

# The Messiah Concept

## Introduction

The concept of the Messiah has been a central theme in Jewish and Christian theology for millennia. Rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, the messianic hope evolved through different historical periods, shaped by political, cultural, and religious contexts. This explores the development of the Messiah concept in **First Temple Judaism**, **Second Temple Judaism**, and **Christianity**, with a particular focus on messianic prophecies during the Second Temple period. It also examines the theological tensions surrounding the Messiah, including the idea of a suffering Messiah and the concept of the **Messiah Son of Joseph**.

## The Term "Messiah"

- The term "Messiah" (Hebrew: *masiah*) means "anointed" and was used in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to kings (Psalm 2:2) and priests (Leviticus 8:10–12).
- In the Second Temple period, the Messiah was often viewed as a king-priest or warrior-judge who would restore Israel.

## The Messiah Concept in First Temple Judaism

During the First Temple period (c. 1000–586 BCE), the messianic idea was closely tied to the Davidic monarchy. The covenant God made with King David (2 Samuel 7:12–16) established the expectation of an eternal dynasty, with a future king who would rule in righteousness and bring peace to Israel. Key prophecies, such as those in **Isaiah 9:6–7** and **Jeremiah 23:5–6**, emphasized a royal Messiah descended from David who would restore Israel's glory.

- **Key Themes:**
    - A royal, victorious king.
    - Restoration of the Davidic throne.
    - Establishment of justice and peace.
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## **The Messiah Concept in Second Temple Judaism**

The Second Temple period (516 BCE–70 CE) saw a diversification of messianic expectations. After the Babylonian exile and under foreign domination (Persian, Greek, and Roman), Jewish hopes for a Messiah became more complex and varied. The destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent struggles for independence fueled apocalyptic and eschatological expectations.

## **Messianic Expectations in Second Temple Judaism**

### **The Context of Second Temple Judaism and Messianic Expectations**

Since the earliest days of the Jesus Movement, Christianity has proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited Messiah of the Jewish people. To understand what this proclamation meant in the context of the Roman Empire and Second Temple Judaism, it is essential to examine the theological and political expectations of the Jewish idea of Messiah during this period.

### **Diversity of Messianic Expectations**

- **Political Messiah:** Many Jews expected a kingly figure who would overthrow Roman rule and restore the Davidic monarchy, as seen in the Maccabean Revolt and Hasmonean Dynasty.
- **Priestly Messiah:** Groups like the Essenes anticipated a messianic figure from the line of Aaron who would restore true worship.
- **Apocalyptic Messiah:** Some texts, such as **4 Ezra** and **2 Baruch**, describe a heavenly figure who would usher in the final Kingdom of God.

### **4 Ezra 13:3-4, 25-26**

- 3: And I beheld, and, lo, that man waxed strong with the thousands of heaven: and when he turned his countenance to look, all the things trembled that were seen under him.  
4: And whensoever the voice went out of his mouth, all they burned that heard his voice, like as the earth faileth when it feeleth the fire.
- 25: This is the meaning of the vision: Whereas thou sawest a man coming up from the midst of the sea:

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26: The same is he whom God the Highest hath kept a great season, which by his own self shall deliver his creature: and he shall order them that are left behind.

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## **2 BARUCH 40:**

- 1 The last ruler who is left alive at that time will be bound, whereas the entire host will be destroyed. And they will carry Him on Mount Zion, and MY Anointed One will convict him of all his wicked deeds and will assemble and set before him all the works of his hosts. 2 BARUCH 40:2 And after these things He will kill him and protect the rest of MY people who will be found in the place that I have chosen. 2 BARUCH 40:3 And His dominion will last forever until the world of corruption has ended and until the times which have been mentioned before have been fulfilled. 2 BARUCH 40:4 This is your vision, and this is its explanation.

## **Messianic Prophecies in Second Temple Judaism**

- **Isaiah 53:** The "Suffering Servant" passage describes a figure who bears the sins of others, is despised and rejected, and ultimately vindicated by God. This prophecy became central to Christian claims about Jesus.
- **Zechariah 12:10:** The prophecy of a pierced Messiah who would be mourned like an only son.
- **Daniel 7:13–14:** The vision of the "Son of Man" coming on the clouds of heaven, which influenced both Jewish and Christian messianic expectations.

## **The Messiah Concept in Christianity**

Christianity emerged within the context of Second Temple Judaism, claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of Jewish messianic prophecies. However, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection presented a radical reinterpretation of the Messiah concept.

## Jesus as the Crucified Messiah

The crucifixion of Jesus was a stumbling block for many Jews, as it contradicted the expectation of a triumphant, royal Messiah. Yet, early Christians saw Jesus' suffering and death as the fulfillment of prophecies like **Isaiah 53** and **Zechariah 12:10**.

- **The Crucifixion Narrative:**

- Jesus' physical suffering and death on the cross.
- The disciples' confusion and despair, as their hopes for a political Messiah seemed shattered.
- The theological significance of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice for sin.

- **Resurrection and Vindication:**

- The resurrection of Jesus affirmed his messianic identity and fulfilled prophecies of a suffering yet victorious Messiah.
- Early Christians interpreted Jesus as both the **Messiah Son of David** (royal king) and the **Messiah Son of Joseph** (suffering servant).

## The Messiah Son of Joseph

The concept of a **Messiah Son of Joseph** reflects the Jewish struggle to reconcile conflicting messianic prophecies. While the **Messiah Son of David** represents a triumphant king, the **Messiah Son of Joseph** embodies a suffering and dying figure.

## Origins and Development

- The idea of a suffering Messiah predates Christianity and is rooted in Jewish interpretations of **Isaiah 53** and **Zechariah 12:10**.
- The **Messiah Son of Joseph** is associated with Joseph, the son of Jacob, whose life of suffering and eventual exaltation prefigured the messianic role.

## **Theological Significance**

- The **Messiah Son of Joseph** represents the paradox of a Messiah who suffers and dies, yet ultimately brings salvation.
- Early Christians saw Jesus as the fulfillment of both messianic roles: the suffering servant (**Messiah Son of Joseph**) and the triumphant king (**Messiah Son of David**).

## **Messianic Prophecies and Their Fulfillment**

### **Isaiah 53: The Suffering Servant**

- Describes a figure who is despised, rejected, and wounded for the transgressions of others.
- Early Christians identified Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophecy, citing his crucifixion and resurrection.
- Jewish interpretations, however, often reject this application, instead viewing the Suffering Servant as a metaphor for the nation of Israel.

### **Zechariah 12:10: The Pierced Messiah**

- Foretells a Messiah who will be pierced and mourned.
- Christians see this as a direct reference to Jesus' crucifixion.
- Jewish interpretations often view this as an eschatological prophecy yet to be fulfilled.

## **How Messianic Prophecy Works**

Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament often involves specific predictions about future events and figures, which are later understood to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus. These prophecies serve as criteria for identifying the Messiah.

## **Examples of Messianic Prophecies and Their Fulfillment**

### **1. The Messiah's Ancestry:**

- **Prophecy:** The Messiah must be a descendant of David (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17).

- **Fulfillment:** Jesus' lineage is traced to the House of David through his mother, Mary (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38).

## 2. The Messiah's Birthplace:

- **Prophecy:** The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- **Fulfillment:** Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–6; Luke 2:4–7).

## 3. The Virgin Birth

| Isa      | 7:14                     | Bible                                      |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|          | 'ā-ḡō-nāy                |                                            |
| 1931 [e] | הוּ<br>hū                | He Pro-3ms                                 |
|          | לָכֶם<br>lā-ḡem          | you Prep   2mp                             |
| 226 [e]  | אֵי<br>'ō-wṭ             | a sign N-cs                                |
| 2009 [e] | הִנֵּה<br>hin-nēh        | behold Interjection                        |
| 5959 [e] | הַעַלְמָה<br>hā-'al-māh, | the virgin Art   N-fs                      |
| 2030 [e] | הָרָה<br>hā-rāh          | shall become pregnant Adj-fs               |
| 3205 [e] | וַיֵּלֶד<br>wa-yō-le-ḡeṭ | and bear Conj-w   V-Qal-Prtcpl-fs          |
| 1121 [e] | בֶּן<br>bēn,             | a Son N-ms                                 |
| 7121 [e] | וַיִּקְרָא<br>wa-qā-rāṭ  | and shall call Conj-w   V-Qal-ConjPerf-3fs |
| 8034 [e] | שְׁמוֹ<br>šmō            | His name N-msc   3ms                       |

### Isiah 7:14 LXX

14 διὰ τοῦτο δώσει Κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον· ἰδοὺ ἡ **παρθένος** ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει, καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ·

## 4. The Messiah's Nature:

- **Prophecy:** The Messiah will have a divine nature, embodying God's presence (Isaiah 9:6; Zechariah 12:10).
- **Fulfillment:** Jesus is described as the "Son of God" and the embodiment of God (John 1:1–14; Colossians 2:9).

## 5. The Messiah's Mission:

- **Prophecy:** The Messiah will heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and raise the dead (Isaiah 35:5–6).
- **Fulfillment:** Jesus performed numerous miracles, including healing the blind and raising the dead (Matthew 11:4–5; John 11:43–44).

## 6. The Messiah's Death:

- **Prophecy:** The Messiah will be pierced and die as a sacrifice for sin (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10).
- **Fulfillment:** Jesus was crucified, fulfilling these prophecies (Matthew 27:35; John 19:34–37).

## 7. The Messiah's Rejection:

- **Prophecy:** The Messiah will be rejected by His own people (Isaiah 53:3; Psalm 118:22).
- **Fulfillment:** Jesus was rejected by many of the Jewish leaders and people of His time (John 1:11; Matthew 21:42).

# Messiah in Islam

## The Meaning of "Messiah" is Undefined in Islam

The Quran repeatedly refers to Jesus as *Al-Masih* (e.g., *Surah Al-Imran* 3:45, *Surah An-Nisa* 4:157, 4:171), but it **never explains what this title means**. This is problematic because:

- **The Jewish concept of Messiah** (a kingly deliverer from David's line) is incompatible with the Islamic portrayal of Jesus.
- **The Christian concept of Messiah** (a divine Savior) is rejected by Islam.
- **Islamic scholars struggle to define Messiah** beyond vague meanings like "the anointed one" or "one who travels." If the title was truly important, why is its meaning not clarified?
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## 2. The Messiah in Jewish Tradition is a Kingly Ruler, But Jesus in Islam is Not

In Jewish tradition, the Messiah was expected to be a **Davidic king** who would:

- Restore Israel's sovereignty.
- Rule the nations with justice (*Isaiah 9:6-7*).
- Defeat Israel's enemies (*Ezekiel 37:24-25*).

However, in Islam:

- Jesus is **not from the Davidic lineage** (he has no human father).
- Jesus **does not establish a kingdom** or rule politically.
- Jesus **did not fulfill messianic prophecies** related to ruling Israel.

So why would the Quran **affirm Jesus as the Messiah** when he does not fit the Jewish expectation of the title?

## 3. The Messiah Must Die, But Islam Denies Jesus' Death

According to Jewish and Christian traditions, the Messiah **must die or suffer for the people**:

- **Daniel 9:26** – "The Messiah shall be cut off and have nothing."
- **Isaiah 53** – Describes a suffering servant (interpreted as the Messiah by many Christians).
- **Christianity** – Jesus' death and resurrection are central to his messianic role.

Islam, however, **denies that Jesus was crucified or killed** (*Surah An-Nisa 4:157*).

- If the Messiah is supposed to **fulfill a role through his death**, but Islam denies Jesus' death, how can Jesus still be the Messiah?

## 4. Why is Jesus the Messiah, But Not Muhammad?

- In Islamic belief, **Muhammad is the greatest prophet** and the final messenger.
- If the Messiah is a special title, why is it given to Jesus instead of Muhammad?
- If being the Messiah is **not important**, why does the Quran emphasize Jesus as *Al-Masih*?

This raises the question: **What is the theological significance of Jesus being the Messiah in Islam if he does not fulfill a messianic role?**

#### **5. The Messiah is Unique, But Islam Reduces Him to Just a Prophet**

- The title *Al-Masih* implies uniqueness, yet Islam considers Jesus **just another prophet**, equal to others.
- No other prophet is called *Al-Masih* in the Quran.
- If Jesus has this unique title, why does Islam **downplay** his importance compared to Muhammad?

This creates a contradiction:

- Either the Messiah is special and unique (which Islam does not fully affirm).
- Or the title means nothing (which contradicts the Quran giving Jesus this title).