earlier, this death is important because, according to the two-Messiah position, the Messiah son of David

According to the two-Messiah position, the Messiah son of David cannot appear until the Messiah son of Joseph suffers and dies.

cannot appear until this first Messiah suffers and dies. The second Messiah's arrival is contingent on the first arrival. According to yet

another extrabiblical source written in Aramaic around the time of the temple's destruction in AD 70:

And whosoever is delivered from the predicted evil shall see My wonders. For My son, the Messiah, shall be revealed, together with those who are with him, and shall gladden the survivors four hundred years. And it shall be, after those years, that My son, the Messiah, shall die (Esdras 7:27-30).

Though Jewish in origin, it is understandable that such a text would not be considered an authoritative book within Jewish theology as it calls the Messiah God's "son." Esdras uses language that is similar to that used of Yeshua (today recognized by the anglicized name "Jesus"), who was attested by His followers to be God's Son. But from a historical perspective, because the

messianic figure in Esdras dies, he is considered by Hebrew scholarship to be the Messiah son of Joseph.

Speaking of the Messiah who would suffer and die, Rabbi Hai Gaon wrote:

At that time a man will arise from among the Children of Joseph . . . and he will be called Messiah of God. And many people will gather around him in Upper Galilee, and he will be their king. . . . But most of Israel will be in their exile, for it will not become clear to them that the end has come. And then Messiah ben Joseph, with the men who rally around him, will go up from the Galilee to Jerusalem. ¹³

According to this rabbinic tradition, then, Messiah son of Joseph will come from the region of Galilee, and though many will not recognize the importance

of the age in which they live, this man will go with his followers to Jerusalem. But the rabbi's predictions continue:

And when Messiah ben Joseph and all the people with him will dwell in Jerusalem, Armilus will hear their tidings and will come and make magic and sorcery to lead many astray with them, and he will go up and wage war against Jerusalem, and will defeat Messiah ben Joseph and his people, and will kill many of them And he will slay Messiah ben Joseph and it will be a great calamity for Israel. ¹⁴

Armilus in Jewish tradition is considered to be the devil, an anti-messiah character originating from Gog and Magog. It would appear that this Armilus defeats this messianic character and crushes the people's messianic hope.

The text continues:

Why will permission be granted to Armilus to slay Messiah ben Joseph? In order that the heart of those of Israel who have no faith should break, and so that they say: "This is the man for whom we have hoped; now he came and was killed and no redemption is left for us." And they will leave the covenant of Israel, and attach themselves to the nations, and the latter will kill them. ¹⁵

Continuing with this two-Messiah position, the rabbi predicted that many would place their hope in Messiah son of Joseph. Their hopes would be dashed so that they would fall away from Judaism. And then they would fall into calamity among the Gentiles. But the story does not end here:

When Messiah ben Joseph is killed, his body

will remain cast out [in the streets] for forty days, but no unclean thing will touch him, until Messiah ben David comes and brings him back to life, as commanded by the Lord. And this will be the beginning of the signs which he will perform, and this is the resurrection of the dead which will come to pass. ¹⁶

Although Messiah son of Joseph is killed, Messiah son of David brings him back to life.

For the Christian reader, these themes may sound very familiar, though not particularly accurate. For the Jewish reader, these rabbinic prophecies may border on the absurd.

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?

Because the Hebrew word translated “messiah” means “anointed,” the Scriptures speak of both kings and priests as being “anointed” ones. In one text, even the Persian King Cyrus is referred to as God’s “anointed” because he was used by God to deliver His people from exile (Isa. 45:1). Even so, the Scriptures point to an anointed prophet, priest, and king who would do for God’s people what they could not do for themselves. Jewish literature often refers to this unique individual as “King Messiah.”

INTERMINGLED PROMISES

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes;

and to Him shall be the obedience of the people (Gen. 49:10).

Written approximately 4,000 years ago, this prophecy attributed to the patriarch Jacob states that the “rule” or authority over Israel as a nation would be established and maintained through the tribe of Judah.

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth” (Jer. 23:5).

Written nearly 2,600 years ago by the prophet Jeremiah, the lineage and rule of the Messiah is once again predicted to come through King David’s bloodline.

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,

and shall call His name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

“Immanuel” means “God with us,” and His birth was to be miraculous. A virgin, one who never knew a man, would bear a child.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting (Mic. 5:2).

The birthplace of this Messiah is Bethlehem. In the Hebrew language it means “House of Bread.” How can we assume that this verse is referring to the Messiah? Because He is set to rule Israel. But more important, His goings forth are from everlasting. He has been waiting in the wings of eternity for the right moment to come to the earth.

ONE MESSIAH IN TWO MISSIONS

There are many other prophecies that could be listed and discussed beyond the scope of this booklet. But it’s important to see how the Hebrew Scriptures themselves allude to the merging of suffering and power in one Person.

God said through the prophet Isaiah, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him’” (Isa. 62:11). This is how it is rendered in nearly every English translation. Grammatically, it is a bit awkward: Salvation is coming, and His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. It sounds as if “salvation” in this passage is an actual person. Perhaps God has planted another clue in His Word. The word *salvation* in this passage is also a proper Hebrew

name—Yeshua. So, it would then read, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely Yeshua is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.’” Grammatically, it makes sense.

Was there ever a man named Yeshua of the tribe of Judah, from the house of David, attested to have been born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem? Yes! But most people know Him by His anglicized name—Jesus.

For those who believe Yeshua was the predicted Messiah who was born in Bethlehem to die outside the walls of Jerusalem, the dual themes of a suffering and powerful Messiah merge into one Person. In His first coming, He fulfilled the picture of Joseph whose betrayal and suffering was used by God to “save” His people. In His promised return, He will fulfill the word picture of David who

will reign in Jerusalem as Conqueror, Deliverer, and King of the world. As God’s ultimate Anointed One, Yeshua fulfills the word pictures of every provision of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (see Lk. 24:44) that God has ever given.

Some rabbis have built their case for two (or more) Messiahs on the opinions of other rabbis. But the case for Yeshua was made by multiple witnesses who lived with Him 2,000 years ago. Those around Him routinely saw the manifestation of God in and through Him, and they proclaimed Him the Messiah, the Son of God.

Suffering Messiah.

Like Messiah son of Joseph, Yeshua suffered and died—fulfilling the prophecy:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our

transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4-6).

In the synagogues many centuries ago, it was common to take the Scriptures and amplify the text to help impart the fuller meaning to the congregations. These amplifications, or paraphrased translations, were called Targumim (Targum in the singular). Here is one English translation of the *Targum Isaiah*, from the same verses as above:

Then [the Messiah] shall pray on behalf of our transgressions, and our iniquities shall be

pardoned for his sake, though we were accounted smitten, stricken from before the Lord and afflicted. But he shall build the sanctuary that was polluted because of our transgressions and given up because of our iniquities; and by his teaching shall his peace be multiplied upon us, and by our devotion to his words our transgressions shall be forgiven us. All we like sheep have been scattered; we had wandered off each on his own way; but it was the Lord's good pleasure to forgive the transgressions of us all for his sake.

This was the understood meaning of Isaiah 53 in the second century. It would clearly be the Messiah who would suffer and die, and people's sins would be forgiven through His work.

The historical Yeshua was taken by force and executed by the Romans. Yet another remarkable event was witnessed not by a few, not by dozens, but by hundreds of men and women in Jerusalem. He rose from the dead!

Orthodox Rabbi Pincas Lapide writes, "This Jesus was utterly true to the Torah, as I myself hope to be. I even suspect that Jesus was more true to the Torah than I, an orthodox Jew." ¹⁷

Lapide also writes, "I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as a historical event." ¹⁸ This too was in keeping with the prophet Isaiah:

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of

the Lord shall prosper in His hand (Isa. 53:10).

The Messiah was to be an offering—a sin offering that had to be slaughtered. But His days would be prolonged nonetheless. He would die, but death would not hold Him. This too was prophesied by the psalmist: "Nor will You let Your Holy One see decay" (Ps. 16:10 NIV).

If there was ever a person who fit the description of the rabbis' concept of a Messiah son of Joseph, it was this historical figure, Yeshua.

If there was ever a person who fit the description of the rabbis' concept of a Messiah son of Joseph, it was this historical figure, Yeshua.

The Returning, Conquering Messiah.

Does Yeshua also fit the description of the rabbis' Messiah son of David?

Yes. He was of the line of the house of David and said He would return as the conquering King of Israel.

If you read His words and the teachings of His disciples, you will see that He promised to come again. And when He returns, He will establish His throne in Jerusalem:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Mt. 24:30-31).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God (1 Th. 4:16).

I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the

winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:11-16).

Yeshua, or Jesus if you prefer, will return again as the conquering king. The expected messianic figure of Daniel 7:13-14 will be visible:

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

WAS YESHUA THE PROMISED ONE?

In this booklet, we have examined Jewish theology concerning two Messiahs. The first, Messiah son of Joseph, would come as the one who would suffer, die, and be resurrected. And His death would prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah son of David, the conquering King of kings.

For the Christian reader, based on repeated testimony from Jewish men and women in the New Testament, it becomes clear that these two Messiahs are one and the same—the historical person known as Jesus, who came, suffered, died, and rose again. In the fullness of time, His resurrection will reach its pinnacle when He returns in power and glory to assume His throne in Jerusalem.

For the Jewish reader,

these claims may as yet seem unsubstantiated. Looking at what has been presented here from a strictly rabbinical viewpoint, leaning on the commentaries and the rabbis as your singular guide, you may not yet be convinced.

Apart from the life of the one known as Yeshua, Jewish theology may make an assumption of two Messiahs. But if Yeshua was who He said He was, then the two Messiahs easily meld into a cohesive unity—one who came and is coming again to fulfill all that the Bible requires.

The fact that Yeshua could be overlooked as the Messiah of Israel should come as no surprise. Certainly, it does not surprise the Almighty, whose prophet Zechariah wrote:

They will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him

as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem (12:10-11).

If Yeshua was who He said He was, then the two Messiahs easily meld into a cohesive unity—one who came and is coming again to fulfill all that the Bible requires.

What do the rabbis think of this passage? Here, at least, is the opinion of one 16th-century rabbi, Moshe Alshekh:

I will yet do a third thing, and that is, that “they shall look unto me,” for

they shall lift up their eyes unto me in perfect repentance, when they see him whom they pierced, that is Messiah, the Son of Joseph; for our Rabbis, of blessed memory, have said that he will take upon himself all the guilt of Israel, and shall then be slain in the war to make atonement in such manner that it shall be accounted as if Israel had pierced him, for on account of their sin he has died; and, therefore, in order that it may be reckoned to them as a perfect atonement, they will repent and look to the blessed One, saying that there is none beside him to forgive those that mourn on account of him who died for their sin: this is the meaning of "They shall look upon me." ¹⁹

Messianic rabbi Bruce

L. Cohen writes:

For us to have pierced Him, He would have to have been here on earth before the scene described in Zechariah 12. He could not have pierce-marks on Him that we would recognize as having been given Him by us (humankind) unless there were something recognizable about Him and the pierce-marks on Him. ²⁰

Someone was pierced.

Yeshua was nailed to the execution stake, suffered, and died. This resonates with the scholarship of Rabbi Hai Gaon:

And at that time a man will arise from among the Children of Joseph . . . and he will be called Messiah of God. And many people will gather around him in Upper Galilee, and he will be their king But most of Israel will be in their exile, for it will not

become clear to them
that the end has come. ²¹

Rabbi Hai Gaon
(mentioned earlier on
pp.17,20-21) writes that
Messiah son of Joseph will
be resurrected, “And this
will be the beginning of the
signs which he will perform,
and this is the resurrection
of the dead which will come
to pass.” ²²

***A day is coming
when all Israel will
mourn because they
did not know the
One who had
been pierced.***

A day is coming when all
Israel will mourn because
they did not know the One
who had been pierced. They
will mourn because so many
generations will have passed
and missed the Promised
One, God’s Anointed.

You need not be among
the mourners. Whether you
are Jewish or Gentile, the
“Light of the world” waits for
you to acknowledge that He
is the one true Messiah, who
was pierced and who is
coming again.

*Blessed are You
O Lord, our God, King of
the universe, who fulfills
His promises and has
promised us the Messiah,
our Redeemer. May our
hearts be turned toward
You, Almighty One, and may
we be found faithful on the
day of the Messiah’s return,
the One in whom the New
Covenant, Your promised
salvation, is made manifest
according to Your eternal
plan. Though our sins be
many, though they be red
as scarlet, make them
white as snow through
the death and resurrection of
Your Son. Blessed are You,
O Lord, who gives us
salvation.*

ENDNOTES

1. *Hilchos Melachim From The Mishneh Torah Of The Rambam*, 11:1
2. *Dictionary Of Jewish Lore And Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991), p.132
3. *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* by Bernard Mandelbaum (Jewish Theological Seminary Of America, 1962), pp.91-92
4. B. Sanhedrin 94a
5. www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/jcreeves/sefer_zerubbabel.htm
6. Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 53, ad Iocum
7. Sanhedrin 98b
8. *What The Rabbis Know About The Messiah* by Rachmiel Frydland (Columbus: Messianic Publishing Co, 1993), p.53
9. *The Temple: Its Ministry And Services* by Alfred Edersheim (Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p.98
10. *Prayer Book For The Day Of Atonement* (Hebrew

- Publishing Co., 1928)
11. *Answering Jewish Objections To Jesus, Vol. 2* by Michael Brown (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), p.212
 12. *The Messiah Texts* by Raphael Patai (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p.165
 13. *ibid*, p.168
 14. *ibid*, p.169
 15. *ibid*, p.169
 16. *ibid*, p.169
 17. *The Resurrection Of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* by Pinchas Lapide (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), p.11
 18. *ibid*, p.13
 19. *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings Of The Rabbinic Sages* by A. Cohen (Schocken Books, 1995), p.95
 20. *The Suffering Messiah In Jewish Sacred Writ*, www.bethelnyc.org/sufferingmessiah.asp
 21. *The Messiah Texts*, p.168
 22. *ibid*, p.169



Our mission is to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable and accessible to all.

Discovery Series presents the truth of Jesus Christ to the world in balanced, engaging, and accessible resources that show the relevance of Scripture for all areas of life. All Discovery Series booklets are available at no cost and can be used in personal study, small groups, or ministry outreach.

To partner with us in sharing God's Word, click this link to donate. Thank you for your support of Discovery Series resources and Our Daily Bread Ministries.

Many people, making even the smallest of donations, enable Our Daily Bread Ministries to reach others with the life-changing wisdom of the Bible. We are not funded or endowed by any group or denomination.

[CLICK TO DONATE](#)