



*Christians, Jews, and the
Baby Messiah*

By

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I've had the privilege of speaking with many Jewish people through the years about their Messiah. I've found a lot of common ground with them about prophecies concerning the Messiah. However, I've also come across some major disagreements. For those Jews who believe the Messiah will be a person, one thing we can agree on is that the Messiah begins life as a baby. Question is, was it the baby Jesus?

Ask an Orthodox Jew about the Messiah and they will tell you he **will** come to Israel. Here is the 12th principle of **The Thirteen Fundamental Principles**:

*"I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Messiah; and although he may tarry, even though I wait every day for his coming."
(Shloshah Asar Ikkarim, The Thirteen Fundamental Principles,
Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 12th century AD)*

Orthodox Jews believe so strongly in the Messiah that they will often bless each other with the words, "you shall live to see Meshiach." The word "meshiach, mashiach, moshiach" (Messiah) means "anointed." Jews believe God will send a man, the Messiah, to bring Jewish exiles back to Israel, rebuild the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem, establish Israel as the leading nation of earth, and bring utopia to the world by ridding it of all evil. Rabbi ben Maimon (Maimonides) believed the Messiah would be an ancestor of King David, a student of the Torah, would compel Israel to walk in the ways of the Torah, would rebuild the Temple, fight and win great military battles on earth, and lead all nations to worship Jehovah. Maimonides believed the

Messiah would be an extremely wise man and powerful military leader, but not a miracle worker and certainly not God.

[There is also an old tradition among some Jews that there will be two Messiahs, one called Mashiach ben Joseph and another known as Mashiach ben David. Messiah ben Joseph would come first and prepare the world for ben David's arrival. Messiah ben Joseph would be killed during a battle with Israel's enemies (based on Zechariah 12:10 - "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then 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."). A time of great trouble would come upon Israel after ben Joseph's death, but then Messiah ben David would arrive to avenge ben Joseph's death, raise ben Joseph from the dead, and bring in the great time of Israel's peace.]

Where Orthodox Jews view the Messiah as a human being, many Conservative and Reformed Jews view "messiah" more as the concept of establishing justice through the effort of many humans, not necessarily one "anointed" person who defeats Israel's enemies and ushers in universal peace. So, which is it? Will Messiah be a man or a concept? Will Messiah be one person or many people?

Israel's namesake, Jacob (Israel), was dying. He called his 12 sons and said to them, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days." (Genesis 49:1) This is an extremely important portion of Scripture for Jews. Israel's patriarch Jacob is

going to tell his sons, the heads of the 12 Tribes of Israel, what is going to befall them “in the last days.”

The “last days” in the understanding of Jacob and his sons was when God would bring about all the blessings in the covenant He made with Abraham. God promised Abraham He would make him a great nation, bless him, make his name great, bless those who blessed him, curse those who cursed him, and bless all the families of the earth in him (Genesis 12:1-3). God passed the prophetic blessing along to Abraham’s son Isaac and Isaac’s son Jacob. Now it was time for Jacob to pass it along to his sons, who would be the heads of the great Hebrew nation.

Jacob first spoke to his oldest son Reuben, then to Simeon and Levi. After that Jacob prophesied to Judah, who was the ancestor of Israel’s great king David. Here’s what Jacob told Judah about what would befall him “in the last days.”

“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? 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. Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. His

eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk.”

Genesis 49:8-12

The “scepter” would not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until “Shiloh” comes. The Hebrew word for “scepter” is *sebet* and is used for the first time in Genesis 49:10. The word was used for a rod or staff that signified authority or special office of authority. Jacob was saying that the staff of authority would not depart from Judah “until Shiloh comes.” The Hebrew word *siloh* comes from the root word *shalah* (requires, to draw out) and carries the idea of being in peace and prosperity. The city of Shiloh was the first seat of government after Joshua led Israel into Canaan. “The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The country was brought under their control.” (Joshua 18:1) It was at Shiloh that Joshua divided up the land for the remaining tribes of Israel that had not yet received their inheritance. You can read more about events in the life of Israel in Shiloh in Judges, 1 Samuel, and 1 Kings. The prophet Jeremiah also mentioned the city of Shiloh several times in his prophecies concerning the future of Israel.

The Hebrew prophet Moses also spoke about the future coming of a great prophet to Israel who would be like Moses. Not everyone is in agreement that this future prophet like Moses would also be the Messiah, but many believe he is.

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” Deuteronomy 18:15-18

God sent many prophets to Israel from the time of Moses to the time of Malachi. Most spoke of a future age of universal peace for Israel and the other nations of the world.

“Therefore wait for Me,’ says the Lord, ‘Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy. ‘For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the Lord, To serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, The daughter of My dispersed ones, Shall bring My offering. In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds In which you transgress against Me; For then I will take away from your midst Those who rejoice in your pride, And you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst meek and humble people, And they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The

remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness And speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, And no one shall make them afraid.” Zephaniah 3:8-13

[Also read Hosea 2:20-22; Amos 9:13-15; Isaiah 2:1-4; 32:15:18; 60:15-18; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 8:23; 14:9; and Jeremiah 31:33-34]

So, who is the ‘anointed one’ God will send to Israel?

Most Jews and Christians agree that after a long time of trouble, God will establish Israel as the foremost nation in the world and will bring about universal peace. That’s where the Messiah comes into the picture. Some Jews believe the Messiah will be a man from the lineage of King David, with impeccable spiritual credentials, who will lead Israel to defeat the great armies of the world and bring in a time of universal peace. Some Jews believe the people of Israel will rise up with the help of God and bring in a time of lasting peace through the principles of messiah. Christians believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel and will come back to earth a second time to defeat the armies of the world and establish great peace in Israel. So, who’s right?

First, let’s look for common ground. Christians and Jews have much to agree upon because both view the Hebrew Bible as the Word of God. Jews would agree with Christians that many passages in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament to Christians) refer to God’s Messiah. They include Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-10; 42:1-4; 59:20; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Hosea 3; Zechariah 14; and Ezekiel 37:24-27.

“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” Ezekiel 37:24-27

The Messiah of Israel will be “David My servant.” How can that be since King David died almost 3,000 years ago? Will God raise David from the dead and place him on his throne in Jerusalem again? No, Jews and Christians believe the future king will be from the lineage of David. Notice what happens when the Messiah is king over all the people.

1. they will all have one shepherd
2. they will walk in God’s judgments
3. they will observe God’s statutes, and do them
4. they will dwell in the land that God gave to Jacob His servant, where their “fathers” lives
5. they will live there with their children and their children’s children, forever

6. the Messiah will be their “prince” forever
7. God will make an everlasting covenant of peace with Israel
8. God will establish Israel and multiply the people
9. God will set His sanctuary in their midst forever
10. God’s tabernacle will also be with them
11. God will be their God and Israel will be His people
12. The nations will know that the Lord set Israel apart when His sanctuary is in their midst forevermore

Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah God promised to Israel, but that the leaders of Israel rejected Him when He presented Himself to them in Jerusalem. Christians point to all of the Messianic verses in the Hebrew Bible and say that Jesus fulfilled or will fulfill all of the promises God made to Israel. So, why don’t Jews believe that?

Jews have had about 2,000 years to respond to Christian claims that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, so the list is pretty long. Here are six of the reasons I’ve heard most often from Jewish friends through the years.

1. Jesus was not a descendant of King David and King Solomon, so He couldn’t be the Messiah.
2. Jesus did not rule Israel from David’s throne while He was on earth, so He couldn’t be the Messiah.
3. The Temple in Jerusalem was standing when Jesus was on earth, so there was no need to rebuild it. The Romans destroyed the Temple within a generation after Jesus was crucified and has never been rebuilt, so Jesus couldn’t be the

Messiah.

4. There has been no universal time of peace since Jesus was on earth, so He couldn't be the Messiah.
5. The nations of the earth have not come together to know God and worship Him, so Jesus couldn't be the Messiah.
6. All of the Jewish exiles have not returned to their homeland, so Jesus couldn't be the Messiah.

Christians respond to these and other reasons from Jews that Jesus could not be the Messiah by explaining that while many of the people of Israel and Samaria responded to Jesus as the promised Messiah, the religious leaders of Judaism (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin) rejected Jesus and convinced the Roman governor to crucify Him. Christians say that God raised Jesus from the grave and received Him back into Heaven, where He waits for the Day He will return to Israel to establish the Messianic Kingdom.

Jews respond to Christians that the Hebrew Bible does not mention anything about the Messiah coming to earth twice, so they won't accept this answer about a "Second Coming." While some Jews through history have viewed Jesus in a positive light, most believe Jesus was a false messiah. One of the reasons Jews claim is that Jesus contradicted the Torah while He was on earth and taught people that the commandments of Moses were no longer to be obeyed.

Christians respond that Jesus made it abundantly clear during His earthly ministry that He supported every part of the Law and Prophets.

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:17-20

Jews respond to this by supporting the words of the Pharisees and Sadducees quoted in the Gospels about how Jesus disobeyed the Law by healing on the Sabbath (e.g. John 9:13-16 – “Therefore some of the Pharisees said, ‘This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’). It is a common tactic when rebutting evidence to use an opponent’s own evidence against them. However, Jews who quote John 9:16 as evidence against Jesus should be careful to quote the entire verse – “Therefore some of the Pharisees said, ‘This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’ Others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them.”

It's important to note that some religious leaders in Israel took Jesus seriously and were opposed to opposing Him. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, visited Jesus by night to question Him (John 3). Nicodemus later spoke in defense of Jesus (though in a weak manner) and was called down by his fellow rulers (John 7). By the time the religious rulers convinced the Roman governor to kill Jesus, Nicodemus had become a true believer in Jesus as Israel's Messiah and helped prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19). After Jesus' resurrection and return to Heaven, one of the leading members of the ruling council of Israel (Sanhedrin) recommended that the council not oppose Jesus' apostles in case they might be found to fight against God.

“Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: ‘Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight

against God.” Acts 5:34-39

What is the **real** reason Jews don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah?

One of the biggest objections Jews have to Jesus Christ being Israel's promised Messiah is the fact He has not fulfilled the Hebrew prophecies about defeating Israel's enemies and establishing the Davidic rule of the world from a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. However, the Apostle Peter spoke to that objection almost 2,000 years ago.

“But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:18-26

Jesus did fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah's suffering and would have fulfilled all of the other prophecies “if” Israel had repented and been converted. God would have forgiven their sins and sent Jesus Christ from Heaven back to Israel to establish the long-promised Messianic Kingdom. As we know, Israel rejected the offer and killed many of Christ's followers in a futile attempt to

destroy those “who were of the Way.” (Acts 9:2)

It's important to note that all of the people who believed Jesus was Israel's Messiah during the time Jesus was on earth and immediately following His return to Heaven were Jews. Thousands of Jews believed and endured brutal persecution after Pentecost. The first blood of martyrs for the Kingdom of God was Jewish blood. So, why haven't more Jews embraced Jesus as their Messiah during all the centuries since God made His offer to Israel through the Apostles?

The answer to the question is best answered by a Pharisaic Jew of the 1st century AD who helped spill the first Jewish blood.

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’” Romans 9:30-33

Saul of Tarsus, better known as the Apostle Paul, continued in his letter to Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome that Israel needs the Gospel.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Romans 10:1-4

Jews do not embrace their Messiah today in large numbers because Israel has rejected Jesus since the 1st century AD. It broke Paul’s heart as a Jew who had met the Messiah personally and was able to speak to the truth of Jesus from the perspective of his deep knowledge of Judaism and personal experience with Jesus Christ.

We learn from Paul that **Israel’s rejection is not total.**

“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ‘Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life’? But what does the divine response say to him? ‘I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer

grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day.' And David says: 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always.'" Romans 10:1-10

Paul also taught that **Israel's rejection is not final.**

"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" Romans 11:11-12

Paul taught that Israel's future is tied to that of the Gentiles. He called it "the fullness of the Gentiles."

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.' Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the

calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” Romans 11:25-32

Remember the baby Messiah? Many Jews believe their Messiah will begin life as a baby. They believe he will grow up to fight for Israel and lead Israel to a bright future of great peace and prosperity. Christians believe the Messiah already came to Israel to fight for them and lead them to a bright future of great peace and prosperity. Jesus began the battle for Israel by defeating Satan and sin on the Cross. Jesus will end the battle when He returns and destroys Israel's enemies (Revelation 19:11-21). What a wonderful blessing we all have from God.

*“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”
Romans 11:33-36*

One last Messianic note for Jews and Gentiles alike comes from the prophet Isaiah. He wrote this during one of Israel's truly dark times. What we read is a word of hope and encouragement for Israel, for

Christians, and for the world.

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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.” Isaiah 9:6-7

To all our Jewish friends during this season of hope, we pray **you will live to know and see Meshiach.**

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