

Messianic Expectations in the Monotheistic Faiths

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All the big religions in the world are characterised by strong messianic expectations. They look forward to a messiah who will eradicate unrighteousness on earth, kill the evil people, stop suffering, heal divisions by a new unity and brotherhood, and introduce a time of unequalled peace and prosperity on earth. Religious convictions everywhere are driven by these expectations, thereby challenging people to ensure a place in the future utopia by leading a life of dedication to religious principles.

Expectation of the Christian Messiah

Evangelical Christians who interpret the Bible literally all expect the second coming of Jesus Christ. He will return to earth to establish His millennial reign here and rule with His saints (Rev. 2:26-27; 5:9-10; 19:15). But before His millennial kingdom will be revealed He will allow evil to increase to its full measure. The Antichrist will gain control over the world for seven years (Rev. 13:7) and during that time the judgements of God will also be poured out upon unrepentant humanity. The seven year-period (Dan. 9:27) is described as the tribulation, and divided into two halves of 3½ years (42 months) each. During the first half, the Antichrist will be the rider on a white horse (Rev. 6:2) who will institute a new world order of false peace and unity. During the second 3½ years he will wage wars in a military reign of terror and kill all people who refuse to worship him (Rev. 6:4,8; 13:4-7,15). This last period of 42 months is referred to as the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14).

The Messiah won't punish His faithful disciples with the unbelievers by surrendering them to the false messiah's reign of terror. He promised that they would escape the coming time of judgements upon the wicked by way of the rapture (Luke 21:36; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). That will be in accordance with a biblical principle that God will never destroy the righteous with the wicked (cf. Gen. 18:23; 19:15-22).

After the seven years of tribulation, the Messiah will return to earth with His saints and set foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:5). A great destruction of enemy forces will occur at the battle of Armageddon. On that occasion, the Antichrist and false prophet will be captured and cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:19-21; Zech. 14:12-13). Satan will be taken hold of, bound and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3).

After that, the Messiah's reign of peace will be established on earth. The devil will be bound and therefore unable to deceive the nations during that time (Rev. 20:3).

They will no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart but often visit Jerusalem to serve the Lord. During this time there will be no wars and international conflicts, and the redeemed people of Israel will be the most honoured nation on earth (Jer. 3:17; Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 8:20-23). There will also be harmony in the animal kingdom (Isa. 11:6-9) and the earth will yield exceptionally big crops (Amos 9:13). All people will know the Lord and no idols will be worshipped (Zech. 13:2). What a time to look forward to! Only the Lord can make us ready and worthy to inherit this kingdom.

Expectation of the Jewish Messiah

Orthodox Jews do not accept Jesus as Messiah and therefore do not regard the New Testament to be part of the Bible. But they do have a strong expectation of the Messiah and, in terms of prophecies in Zechariah 14 and elsewhere, they are looking forward to the coming of a special man of God who will save Israel from the hands of their anti-Jewish enemies during a time of intense warfare. According to Zechariah 14 He will appear on the Mount of Olives, fight against the nations that besieged Jerusalem, pour terrible plagues upon them that will cause their sudden destruction, elevate Jerusalem and establish His kingdom there. He will restore the throne of David in Jerusalem and rule from it (Isa. 16:5). He will also build the temple of Ezekiel 40 to 44, restore the sacrificial service and apply the Law of Moses (the Torah) to all nations.

However, there is a serious deficiency in the messianic expectation of the Jews as they fail to distinguish between the suffering and ruling Messiah in the Old Testament. In terms of prophecies such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, the Messiah first has to come as a lowly Servant to sacrifice His life for the sins of the nation. Only after that, when Israel has been reconciled to Him, He will come as the conquering Messiah to destroy His enemies and rule from Jerusalem. It is precisely their lack of knowledge on the first phase of the Messiah's coming as Saviour which gave rise to their national rejection of Jesus as the suffering Messiah.

Since Israel still do not have a Saviour they are pursuing the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstatement of the sacrificial service. They still fix their hope on the observance of the Law in order to have their sins forgiven. The big tragedy with regard to Israel and the unsaved nations is that Satan is ready to offer a false messiah to all those who did not accept the true Messiah. Jesus clearly warned Israel against this serious consequence when they rejected Him as Messiah: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43).

This “other messiah” will be the false messiah (the Antichrist). After the rapture he will suddenly appear on the scene to deceive all people on earth with his miracles and supernatural powers. He will claim to be a descendant of King David and Israel will immediately accept him. He will be particularly welcomed by Israel when he grants them the right to rebuild the temple on the Temple Mount. But they will be greatly disillusioned when, after 3½ years, he will enter the rebuilt temple, declare himself to be God and profane the temple by placing an image of himself in the Holy of holies (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15). Israel will revoke their covenant with him and then have to flee hastily from Jerusalem for survival. The subsequent 3½ years will be the dark days of the great tribulation when Israel will be fugitives somewhere in the wilderness – probably in Petra (Matt. 24:15-21).

At the end of the seven years of tribulation, when the true Messiah comes, the remnant in Israel will go the Mount of Olives and accept Him there as Messiah. They will look on Him whom they have pierced during His first coming and grieve for Him (Zech. 12:10). Only then, when they have been reconciled to Him, the whole Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25-26). That will be their first meeting with the Messiah after having rejected Him during His first coming. He said to them: “You shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:39).

After this, during the Messiah’s reign, the saved Israel will enjoy special recognition as God’s Chosen People: “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isa. 27:6). “In that day the Lord of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people” (Isa. 28:5). “In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23). This wonderful time will only dawn after Israel have accepted their Messiah, who will then rule the world from the throne of David in Jerusalem.

Expectation of the Islamic messiah

There are different Islamic views on the coming world messiah, who is referred to by them as the Imam Mahdi. Many Muslims expect the reappearance of a former Imam who will unite the various factions of the Islamic faith, destroy all infidels and establish the worldwide rule of Allah in accordance with the Qur’an and Islam’s Shariah law. But there is also a growing school of thought in which it is held that Jesus Christ will be the world Messiah – not the Jesus of the Bible but the distorted Jesus of the Qur’an. Jesus is mentioned 97 times in the Qur’an.

Concerted efforts are made to define Jesus in terms of Islamic concepts, thereby claiming Him as one of Islam's great prophets. These views are advanced in various booklets which are printed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and distributed by various Islamic propagation centres around the globe. Examples of these booklets are: "We believe in Jesus" by Soliman H. Al-But'he, "Qur'anic verses about Christianity" by Abdullah Al-Saeed, "A brief illustrated guide to understanding Islam," by I.A. Ibrahim, and "Jesus is coming" by A.H. Jacob.

In the booklet "Jesus is coming," A.H. Jacob rejects the Bible as the infallible Word of God. He says, "The Bible is distorted, changed and no longer the Book of God..." (p. 22). Islam's views on Jesus and the Antichrist are derived from the Qur'an. They do not regard Jesus as God nor the Son of God (p. 20,21), and also refute the biblical account of His crucifixion: "The Qur'anic teaching is that Jesus Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews" (p. 25). According to this teaching somebody else was crucified in his place and under his name.

The author says the following about the Antichrist: "The False Messiah will be a young man with rough hair, and one of his eyes will stick out... He will come from the road between Syria and Iraq and will cause destruction and bloodshed right and left" (p. 9).

In this booklet, the author mostly dwells on the identity, teachings and second coming of Jesus Christ as the great forerunner of Mohammad. He says: "The Messiah, son of Mary, will descend to earth in Damascus. Jesus Christ will search for the False Messiah (the Antichrist) and catch hold of him at the gate of Lod near Jerusalem and kill him" (p. 10).

"God's Messenger Mohammad said, Surely Jesus, the son of Mary, will shortly descend among you people (Muslims) and will rule and judge mankind justly by the law of the Qur'an and the Sunna. He will break the cross and forbid the sale and consumption of pork..." (p. 15).

"Jesus will come back as a follower of God's last Messenger, Mohammad and revive the true religion of God, Islam... He is coming back to rule mankind justly by God's last and final message to mankind, the Holy Qur'an, as well as by the tradition of the Prophet Mohammad. He will guide humanity toward Islamic monotheism, to worship God alone, and to follow the footsteps of His last Messenger, Mohammad, and warn people of the eternal consequences of polytheism" (p. 17,18).

“Jesus will destroy the false doctrines that pass in his name, such as the belief that God is a trinity, declaring that such a belief is polytheism, the belief in many gods.

He will stress the fact that God is One, Absolute, and not a composite unity. Jesus will not view himself with God in a father-son relationship. Rather, he will view his relationship with God as a master-slave relationship... Jesus will deny that he has any of God's attributes. He never claimed to be God or referred to himself as the son of God. He was only a prophet and a grateful slave of God” (p. 20,21).

“In his second coming, he will declare that he is a slave of God, who follows his brother, Prophet Mohammad, the last Messenger of God. Jesus will perform the prayer in the right way as the Muslims do, give charity, fast during the month of Ramadan, and perform the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and the Umrah” (p. 23).

“Jesus is coming back to deny the false claim that the Jews killed him, and those Christians who, in ignorance, believe them. He will fight the Jews and kill the False Messiah. The Jews will be the soldiers and followers of the False Messiah, and during his time, the Jews will have a very powerful government till Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, descends. He will search for the False Messiah, catch him and kill him. Then Jesus and his Muslim companions will fight against the Jews till some of them hide between the stones... He will also kill the Christians who adore the cross. Thereafter, when both parties are defeated and polytheism and disbelief are cleansed from the earth, that is the time when peace and tranquillity will prevail amongst the people” (p. 24).

The author devotes a long section on how Jesus, at His second coming, will forbid the eating of pork (p. 27-29). He says: “Jesus will strictly forbid selling, keeping and eating pork. He will even order the pigs killed... Jesus cursed whoever eats it... Yet pork is the favourite dish of the Christians. God the Exalted forbids eating pork in his last Book, the Qur'an” (p. 27).

Muslims say that Jesus lived for 33 years on earth, and that he will return for the remaining seven years of his prophetic ministry of 40 years. They will, therefore, accept the Antichrist as “Jesus!”

These views on the world messiah are held by many of the Sunni Muslims. About 86% of all Muslims are Sunnis. *Sunnah* means *Tradition* and refers to the fact that this group upholds a collection of traditions (the *hadiths*) which are observed on the same level as the Qur'an. They recognise all the *kalifs* who rule in the Muslim world as successors of

Mohammad, while the Shiites regard the first three *kalifs* as intruders who usurped the position of Mohammad, and whose teachings are also rejected.

There is bitter enmity among the Sunnis and Shiites. There are large groups of Shiite Muslims in Iran and Iraq. Iran is the major stronghold of this group.

The Shiites have a strong expectation of the coming of the 12th Imam as world Messiah. The leader of Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who threatened to wipe Israel off the map, accepted the role of paving the way for the coming Imam. Tony Pearce (*Light for the Last Days*, Winter 2005) says the following about this dictator:

“Ahmadinejad says that the wave of the Islamist revolution will soon reach the entire world. He believes that the world is heading for a clash of civilisations in which Islam is the only credible alternative to Western domination. And he is convinced that Islam can and will win.

“There is nothing more dangerous in the world than a religious fanatic who seeks to impose his idea of justice by force. Part of Ahmadinejad’s conviction comes from his belief in the second coming of the 12th Imam. According to the Shiite version of Islam the 12th descendant of Mohammad, known as the 12th Imam or the Mahdi, went into hiding in 941, more than a thousand years ago. Shiites believe that he will reappear when the world has become full of oppression and tyranny. They believe that he is hidden in the Jamkaran well in Iran, which is a place of pilgrimage for believers who drop their requests for help into the well in the hope that the Imam will read them and come to their aid.

“Ahmadinejad has said, ‘Our revolution’s main mission is to pave the way for the reappearance of the 12th Imam, the Mahdi... His government held a formal cabinet meeting in which it was agreed to sign an agreement with the 12th Imam... A large number of Ahmadinejad’s close allies are talking about preparing the ground for the hidden Imam’s imminent manifestation and seriously and explicitly relate it to Iran’s nuclear programme... They argue that they ought to help spread evil, tyranny and oppression in order to facilitate the coming of the 12th Imam.’”

The Shiites believe that the Imam Mahdi will reign on earth for seven years, before bringing about a final judgement and the end of the world. Ahmadinejad’s government has already decided to sign an agreement with him. Daniel says that when the false

messiah comes, “he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [of seven years]” (Dan. 9:27).

There are those in Iran who expect the Imam’s appearing within the next two years or so. Ahmadinejad is of the opinion that the country should prepare for this event by building enough hotels for the large number of tourists and pilgrims who will visit their country.

According to Ezekiel 38 and 39, Iran (the former Persia) will indeed attack Israel in an effort to wipe it off the map. This war will be a joint venture by Magog (an ancient name for modern Russia), Iran, Turkey, Libya, Ethiopia, and many other peoples with them (Ezek. 38:2-8,15-16). Although Russia has a large supply of nuclear weapons the description of this war is that of a big military invasion of Israel and not the use of long-range nuclear missiles.

This invasion will inevitably lead to a worldwide military alert and the deployment of nuclear weapons by various nations. But the Lord will suddenly and unexpectedly intervene in the war and destroy the enemy forces on the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 38:22; 39:1-5). It will be a scene of utter destruction and, according to the King James Version, only a sixth part of the invading forces will survive the divine judgement (Ezek. 39:2). Israel will gather the spoils of war and it will take them seven years to burn and recycle the military hardware (Ezek. 39:9).

The seven years following the abrupt end to this war will most probably be the seven years during which Israel and the nations will conclude a covenant with the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27). He will appear at the critical moment directly after the destruction of the invading forces, and will pose as a Messenger of God who came just at the right time to deliver humanity from a self-destructing nuclear war. Israel will be saved from the jaws of death.

The leaders and people of Israel will give glory to God for this mighty act of deliverance, but wrongly accept a satanic impostor as the promised Messiah (John 5:43). The other nations will follow suit. This prince of peace will ride on a white horse and exalt himself above every god. He will pretend to be the universal messiah of all faiths – i.e. Jesus Christ to the Christians, the Imam Mahdi to the Muslims, Krishna to the Hindus, and the Maitreya Buddha to the Buddhists.

After an initial period of false peace he will be revealed as a most violent man who will “take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another” (Rev. 6:4). “He shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many... yet he shall come to his end, and

no one will help him” (Dan. 11:44-45). His end is described in the last book of the Bible. It will take place on the day when the true Christ sets foot on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. John says:

“And I saw the beast [the Antichrist], the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse [the true Christ]

and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet... These two were cast alive into the lake of fire... And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh” (Rev. 19:19-21; cf. Zech. 14:2-4,12-13).

All Messianic expectations outside the true Christ, who is the Son of God and God Himself manifest in a human body, are focussed on the Antichrist. All the deceived peoples of the world will conclude a covenant with the false messiah because of not personally knowing the only true Saviour of a spiritually lost humanity (cf. John 5:43; Acts. 4:12). There are many deluded forerunners of the false messiah who are paving the way for his imminent appearance. His reign of seven years will be the world’s coming hour of darkness.