

FIFTY MESSIAHS AND STILL WAITING



Many deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7).

The Jewish bookstore proprietor, Mr. Golden, was adamant with me. “Jesus *cannot* be the Jewish Messiah. The world is still in virtual chaos; children are hungry; diseases kill millions; and war and terrorism are tragic realities. Where is the world’s universal peace and prosperity that originate from the Messiah’s coming? These did not accompany Jesus, did they?”

The normally gentle Orthodox Jewish bookseller did believe that a messiah would ultimately come based on his confidence in Jewish sages and rabbinic opinion. For example, the outstanding 12th-century theologian, physician, and philosopher, the famous Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon (“Ramban”) mandated in his “Thirteen Articles of Faith” the daily Orthodox Jewish recitation of, “I believe in the coming of the Messiah; and though he tarry, yet will I daily wait for him.”

Yet Rambam also strongly warned Jews against following false messiahs in his *Letter to Yemen* (1192) where he recounted the histories of four recent messianic claimants. These false messiahs had not only met with tragic fates; they also had brought shame, ridicule, and catastrophe on the Jewish world. Messiahs ranged from reportedly being miracle-working charismatic dreamers to messianic draftees compelled by Jewish people desperately needing national redemption. All told, since the time of Jesus, more than 50 documented Jewish messiahs have led Israel down the

same dead-end street to amplified grief and depressing disillusionment.

The Jewish pursuit of messianic pretenders while simultaneously rejecting Jesus as Messiah befuddles many Bible-savvy Christians. Evangelical eschatology holds a substitutionary messianic imposter (an *antichrist*) will yet flash on the global horizon and have immense, though temporary, appeal to the Jewish masses. Yet, it remains a mystery how the people of the Book could entirely miss God’s full messianic revelation in Jesus — Israel’s only God-appointed Anointed One, the Messiah. Paul laid this sin to Satan’s charge, e.g., “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Only God has authenticated the Messiah Jesus by His resurrection from the dead.

THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHY OF THE MESSIANIC ANOINTING

The kings since Saul and David and the priests since Aaron in the Hebrew Bible had been anointed for divine service. The verb *mashah* meaning to “anoint” or the “oiling of the body” was applied to the *mashiah* or the “anointed one.” The oil was poured from a *shofar* (ram’s horn) or alternate vessel on the head of the anointed one as God’s chosen means of publicly declaring the One carefully chosen for auspicious divine assignment. The act of anointing conferred *kabowd* or “honor, weightiness” on the recipient and signified the anointed one’s divine authorization to execute his God-appointed commission.

The newly anointed one was to be honored by Hebrew society as a solid “heavyweight” in God’s order. It was not enough for the messianic personality to simply be divinely designated. Rather, the people who stood to benefit from his heavenly ordained administration corporately needed to openly acknowledge him as their God-enabled leader. While

the one so anointed was issued authority and provided protection by divine decree, the people of God were under obligation to submit to God's appointed anointed king or jeopardize their own legitimacy as God's faithful servants. To reject God's anointed king or priest was to hazard the social well-being of God's carefully nurtured faith community.

For example, despising the unique role of God's anointed high priest would make his priestly intercession futile in the wake of communal rejection. Only full dependence on the high priest's ministry would yield the desired and beneficial interaction with God that Israel needed. Likewise, disobedience to the king was insubordination to God. Refusal to walk in submission to God's appointed and anointed king would temporarily nullify the direct benefit of the king's reign that would otherwise be Israel's immediate experience. Certainly no God-defying person or community could expect to inherit the divine blessings associated with the Messianic kingdom in their active hostility to God and His Anointed (Psalm 2).

THE FOLLY OF FAITHLESSNESS

Rejection of God's true Messiah, Jesus, led directly to the momentary loss of

the riches of God's kingdom blessings on Israel until the day when Israel will embrace Jesus and again fully benefit from faithful obedience to God. Paul certainly anticipated that pending day of corporate repentance when "all Israel will be saved"

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(Romans 11:26). But in the interim, defiance of God's revelation by religious leadership has yielded a long list of tragic episodes in the annals of Jewish history. Following man-chosen messiahs has led to Jewish grief and pain beyond imagination and well illustrates the maxim, "Truth is stranger than fiction."

PRETENDERS AND ANTICHRISTS

There have been at least 50 messianic imposters since Jesus' time. Rambam reported that one Yemenite messiah offered proof of his resurrection power by challenging his adversaries to chop off his head and then witness his resuscitation. Duly impressed, they complied. The story ended right there.

The vast majority of Palestinian Jewry followed Simon Bar Kochba from 132 to 135 A.D. when he claimed messiahship and challenged the might of Rome. At the end of his bloody campaign, most of his colleagues and followers were dead, including the famous Rabbi Akiva. Jerusalem's name was changed by Rome to Aelia Capitolina and entry into the Holy City by Jews was punished with death.

Shabbatai Zvi was acknowledged as messiah by some 50 percent of European Jewry in 1665-66. A hallucinating Nathan of Gaza, Zvi's own Elijah the prophet, announced that the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel were presently waiting the signal to gather again with their European Jewish cousins in the Promised Land. Diplomatic confrontation with the incredulous and angry Turkish Sultan led Zvi to convert to

Islam to save his life, much to the horror of his multitudes of loyal Jewish followers. But Zvi's conversion to Islam did not dissuade others from their misguided faith. Some even advocated that the messiah had to sin in this way to bring about global redemption. Zvi ultimately died in prison 10 years later in the wake of massive disillusionment.

Jakob Frank, another messianic imposter, claimed in the 18th century to be the reincarnation of Shabbatai Zvi. Frank advocated that a world of undiminished evil would effectively provoke God to release the messianic redemption and kingdom into being. Religious communities were encouraged to engage in gross communal sin to compel a distraught God to immediate messianic action. After some painfully shattering societal episodes, the rabbis condemned Frank as a heretic. He and many of his followers ultimately found refuge from their fellow Jewish antagonists by religious conversion to Roman Catholicism.

The most recent internationally proclaimed Jewish messiah was Menachem Schneersohn of Brooklyn, head of the



Chabad Lubavitch movement, who died in 1994. Many thousands of his disillusioned followers anticipated his physical resurrection from his New York grave. For years this led to inevitable religious group factionalism.

The Zvi and Frank episodes generated disillusionment in the Jewish world, and many thereafter totally disavowed any belief in a coming Messiah. Modern Jews were prepared to disassociate from both the biblical promises of a Messiah and traditional Jewish Orthodoxy due to the sad results of Jewish messianism. The majority of the Jewish world today has lost all hope for a coming Messiah and a corresponding redemption. How utterly tragic this is for Jewish people. Jesus is the Promised Messiah, the Anointed One of God, and the One still to bring total redemption and complete fulfillment of the biblical promises to the House of Israel.

THE SURPRISING ANCIENT RABBINIC CORRESPONDENCE WITH CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS

Both intertestamental apocryphal literature and post-New Testament rabbinical *Targumim* (translations) offer an amazing Jewish perspective on the Messiah. While the *Mishnah* (A.D. 200) does not express messianic hopes, the *Targumim* include the following: (1) The Messiah's kingdom precedes the resurrection and judgment; (2) The Messiah will remain hidden due to Israel's unrighteousness; (3) The Messiah is prophet, Torah-teacher, and king; (4) The Messiah makes a new covenant between God and Israel; (5) The Messiah does not violate the Torah on any point; (6) The Messiah has prophetic gifts because the Holy Spirit rests on Him; (7) The

Messiah's task is to establish righteousness and cause others to conform to God's Law; sinners are hurled into *Gehenna*; (8) The Messiah sanctifies Israel and ushers in peace and prosperity; (9) The Messiah will rule in righteousness and rebuild the temple; (10) Miracles and longevity of man will result from His reign.

But before millions of American Jews, including Mr. Golden, can eyewitness the fulfillment of the prophesied messianic blessings, "All Israel shall be saved." It behooves Pentecostals everywhere to inspire the Jewish trusting embrace of the true Messiah, Jesus.



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