

A “Suffering Messiah” In Judaism?
According to the Scriptures and Sages of Israel

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[Note: This paper contains in print the information in the “Who Is Yeshua” audio and “The Passed-Over Messiah” video pages in this website’s Learn With Us section. Enjoy!]

Obviously central to “Two Testament” Judaism, also known as “Messianic Judaism” are the “New Testament” and “The Messiah.” While vastly differing levels and manners of Jewish observance and practice exist within these faith-streams, the common threads making them a distinct presence in the Jewish world are:

1. Belief that the חדשה ברית “b’rit chadasha” (“new covenant” or “testament”) foretold in the writings of the Jewish prophet Jeremiah (chapter 31) has already been enacted by God in history; and
2. Acceptance of the historical person Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth as the figure Talmudic Sages call, משיח “Messiah son of Joseph, who was slain.” (Sukkah 52a) It is important to note when reading the passage in the Sefaria™ online Jewish library and the Schottenstein Edition™ of the Talmud, the English translation adds words that are not in the actual Hebrew/Aramaic text, which words dilute the sense of connection to the Daniel 9:25 foretold “Messiah the Prince who will be executed (יכרת)” – which Daniel’s prophecy places firmly between the time the 2nd Temple is rebuilt (445 bce) and again destroyed (70 ce). The added words place the dying Messiah as having been killed “in battle” or “will be killed during the (future) War of Gog and Magog.” These added words are not justified by anything in the text: they are intended to deflect attention from Yeshua of Nazareth having lived and died at exactly the time foretold by Daniel: and having died by judicial execution at the hands of the Roman government in charge of Israel in that era, when the official method of execution for rebels against Roman supremacy was crucifixion.

In the absence of our Temple (destroyed two millennia ago, in 70 c.e.), we have no sacrificial system to deal with the justice demanded by our human sins. Without atonement (just punishment for wrongdoing), God cannot simply “forgive” sin and remain just. Without blood-sacrifice, there can be no atonement (Leviticus 17:11); and without our Temple, there can be no sacrifices, and thus no forgiveness of sin through that means.

Our Hebrew Scriptures are not silent on this subject. In direct context of the destruction of the 2nd Temple, the prophets point concretely to only one method of atonement: faith in the substitutionary death of Messiah (Daniel 9:25-27, Isaiah 53).

Below are the reasons why we Messianic Jews cannot see an authentic Judaism leading to relationship with the God of Israel existing apart from atonement through Yeshua of Nazareth: the foretold suffering, redeeming Messiah our Scriptures and many writings by Chaza”l (our Sages of blessed memory) foretell.

The founder of Judaism that rejects Yeshua of Nazareth as Messiah arrived at his own deathbed spiritually bankrupt: racked with fear over his eternal destiny, and without any security that he had been spiritually on the right path before God. [Talmud Bavli: Berachot 28b] That is no way to face eternity: and the subject of Messiah is no mere academic study: the Old and New Testaments frame the question of Messiah as definitive of each individual’s choice to accept or reject God’s rightful government over the human soul, and thus, a decision affecting both temporal life, and eternal life.

Let us explore Messiah and his atonement for our sins further in the sacred writings of our people.

I. WHERE AND HOW MESSIAH IS DESCRIBED

Messiah is defined and described authoritatively in Jewish faith by the sacred literature of the Torah, Prophets and Writings comprising the “Tanakh” ;known in some circles as, “the Old Testament.” While commentaries such as the Talmud may amplify our understanding of Messiah, only the Scriptures speak with final authority on Messiah, or any other matter of Jewish faith. (Isaiah 8:20)

II. WHY THE TANAKH DESCRIPTIONS ARE MORE THAN JUST GOOD IDEAS

These sacred Scriptures (writings) derive their authority as “the Word of God” above mere philosophy or human religious commentary by meeting the demand placed upon their authors in Deuteronomy 18. A

speaker of spiritual revelation (“prophet”) had to pass a test no human author could pass: to foretell future events and/or disclose hidden knowledge with perfect accuracy. (Deut. 18:18-22)

The Jewish Scriptures were formed across the centuries as differing writers gave religious teaching based on the Torah of Moses. Those teachings had to be consonant with the Torah (Isaiah 8:20), and be confirmed at some point as prophetically accurate so as to pass the Deuteronomy 18 test, as well as being historically accurate on a factual basis.

Instances of such as the forecasts, knowledge or historicity are: the fall of the region of Ephraim in Isaiah chapter 7, or the predictions of the next several hundred years of Middle Eastern political alliances in Daniel chapter 11), the Hubble-expansion of the universe or the spheroid shape of the earth and its gravitational suspension in the void [Isaiah 40:22], or historical matters like the accounts of the reigns of the kings of Israel.

III. TWO MESSIAH PORTRAITS IN SCRIPTURE

In the theology commonly offered our Jewish people in faith-communities outside Messianic Judaism, Messiah is most often portrayed as a triumphal descendant of King David who conquers the world, subdues and alters the natural order, and rules from Jerusalem. This figure is indeed evoked by the Tanakh in segments like Isaiah chapter 11 and elsewhere. The Sages of Israel refer to this Conquering Messiah in the Talmud (a sixty-six volume compendium of rabbinic commentary across the ages) as “Mashiach ben Daveed” (Messiah son of David).

However did you know there is another portrait of Messiah not having gotten equal attention across the years? There is a Messiah predicted in Scripture who will not rule and reign, but be killed?

Did you know Jewish Scripture says Messiah will die?

The fifty-third chapter of the Old Testament Jewish prophet Isaiah (who wrote about 700 years before the common era forecasts the Suffering Messiah with the utmost clarity. This startling passage of Jewish scripture foretells a Messiah who will be rejected by our nation (see verse 3), suffer for our transgressions (willful sins) and our iniquities (acts erupting from a skewed nature). This Messiah will be killed (see verses 8, 9, 12), and in dying He will bring atonement for sin to us.

Did you know the Talmudic rabbis are quite aware of this suffering Messiah? In Sanhedrin 98b, some of the Talmudic rabbinic Sages of Israel state their belief the above passage from Isaiah 53 refers to the Messiah.

“What is the name of the Messiah?” The Rabbis said: His name is ‘Stricken’ as it is written, ‘Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.’”[click here to see Hebrew Text from the Sefaria™ Talmud Bavli]

“As it is written?” Written where? Written in Isaiah 53:4. As you can see, the Talmud leaves no doubt Isaiah 53 is seen by our rabbinical Sages as referring to Messiah.

The Jewish sages go in Sukkah 52a, the Talmudic Sages further in great detail discussing the two portraits of Messiah.

“... the Messiah the son of Joseph who was slain, since that well agrees with the Scriptural verse, And they shall look upon me because they have thrust him through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for his only son...” (Zechariah 12:10)

As you can see, awareness of a Suffering Messiah has long been a facet of authentically Jewish faith-discussion for centuries, right alongside the portrait of the Davidic conquering Messiah more familiar to our people down through the ages.

This fact makes appalling the falsehoods published in the alleged name of ‘Judaism’ stating such an idea is supposedly totally foreign to authoritative Jewish thought, as did Gerald Sigal in his well-known, “A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity,” wherein he states:

“In order to arrive at the theological concepts they desire [agreeing with the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth), missionaries [an intendedly prejudicial reference to Messianic Jews] propose their own radically altered constructions of the meaning of biblical verses. These altered constructions bear no relation to any of the beliefs taught by priest and prophet, the authentic teachers in ancient Israel.” (Sigal, G. p. xv)

As this treatise goes on, you will see for yourself how Sigal’s allegation becomes increasingly clearly untrue in regard to Judaism’s relationship to the Suffering Messiah who will be killed.

The Scriptural passages to which the Rabbis refer above in Sukkah 52 give us a fascinating glimpse into the kind of long-extant view of Messiah that has become taboo as a Jewish in-house matter over the last seventeen centuries of theopolitical confusion.

IV. WHAT ELSE ABOUT MESSIAH IS NOT COMMONLY KNOWN?

A. Zechariah 12:10 a truly amazing passage, in which HaShem (God) tells us our nation’s inhabitants in Jerusalem will actually see Him at a certain point and will recognize him as “Me, whom they have

pierced” and will, for that reason, “mourn for Him as for an only son.” For us to have pierced Him, He would have to have been here on earth BEFORE the scene described in Zechariah 12. He could not have pierce-marks on Him that we would RECOGNIZE as having been given him by us (humankind) unless there were something recognizable about Him and the pierce-marks on Him. This begs the questioned answered by the following passage:

B. Psalm 21:4 King David speaks of God granting him eternal life. The Messiah is accepted in Jewish thought as descending from King David. This reference shows the Talmudic rabbis see BOTH portrayed Messiahs (Suffering and Conquering) having their ancestry in King David.

C. Psalm 2 King David calls the Messiah the “Son of God,” and He is foretold as ruling all nations. Thus, Messiah descended from David is declared Son of God who will rule the whole earth. The Essenes of Qumran near Jerusalem knew this to be so two thousand years ago. In the recently discovered and published Qumran fragments we find they wrote:

“The heavens and earth will obey His Messiah” [DSS-4Q521] and He shall be called ‘Bar Elyon’(‘Son of the Most High’) [DSS-4Q246]

There is even an apparent reference to the Head of the Assembly (of Israel) being killed by piercings. [DSS-4Q285]

That Qumran text is couched in references to, and quotes of, Isaiah the prophet’s writings that clearly denote the Messiah and his lineage in King David.

Were you aware that Jewish understand of the coming of a suffering, dying Messiah went back this far into Jewish antiquity?

V. WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH YOU?

The Messiah is not merely a subject for armchair philosophic conversation. The Messiah bears directly on the issue of atonement: that is, how our sins and the justices due those sins are dealt with by G*d in this life and the next.

Without atonement, there is no way for unholy, sin-defiled humanity to interact with the Holy One of Israel. In the past, the Temple Sacrificial system provided that atonement. During brief spans of our history when the Temple was not functioning, we have a vacuum in Scripture concerning the issue of atonement. We face no such vacuum now.

Our Scriptures point directly to the death of the Suffering Messiah as THE means of atonement for humankind once the Second Temple is destroyed. (See Daniel 9:24 and Isaiah 53).

Sitting in shul on Yom Kippur one day a year will not do it.

Prayer and repentance alone will not accomplish it. (See Leviticus 17:11)

Only repentance PLUS an atoning sacrifice to pay for the justice due the crimes of sin in our lives will together produce a “new-birth” into relationship with God.

The founder of non-Messianic Judaism declared to us on his deathbed that his manner of Judaism produced in him no security in regard to his eternal destination once his life was over. He knew he would face God, and did not know which way his life’s deeds would take him: into a peaceful eternity or a punishing one. [Talmud Bavli: Berachot 28b]

No one ever expressed the essence of Two Testament Judaism better than its founder, Yeshua of Nazareth:

“This is eternal life: to know You, the One True God; and Yeshua the Messiah whom You have sent.
John 17:3

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