

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

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Are the events taking place in Israel and the Middle East today a sign of the coming of the Messiah?

Will the Messiah come in our day? —

As a King, a Rabbi or a General?

A spiritual prophet like Moses or Samuel, a warrior / king like David, or an anointed military commander like Joshua?

Or someone completely different?

Will his coming be preceded by unprecedented trouble or by a great improvement in world conditions? —

Or is the whole concept of the Messiah just a myth, which may give hope to people in the midst of their troubles, but has no possibility of fulfilment in the real world?

The Orthodox Jewish hope of the Messiah is that he will be an anointed King who will bring peace and the knowledge of God to Israel and to the world, restoring the Jewish people to Israel and rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. In his code of Jewish Law, Maimonides wrote that this is what the Messiah should do:

‘If a king arises from the House of David who meditates on the Torah, occupies himself with the commandments as did his ancestor King David, observes the commandments of the Written and Oral Law, prevails upon all Israel to walk in the way of the Torah and to follow its direction, and fights the wars of G-d, it may be assumed that he is the Messiah.

If he does these things and is fully successful, rebuilds the Third Temple on its location, and gathers the exiled Jews, he is beyond doubt the Messiah. But if he is not fully successful, or if he is killed, he is not the Messiah’.

The traditional Jewish teaching is that the Messiah must accomplish the following signs to show that he is the Messiah:

1. Have the correct genealogy being descended from King David.
2. Be anointed King of Israel.
3. Return the Jewish people to Israel.
4. Rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.
5. Bring peace to the world and end all war.
6. Bring knowledge of God to the world.

Putting this in the context of the modern world, Rabbi Winston of Aish wrote:

‘For millennia, Jews have eagerly anticipated the arrival of Moshiach (Messiah). ... Now, more than ever before the Jewish people, and even the world in general, need a saviour. ... We need someone who can, once and for all, bring an end to all human conflict, especially in the Middle East. And, if he can do that — a tall order — then perhaps he would also be able to destroy whatever other evil exists in the world. As he engineers this long-dreamed-of world peace, let him make unethical and immoral behaviour a thing of the past, too. In other words, this saviour, if he is truly a saviour, should usher in a permanent Utopian society where virtuous living is the main theme and second- (if not first-) nature. And, what shall we call this modern-day hero of Biblical proportions? In Judaism, he has always been called ‘Moshiach’— ‘the anointed one’— because, as a Jewish king he is to be anointed upon taking office, so-to-speak.’

Rabbi Kaplan, in his book ‘The Real Messiah’, wrote that the coming Messiah would be a ‘mortal human being born normally of human parents’ who will change the course of history:

‘Now imagine a charismatic leader greater than any other in man’s history. Imagine a political genius surpassing all others. With the vast communication networks now at our disposal, he could spread his message to the entire world and change the very fabric of society.’

He describes a possible scenario, which brings him to power:

‘One possible scenario could involve the Middle East situation. This is a problem that involves all the world powers. Now imagine a Jew, a Tzadik (literally a ‘righteous one’) solving this thorny problem. It would not be

inconceivable that such a demonstration of statesmanship and political genius would place him in a position of world leadership. The major powers would listen to such an individual.'

He goes on to describe how he would re-gather the exiles to Israel, cause the Temple to be rebuilt and teach all mankind to live in peace and follow God's teachings.

According to Rabbi Richman of the Temple Mount Faithful, the present establishment of the Jewish state of Israel is itself a sign of the coming Messiah:

"Prior to the coming of the Messiah, the Jewish people will begin to return to the Land of Israel and resettle the land. Since Jerusalem is the holiest spot, it is the most important city that must be rebuilt. In fact, there is even a tradition that the ingathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem will together go hand in hand as the two signs of a prelude to the coming of the Messiah."

On the other hand the Neturei Karta are Orthodox Jews who oppose Zionism and say that the present state of Israel is a violation of a command in the Talmud (Ketubot 110b-110a) that Israel should not 'rebel against the nations of the world'. They believe that the establishment of the State of Israel is a 'rebellion against the nations' and that only the coming of the Messiah can bring about the return of the Jewish people to Israel.

There are writings which indicate that there will be a time of great trouble for Israel at the time of the coming of the Messiah. The Yalkut Shimoni is a piece of rabbinic literature, the oldest copy of which dates back to around 1310, but quotes many rabbis who lived far earlier, during the Talmudic era in the first three centuries CE. It touches on many future scenarios for both the nation of Israel and the world in the days of the coming of the Messiah. It states:

'In the year the Messiah-King appears, all the nations of the world are provoking each other. The King of Persia provokes an Arab king and the Arab king turns to Aram for advice. The King of Persia goes back and destroys the entire world. And all the nations of the world are in panic and distress and they fall upon their faces and are seized with pains like those of a woman giving birth. And Israel are in panic and distress and asking, 'Where shall we go?' and He says to them, 'My sons do not fear, all that I have done, I have done only for you. Why are you afraid? Do

not fear, your time of redemption has come, and the final redemption is not like the first redemption because the first redemption was followed by sorrow and servitude under other kingdoms, but the final redemption is not followed by sorrow and servitude under other kingdoms.’

Writings in the Talmud say that prior to the coming of the Messiah there will be days of spiritual decline and trouble. Rabbi Sokolovsky in his book ‘Prophecy and Providence’ quotes a number of passages from the Talmud speaking of times of distress during the *lkveta d’Meshicha* (the heels of Messiah, the days before the coming of the Messiah):

‘Tragedy will come upon you at the end of all the days.’ (Targum Yonathan).

‘During the *lkveta d’Meshicha* insolence will abound. The young will make the faces of the elderly grow ashen with shame; the elderly will have to rise before the young; sons will disgrace fathers; daughters will rise up against their mothers; the members of one’s family will become his enemies.’ (Sotah 49b)

‘During the *lkveta d’Meshicha* government will turn atheist and there will be no protest. Truth will vanish.’ (Sanhedrin 97a, Sotah 49b)

Other passages in the Talmud describe a time which will be scientifically and technologically advanced to the extent that it will have the power to destroy the world (Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs 2:29). The times will be one of spiritual decay that will bring people so low that just as the wicked ways of the people living at the time of Noah brought upon them the flood, so also the generation that will see the Messiah should rightly be destroyed (Mishnah Sotah 0:15).

### **A time of trouble for the end of days**

So will there be a time of trouble in the days before the Messiah comes? The words from the Talmud already quoted say that ‘tragedy will come upon you at the end of days.’ They also speak of a time of wickedness like in the time of Noah. The Yalkut Shimoni warned of a conflict in the Middle East involving the Arab nations and Persia, which causes Israel to be in fear. In the present situation there is great turmoil in the Middle East with conflicts within Arab countries and the rise of radical Islamists whose goal is the destruction of Israel. Iran / Persia is also the main cause of fear for the future of Israel, with fears that

it will obtain a nuclear bomb and threaten Israel with destruction. All the nations are in fear of a terrible destruction coming out of the Middle East. In the Yalkut Shimoni prophecy this time of tribulation leads to the final redemption through the coming Messiah King.

Although words like these found in the Yalkut Shimoni and the Talmud are interesting, we should look to the Bible as the final word of God. He knows the end from the beginning and there are many passages which describe conditions on earth in 'the last days' of this age. In the Torah we read of Israel seeking the Lord in a time of distress, when 'all these things come upon you in the latter days.' (Deuteronomy / D'varim 4.30).

A number of passages in the prophets also speak of a time of trouble in the last days. Concerning these days we read in the Hebrew Prophets:

“For thus says the Lord. ‘We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear and not of peace. Ask now and see whether a man is ever in labour with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labour, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. .... In the latter days you will consider it.’ ” (Jeremiah 30:5-7, 31)

‘At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.’ (Daniel 12:1)

Similar words are also to be found in the ברית החדשה B'rith Hadasha (New Covenant / Testament) concerning the second coming of Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah. He also said that these days would be preceded by a time of unique trouble:

‘For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.’ (Matthew 24:21-22).

In the days before Yeshua comes again, there will be a time of moral decline, marked by violence and sexual immorality ‘as in the days of Noah’ and the ‘days of Lot’ (Sodom and Gomorrah). See Luke 17.26-30 / Genesis 6 and 19.

Wickedness will increase and most men's love will grow cold. (Matthew 24.12).

Character and behaviour will be in decline:

‘But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.’ (2 Timothy 3.1-5)

There will be wars and conflicts increasing, along with natural disasters and famines (Matthew 24.7). Following worldwide dispersion, the Jewish people will return to the land of Israel. The rebirth of Israel is prophesied in the Hebrew prophets (Ezekiel 36-39, Jeremiah 31.10). At the time of the end there will be a great conflict centering on Jerusalem (Zechariah 12; Luke 19.41-44; 21.20-24). In the New Testament it is seen as a sign of the second coming of the Messiah Yeshua who will return in person as the all-powerful king (King of kings and Lord of lords) to bring an end to war and bring peace to the world, starting from Jerusalem. At that time, according to the Book of Revelation:

‘the kingdoms of this world’ shall become ‘the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Messiah and He shall reign forever and ever!’  
(Revelation 11.15)

These prophecies tie in with current world conditions and are a sign that we are living in the last days of this age. / הימים אחרית

In Chapter 2 we look at some of the major prophecies of the end times . . . .

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