

Thoughts on the expectation of the Messiah

Comparing Biblical prophecies with Jewish writings from different times

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The expectation of the Messiah in ancient Jewish writings

God made the first messianic promise immediately after the Fall:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen.3,15)

According to Midrash Rabbah 23 (1), this prophecy refers to the King-Messiah: „Eve was in awe of this seed...And who is this? This is the Messiah, the King.”

This promise contains both the victory of the woman's descendant over the serpent and his suffering in death. During the crucifixion, the heel was literally crushed by a large nail (see Appendix 1).

Moses' blessing over Joseph (Deuteronomy 33:17) contains references to both the atonement and the world rule of the Messiah:

His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of a wild ox: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth.

The firstborn male cow had to be sacrificed:

But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy: you shall sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shall burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet aroma unto the LORD (Numbers 18:17).

In contrast, the wild ox/aurochs was a massive animal that was impossible to keep as a domestic animal. The double meaning of Moses' blessing is explained in Midrash (2). Four double images are described there, each as the two sides of a coin:

- 1) Abraham: old couple // young couple
- 2) Joshua: a bull // a buffalo or aurochs
- 3) David: Shepherd's staff and bag // Fortress tower
- 4) Mordecai: Sack and ashes // golden crown.

The double image of Joshua describes the double task of the Messiah, which is to be fulfilled by a single person. Joshua is a descendant of Joseph, and Joseph's life provides a prophetic preview of this dual purpose of the Messiah, his suffering and his reign in the kingdom of peace. The horns of this wild buffalo represent his ruling power, which will reach to the ends of the earth in the messianic kingdom of peace.

The two very different tasks of the Messiah are described individually in the following two quotations: Regarding “Firstborn of his bull”, Esther Rabbah (2a) quotes the sacrificial regulations for the firstborn of domestic animals and in (2b) *Menahem ben Ammiel ben Joseph* is mentioned as the future ruler of the Messianic Kingdom.

At the time of Moses, it had not yet been revealed that the Messiah would be a son of David. Therefore, readers of the five books of Moses at that time could assume that the Messiah would be Joseph's son. This possible interpretation is probably the beginning of the rabbinic concept of the “Suffering Messiah Ben Joseph”. It was only centuries after Moses that King

David received the promise that the Messiah would be one of his descendants (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Psalm 78:67-70a explains:

Moreover, he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he has established forever. He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds.

According to Psalm 2:7, the Messiah is not only a son of David but also the son of God:

I will declare the decree: the LORD has said unto me, You are my Son; this day have I begotten you.

The Midrash (3) explains Psalm 2:7: The LORD said: "You are my son"... *These sayings will be fulfilled in the Messiah King.*"

The divine origin of the Messiah is also confirmed in the Midrash (4) on Psalm 72:17: *This king also is the Messiah, for it is written: 'A branch will come from the stump of Jesse, and he will judge the lowly in righteousness' (Isaiah 11:1+4), and: "Before the sun was, his name was 'Yinnon' (i.e. shall sprout). The Messiah received this name before the creation of the world."*

RaSHI (5) also confirms the divine origin of the Messiah in his explanation of Micah 5:1, where he uses both Ps.118, 22 and Ps.72:17: : **from you shall emerge for Me: the Messiah, son of David, and so Scripture says (Ps.118:22): "The stone the builders had rejected became a cornerstone"; and his origin is from of old: "Before the sun his name is Yinnon" (Ps. 72,17).**

Also, on Micah 5:1, Rabbi David Qimhi (RaDaQ) (6) writes: *In the messianic age it will be said that its origins are from ancient times, from the primeval times; of Bethlehem means that he will be of the house of David, for there is a long period of time between David and the Messiah-King; and he is El (God), therefore he is of old, from the beginning of time.*

The Qumran writings also describe the Messiah as the Son of God (7): *He will be called the Son of God and they will call him the Son of the Most-High.*

(On the expectation of the Messiah at the time of Jesus Christ, see Appendix 2).

The divine and human side of the Messiah is also expressed in the changed name used for Joseph in Psalm 81:6. In Hebrew this name is: Yehoseph – according to the Midrash this is a combination of the divine name Yah with the name Joseph. Joseph's life also foreshadows in many details the life of the suffering and reigning Messiah. Here are some examples:

Joseph was particularly loved by his father.

At the baptism of Jesus Christ a voice came from heaven and said:

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:17).

Out of envy, Joseph was sold by his brothers.

The Messiah Jesus was sold by his people - his brothers - out of envy: he (Pilate) knew that they had handed him over out of envy (Matt. 27:18).

Joseph was made ruler by Pharaoh.

The Son of Man was made eternal ruler by God (Dan.7:13-14): Behold, one came with the clouds of heaven, like the Son of Man; and he came to the old man and was brought before him. And to him was given dominion, honor, and kingdom, and all nations, tribes, and languages, served him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall never perish.

Joseph was recognized by his brothers, and the brothers repented.

When the Son of Man returns with the clouds of heaven, Israel, which represents all of his brothers, will recognize him and grieve over him:

I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn (Zech.12:10).

The development of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah has taken different directions. Starting from the biblical foundations, some of the rabbis separated the two sides of the one coin and assigned the suffering and the reign of the Messiah to two different people, the suffering Messiah Ben Joseph and the King Messiah Ben David. There was also the idea of a battle with evil in which the suffering Messiah Ben Joseph would be killed, as already indicated in Genesis 3:15.

Who is the suffering servant of God?

The most important passage in the Bible about the Suffering Servant of God is Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This prophecy contains both the guilt offering of the servant of God and his resurrection life after his vicarious death:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand (Isa. 53:10).

The Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel (8) from the 1st century AD begins with the words: *Behold, my servant Messiah shall prosper.* Ben Uzziel understands the suffering servant of God to be the Messiah and writes: *This is also the opinion of the scholars in the majority of the Midrash.*

RaSHI introduced the interpretation that the people of Israel are the suffering servant of God in Isaiah 53. Some rabbis, on the other hand, see the suffering servant of God as the Messiah Ben Joseph.

In Dan.9:25-26 the death of the Messiah is announced before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple:

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and its end shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

Various ideas have been developed regarding the death of Messiah Ben Joseph. According to the Jewish Apocalypse (9), Menahim Ben Ammiel Ben Joseph is the messianic war hero who fights against Armilius (embodiment of evil) and is killed.

Bar Kochba started a rebellion against the Romans in the year 132, was proclaimed Messiah by Rabbi Akiba and was killed in 135. He was the first false Messiah.



Fig.2 Silver coins from Jerusalem in the year 133
 Front: trumpets with inscription: "For the freedom of Jerusalem".
 Back: Harp with inscription: "Year two of Israel's freedom".

In the apocalyptic Midrashim, the messianic future is presented as follows: Messiah Ben Joseph will first fight victoriously, then be killed in the gates of Jerusalem fighting Armilius, and then be resurrected by Messiah Ben David.

Maimonides (RaMBaM) (10) describes what the King-Messiah will accomplish and concludes with the words: If he builds the Temple on its original site and gathers the scattered remnant of Israel, he is certainly the Messiah (cf. Appendix 4).

In fact, Israel will recognize the Messiah as the one they pierced (Zech.12:10). Rabbi Moshe Alshech (11), who is called a saint (Hakadosh), writes on Zech.12:10: *"I will do yet a third thing, and that is, that e 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 rabbies, 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 an atonement, in such a 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"*.

Here the atoning suffering of the Servant of God in Isaiah 53 is interpreted as the suffering of the Messiah Ben Joseph. In contrast, according to the prevailing view in Judaism today, the collective Israel is the servant of God.

Israel's recognition of the Messiah will be even more dramatic than the moment when Joseph was recognized by his brothers. The Messiah will come as described in Daniel 7:13-14: Behold, one came with the clouds of heaven, like the Son of Man; and he came to the old man and was brought before him. And he was given dominion, honor and kingship (see my article: God's plan for Israel). Of this Son of Man RaSHI says (12): One like a man came: This is the King Messiah.

A second coming of the Messiah can also be found in Jewish literature. An old prayer for Yom Kippur (13), which was in the official prayer book for the synagogues until 1932, reads: *„Messiah our Righteousness is departed from us: horror hath seized us, and we have none to*

justify us. He hath borne the yoke of our iniquities, and our transgression, and was wounded because of our transgression. He beareth our sins on his shoulder, that he may find pardon for our iniquities. We shall be healed by his wound, at the time that the Eternal will create him (the Messiah) as a new creature. O bring him up from the circle of the earth. Raise him up from the land of Seir, to assemble us on Mount Lebanon, a second time by the power of Yinon."

(Seir is a secret name for Rome, Lebanon refers to the temple, and Yinnon means sprout and is one of the names of the Messiah (14)). This prayer fell victim to censorship in the 20th century and can only be found in old editions.

The expectation of the Messiah in modern Jewish writings

According to RaMBaM, the Messiah will finally prove himself to be real by enabling the sacrificial service on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the construction of the Third Temple. This expectation is expressed today in various books, e.g. (15).

In addition, according to today's opinion, the Messiah is "a normal human being, born of human parents. It is therefore possible that he has already been born" (16). This opinion is held by many rabbis today.

In Appendix 3 the Jewish year is compared with the secular year according to a modern source (17). However, the secular year given there does not agree with accepted history: Nehemiah traveled in 444 BC. to Jerusalem. The difference to the "secular year" of the Jewish calendar is 109 years. The 2nd Temple was destroyed in the year 70. The difference of one year is due to the missing year 0 in the Christian era.

According to the Jewish year count, there was a period of 465/466 calendar years between the order to rebuild Jerusalem or Nehemiah's journey and the time when Bar Kochba was proclaimed as Messiah by Rabbi Akiba. In fact, there were 577 years between them.

The Messiah Jesus of Nazareth was crucified in the year 33. A week before, he publicly rode into Jerusalem as Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecy Zech.9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes unto you: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey.

Since the order to rebuild Jerusalem and this point in time, 476 calendar years had passed. Taking into account the length of a prophetic year of 360 days and the absence of year 0, one arrives at 483 prophetic years (18) in full agreement with Dan.9:25.

It is important to note that according to Dan.9:26 the death of the Messiah predates the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70.

I wonder if the Jewish calendar was distorted to make the prophecy of Dan.9:25 compatible not with the Messiah Jesus of Nazareth but with Bar Kochba, the false Messiah.

David Flusser, who was a professor of early Christianity and Judaism at the University of Jerusalem and died in 2000, used to say (19) that the citizens of Jerusalem will go out to meet the Messiah when he comes to Jerusalem and ask him, "Are you? First time here?"

Literature

1 Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 23: „Eve was in awe of this seed...And who is this? This is the Messiah, the King.”

2 Midrash, Genesis Rabbah, 39,11

Full text: *There were four whose coinage became current in the world: (1) Abraham, as it is said, And I will make of you [a great nation], etc. (Gen. 12.2). And what effigy did his coinage bear? An old man and an old woman on one side, and a youth and a maiden on the other. (2) Joshua, as it is said, So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame was in all the land (Josh. 6.27), which means that his coinage was current in the world. And what was its effigy? A shor on one side and a rem on the other, corresponding to the firstborn of his shor is his majesty; and the horns of a rem are his horns (Deut. 33.17). (3) David, as it is said, And the fame of David went out into all the lands (1 Chron. 14.17), which means that his coinage was current. And what was its effigy? A [shepherd's] staff and bag on one side, and a tower on the other, corresponding to Your neck is like the tower of David, built with turrets (Song 4.4). (4) Mordecai, as it is said, For Mordecai was great in the king 's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces (Est. 9.4); this too means that his coinage was current. And what was its effigy? Sackcloth and ashes on one side and a golden crown on the other (Est. 4.1; 8.15).*

2a *In [the Zodiacal sign of] Taurus was found the merit of Joseph who was called ox, as it says, The firstborn of his shor, majesty is his (Deut. 33.17); and also the merit of the offering, as it says, A bull [shor], or a sheep, or a goat when it is born [shall be seven days with its mother; and from the eighth day on it shall be accepted as an offering made to YHWH by fire (Lev. 22.27)] (Est. R. 7.11).*

2b *But you exalted my horn like a rem. Just as the horns of the rem are taller than those of all beasts and animals, and it goes to its right and to its left, so with Menahem ben Ammiel ben Joseph, his horns are taller than those of all kings, and he will gore in the future towards the four corners of the heavens. And concerning him Moses said: The firstborn of his shor, majesty is his; and the horns of a rem are his horns. With them he shall gore the peoples, all as one, even to the ends of the earth (Deut. 33.17) (Pirqey de Rabbi Eliezer, 22a).*

3 Midrash zu Ps.2,7

4 Midrash zu Ps.72,17

5 RaSHI's Kommentar zu Micha 5:1b

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<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/rambam-messiah.txt>

11 Rabbi Moshe Alshech zitiert nach A. M'Caul, Rabbi David Kimchi's Commentary upon the Prophetes of Zechariah, James Duncan, London, 1837, p. 163

12 RaSHI's Kommentar zu Daniel 7,13 (Website, siehe 5)

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17 Mattis Kantor, Timeline of Jewish History

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18 Harold Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Academie Books, Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1977, ISBN 0-310-26211-9, p.128.

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Appendix 1 The crushed heel

This promise describes the crushing of the serpent's head - an understandable image when one imagines a man crushing the serpent's head with his heel. But what does the second picture mean? Can a snake crush a man's heel? Who is this snake? Rev. 12:9:

The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan.

The snake therefore represents Satan.

When the Messiah crushed the head of the serpent on the cross, i.e. defeated Satan, his heel was literally crushed, as shown in the image of the heel of a crucified man with the nail still stuck in it.



Heel of a crucified man with an iron nail from Jerusalem before 70 AD; Israel Museum
(photo credit: Courtesy of the Israel Museum. Photographer: Ilan Shtulman)

Appendix 2 Expectation of the Messiah at the time of Jesus Christ

John the Baptist testified that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:34), as did Nathanael, one of Jesus' first disciples, who confessed:

Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel (John 1, 49).

John the Baptist also prophesied the sacrificial death of the Messiah with the words:

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

However, the sacrificial death of the Messiah, predicted in Moses' blessing over Joseph, had otherwise been forgotten by both the disciples and the Jewish people. When Jesus spoke of his death on the cross and described himself as the Son of Man, the Jews asked:

We have heard out of the law that Christ abides forever: and how say you, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? (John 12:34).

To one of the most famous theologians of that time and member of the Synedrium, Nicodemus, Jesus explained the prophetic meaning of the bronze serpent (Num. 21:8-9) with the words:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:14-15).

Later, Nicodemus argued against the Synedrium's hasty condemnation of Jesus.

The high priest said to Jesus before the synedrium:

I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you be the Christ, the Son of God. (Mt.26:63).

Jesus answered this question in the affirmative and added:

Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64).

He was then sentenced to death for blasphemy by the Synedrium. Additionally, he was sentenced to death for treason by the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate and crucified.

By dying on the cross, Nicodemus recognized that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been convicted of blasphemy, was the promised Messiah and, together with Joseph of Arimathea, prepared a royal burial for him. In doing so, he publicly confessed his faith in him.

The disciples, on the other hand, were completely at a loss and desperate. On the third day after the crucifixion, two of them reported to a stranger who asked about the events of the last days:

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: 20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. 21 But we hoped that it was he who should have redeemed Israel.

The stranger was the risen Jesus Christ, whom they had not recognized. He answered them, *O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: 26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? 27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:19-21 and 25-27).*

Appendix 3 Timeline of Jewish History by Mattis Kantor, excerpt

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/.../jewish/Timeline-of-Jewish-History.htm

SECULAR YEAR	JEWISH YEAR	EVENT IN HISTORY
-335	3426	Nehemiah returned to rebuild walls of Jerusalem
69	3829	The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed
133	3893	The Bar Kochba revolt ended in tragedy

Appendix 4 The Last False Messiah

Daniel 9:27 describes Israel's last seven years before the coming of the Messiah. These seven years begin with a seven-year covenant between the many of the people of Israel and the coming Prince: He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week; and in the middle of the week he will stop the sacrifice and meat offering (Dan.9:27).

A coming master diplomat of the Roman Empire in its future form will make this alliance. Included in this covenant is the reintroduction of the sacrificial service on the Temple Mount and the construction of the Third Temple (see my article: The Future of the Temple in Jerusalem). Thus, in the words of Maimonides, this coming prince will prove to be the Messiah.

But after three and a half years he will break the covenant and demand worship from the people of the earth (Rev.13). He will sit in the newly built temple and be worshiped as God (2 Thess. 2:3-4):

That day shall not come, except there come the falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The true Messiah will appear 1335 days after the breaking of the 7-year covenant (Dan.12:12) and will defeat the last false Messiah (Rev.19:11-21).

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