

Jewish Beliefs and Teachings: Messiah (Mashiach)

What does the specification say?

Messiah (Mashiach)

➤ Different views within Orthodox and Reform Judaism about the nature and role of the Mashiach (Messiah); special person who brings an age of peace, ourselves, his arrival as signaling the end of the world, praying for his coming, concerned more with living life according to the mitzvot

KEY CONCEPT VOCABULARY (KCV): Messiah (Mashiach) – *The anointed one who Jews believe will bring in a new era or age for humankind. This may include rebuilding the Temple and bringing in an age of universal peace.*

- There are no definite teachings about the Messiah in the Torah (Five Books of the Law – 613 mitzvot). This means that any relevant passages in holy texts are being **interpreted** rather than there being clear guidance from G_d on this.
- **Judaism is a faith of action** and so the 'here and now' is what is considered to be the most important thing. Following the 613 mitzvot (taryag mitzvot). This is seen in the Mishnah (a holy text written by a collection of Rabbis over many generations) which states "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward. (Ethics of the Fathers 1:3)".
- The belief in Gan Edan (the world to come) or **the afterlife is beyond human understanding** as what happens at the 'end times' is down to G_d not humanity.

The Messianic Age Vs. The Messiah?

The End of Days - Belief in the Messiah:

Some Jews believe in the coming of the messiah at the end of days (**eschat – end of time**). The messiah is believed to be a descendant from the House of David (the second king of the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah) who will **save humanity** and **establish the reign of G_d** on earth, **rebuild the temple** and bring **all the Jews back to Israel**. The term messiah comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed'. The idea of anointment refers to a ceremony by which biblical kings were selected using oil (poured over their heads) to confirm them as king. **The messiah is seen as the new ruler bringing about perfect peace (Shalom) on earth.**

Messianic Age (Reformed/Progressive Views):

However, **some Jews see the messiah not as a person but as a time when humanities attitudes and actions are more godlike**. This is sometimes referred to as the messianic age. In this view, it is humans themselves led by Jewish example that will produce a state of perfect peace on earth.

When Might the Messiah Come?

There are no references in the Torah as to when the Messiah may come. Some Jews believe this is because the Messianic Age is beyond human understanding and will be revealed by G_d at a time of G_d's choosing. Some Jews have tried to calculate the arrival date of the Messiah.

RT *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

(Malachi 4:5-6) – Jews include an empty chair at the table during the Pesach festival celebrations in anticipation that Elijah will return to announce the Messiah's arrival shown in the prophecy above.

Meir Loeb ben Yehiel predicted (1868) the Messiah would come in 1913. There have also been false Messiahs too, such as Shabbetai Tzvi (from the seventeenth century) who convinced thousands but converted to Islam upon threat of death.

What will the Messiah do?

There is not one set of coherent beliefs in Judaism about who the Messiah will be, what they will do or even if they will be a person at all. But in those who do believe in a Messiah, the focus is not so much when the Messiah will come but what the Messiah will bring about. The more traditional beliefs suggest that the Messiah will be a great political leader and judge. This person will bring about **'the end of days'** or the **'end**

times'. Some believe he will be less of a supernatural being but a **human being descended from the House of David** (King David as discussed above) who will be an inspiration to others. Different Jews again believe every generation a person is born with the potential to be the Messiah should G_d require them on Earth.

What is clear from the paragraph above is that there is no one unified belief about the Messiah. However, in the TANAKH (the Jewish holy text split into three parts – Torah (Five books of the Law), Neviim (The Prophets) and Ketuvim (The Writings)) three specific examples are given as to what the Messiah may do:

- 1) He will bring Jews back to Israel and restore Jerusalem.
- 2) He will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem – the original place of worship and holiest place on Earth for some Jews (the original second Temple was destroyed in 70AD by the Romans following a Jewish uprising).
- 3) He will bring about a time of peace and forgiveness when people will live together in harmony without fighting (***“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them”***. Isaiah 11:6)

Different views within Judaism about the nature and the role of the Messiah

Orthodox views: Orthodox Judaism maintains that Jews are obliged to accept the 13 Principles of Faith as formulated by Maimonides. Each principle starts with the words Ani Maamin (I believe). Number 12 is the main principle relating to Mashiach. Orthodox Jews strictly believe in a Messiah, life after death, and restoration of the **Promised Land**. The translation is as follows:

“I believe with full faith in the coming of the Messiah. And even though he tarries, with all that, I await his arrival with every day.”

Hasidic Judaism (Ultra Orthodox): Hasidic Jews tend to have a particularly strong and passionate belief in the immediacy of the Messiah's coming, and in the ability of their actions to hasten his arrival. Because of the supposed piousness, wisdom, and leadership abilities of the Hasidic Masters, members of Hasidic communities are sometimes inclined to regard their dynastic rabbis as potential candidates for Messiah. Many Jews, especially Hasidim, adhere to the belief that there is a person born each generation with the potential to become Messiah, if the Jewish people warrant his coming; this candidate is known as the Tzadik Ha-Dor, meaning Righteous One of the Generation. However, fewer are likely to name a candidate.

Conservative Judaism: Their statement of principles, states the following: Since no one can say for certain what will happen in the Messianic era each of us is free to fashion personal speculation. Some of us accept these speculations are literally true, while others understand them as elaborate metaphors... For the world community we dream of an age when warfare will be abolished, when justice and compassion will be axioms of all, as it is said in Isaiah 11: "...the land shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." For our people, we dream of the ingathering of all Jews to Zion where we can again be masters of our own destiny and express our distinctive genius in every area of our national life. We affirm Isaiah's prophecy (2:3) that "...Torah shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." We do not know when the Messiah will come, nor whether he will be a charismatic human figure or is a symbol of the redemption of humankind from the evils of the world. Through the doctrine of a Messianic figure, Judaism teaches us that every individual human being must live as if he or she, individually, has the responsibility to bring about the messianic age. Beyond that, we echo the words of Maimonides based on the prophet Habakkuk (2:3) that "though he may tarry, yet do we wait for him each day."

Reform and Reconstructionist (Progressive) Judaism: Reform Judaism and Reconstructionist Judaism generally do not accept the idea that there will be a Messiah. Some believe that there may be some sort of "messianic age" (the World to Come) in the sense of a "utopia", which all Jews are obligated to work towards (thus the tradition of Tikkun olam—healing the world). It will be the good actions of human beings that will bring a Messianic Age of peace.