



*Series on Belief & Faith – Moshiach Part I*

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*The Messiah I*



***Noahide Nations Nagid Clergy  
Continuing Education Program***

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# The Messiah I

## Introduction

The pre-Messianic era, Messianic era, and identity of the Messiah himself are complicated and often misunderstood topics that involve a number of people and a process of unfolding events. While the grand details are known with certainty, specific elements must remain speculation until the actual time comes. In this lesson we will review the facts and questions regarding the coming of the Messiah.

## The Pre-Messianic Era

Numerous scriptural prophecies, Midrashim, and other sources tell us that, as the time of the Messiah draws near, the world will experience changes and upheavals. Many of these will be positive, while others will be devastating.

### Changes in Religion and Belief

*Truth will ne'ederes [fail]...*  
Isaiah 59:15

The Talmud<sup>1</sup> explains that the word *ne'ederes* is also related to the word for “flocks.” The implication of the verse is that truth will fail because the Torah world will be divided into various groups, or flocks, each of which will claim the truth for its own. True Torah and faith will become indistinguishable from that which is false.

### Rise of Atheism

Atheism will engulf the world and religious studies will become despised in the era preceding the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> The Jewish world will not be spared from this calamity – many Jews will abandon the Torah and their faith as well. However, the wise will recognize that this torrent of disbelief is a test and that they must remain firm in their faith. This is the interpretation<sup>3</sup> of the verse:

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<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin 97a.

<sup>2</sup> *Sichos HaRan* 35.

<sup>3</sup> See Rambam *Iggres Teiman* and *Sichos HaRan* 35 ,220.

*Many shall purify themselves – make themselves white and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but they that are wise shall understand.*

Daniel 12:15

There are many who are far from Torah and truth, however, who will see what is happening and realize its import. They will return to God, yet they will suffer ridicule for abandoning the norms of secular culture. This is the meaning of the verse:

*He who departs from evil will be considered a fool.*

Isaiah 59:15.

**Social &  
National  
Upheaval &  
Decline**

This decline in religious unity will be, partially, the result of a general global decline in values, morals, and important social institutions.<sup>4</sup> Because change will advance so rapidly, parents and children will experience the world on radically different terms.<sup>5</sup> As a result, there will be no respect of the elderly or for one's parents. Governments will become godless and economies will fail.<sup>6</sup>

This will all be accompanied by a sudden increase in world population.<sup>7</sup>

This will be a time of tremendous strain. The Midrash states:

*One-third of the world's suffering will come in the generation before the Messiah.<sup>8</sup>*

**Increase in  
Secular  
Knowledge**

According to some recent authorities,<sup>9</sup> there will be an explosion of secular and scientific knowledge before the coming of the Messiah. This is understood from a passage in the Zohar:

*In the 600<sup>th</sup> year of the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium, the supernal gates of wisdom and the lower wellsprings of wisdom will open. This will prepare the world to enter the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium just as man prepares for Sabbath before sunset.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Sotah 49b; Sanhedrin ibid. See also *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2:13. Also Zohar 3:67b.

<sup>5</sup> See Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought* II 24:12.

<sup>6</sup> Sanhedrin 97a – “The son of David will not come until the last penny has gone out from the purse.”

<sup>7</sup> *Tosafos* to Niddah 13b s.v. ad *she-yikblu*.

<sup>8</sup> *Midrash Tebillim* 22:9.

<sup>9</sup> Most notably Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in a number of his books and essays.

This prophecy establishes the Hebrew year 5600 (1839/1840) as the start of a new era in Human knowledge. Though we cannot tie this Zohar to any specific even in that year, it does correspond to the onset of the scientific revolution and modern technological era.

## Ingathering of Exiles

*He will gather the dispersed of Israel*  
Psalms 147:2

*God will then bring back your remnants and have mercy on you. God your Lord will once again gather you from among all the nations where He scattered you.*  
Deuteronomy 30:3

Either after or concurrent with the pre-messianic upheavals there will be a return of the Jewish people to their ancestral land. The unfolding of this process, whether gradual or sudden, miraculous or natural, is uncertain.<sup>11</sup> However it occurs, it will only be completed by the Messiah himself:

*On that day, God will stretch forth his hand a second time to recover His people... He will send up a banner for the nations, assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*  
Isaiah 11:11-12

### **Restoration of Prophecy**

Besides the prophetic indications of a national return, it is also a necessary component of the redemptive process. It appears that the coming of the Messiah is concomitant with a return of prophecy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Zohar I:117a

<sup>11</sup> It is not 100% clear if the current resettlement of Israel constitutes this pre-Messianic ingathering. On one hand, Kesubos 111a discourages the en-masse return to Israel prior to the coming of the Messiah (according to many). However, there are opinions that the return will begin with some sort of political independence (see Rabbi Chama in Sanhedrin 98a) and possibly involve the consent and assistance of other nations (Ramban on Song of Songs 8:13, Radak to Psalms 146:3, Abarbanel to Psalms 147:2, and many, many more). Nevertheless, we should pray that the current Jewish resettlement of Israel is this much anticipated messianic prequel.

<sup>12</sup> See Joel 3:1 to 5 and Rambam *Igros Teiman*. Additionally, the Messiah will be king. Kings can only be anointed by a prophet. As well, the Messiah himself will be a prophet (see *Hilchos Teshuva* 9:2)

However, this can only happen when a number of other conditions are fulfilled, one of which is that the majority of the Jewish population must reside in the land of Israel. Therefore, there must be a resettlement prior to the advent of the Messiah.

### **Cultivation of the Land**

*O mountains of Israel, let your branches sprout forth and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are at hand to come.*

Ezekiel 36:8

*I will open rivers on the high hills and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness cedar, the acacia, myrtle, and the oil-tree. I will set in the desert cypress, the plane-tree, and the larch together so that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of HaShem has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.*

Isaiah 41: 18 - 20<sup>13</sup>

These passages are only a sampling of those prophesying a renewed cultivation of the land of Israel prior to the redemption.<sup>14</sup>

## **The War of Gog and Magog**

One of the final steps in the messianic advent is the War of Gog and Magog. The Book of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, prophesies a war in the era immediately preceding the Messiah. This war, according to the Zohar<sup>15</sup>, will take place in the vicinity of Jerusalem. It will be the final showdown for the Land of Israel, a battle royale for the soul of the land. Upon its conclusion, the Jews will live free of harassment in their land.<sup>16</sup> According to Rabbi Akiva<sup>17</sup>, the war will last one year.

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<sup>13</sup> See interpretation of Rabbi Abba, Sanhedrin 98a.

<sup>14</sup> See also Isaiah 49:18 – 22, Jeremiah 33:10-11.

<sup>15</sup> 2:32a.

<sup>16</sup> *Sifrei* Bamidbar 76, Deuteronomy 43. See also Sanhedrin 97b.

<sup>17</sup> Eduyos 2:10.

Though the names of Gog and Magog appear early in Tanakh<sup>18</sup>, the exact identities of these nations in modern terms is uncertain. According to the Talmud<sup>19</sup>, the second Psalm is a reference to this eventual conflict

## The Two Messiahs

It is little known that there actually are two Messiahs: Moshiach ben David (Messiah, son of David) and Moshiach ben Yosef (Messiah, son of Joseph – sometimes called Moshiach ben Ephraim). This is alluded to in numerous places:

*And you, son of man, take one stick, and write upon it: For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions; then take another stick, and write upon it: For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and of all the house of Israel his companions; and join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.*

Ezekiel 37:16-17

*Ephraim's envy will depart and Judah's enemies will be cut off. Ephraim will not envy Judah and Judah will not envy nor harass Ephraim.*

Isaiah 11:13

Of particular importance is the latter verse teaching that each of the Messiahs will have their own missions uniquely suited to their strengths. They will not envy one another nor interfere with their respective jobs. Each Messiah will have his own era, as well, with the Era of Moshiach ben Yosef coming first.<sup>20</sup>

### **Moshiach Ben Yosef**

All messianic tasks up to and including the War of Gog and Magog will be the duties of Moshiach ben Yosef. It is he who will wage the war and conquer:

*The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau stubble. They will set them ablaze and consume them; there will be no survivor of the house of Esau, for God has spoken.*

Obadiah 1:18

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<sup>18</sup> I.e. Genesis 10:2.

<sup>19</sup> Avodah Zara 3b.

<sup>20</sup> There is some disagreement about the exact order of these two eras. *Tosafos* Eruvin43b presents an argument that ben Yosef must precede ben David. However, Rashi *ad loc.* disagrees. Most scholars agree with *Tosafos*. There is a tremendous amount written on this subject..

It appears that this Messiah will die in battle, though, and be mourned by Israel:

*They shall look to Me because they have pushed him through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for a first born son.*

Zechariah 12:10

According to some scholars, however, the decree of death for Moshiach ben Yosef was rescinded.<sup>21</sup>

## **Eliyahu HaNavi**

Following the War of Gog and Magog<sup>22</sup>, the prophet Elijah will herald the impending messianic age:

*Behold! I will send Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of God!  
He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and of the children to their fathers...*

Malachi 3:23

As we see in the verse, he will turn people back to truth and rectify much of the world's pre-messianic decline. Immediately following his arrival, the final Messiah, ben David, will be revealed.<sup>23</sup>

In the second part of this lesson, we will examine the qualifications and duties of Moshiach ben David.

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<sup>21</sup> See *Kol HaTor* 1:6 and 8. The Ari Z"l also says that the death of ben Yosef is not an absolute certainty.

<sup>22</sup> *Eminus VeDeyos* 8:2.. Some, however, maintain that Eliyahu will come before the war.

<sup>23</sup> Eruvin 43b and *Tos. Ad loc.* See also Rash on Eduyos 8:7, *Hilchos Nazirus* 4:11.



## Summary of This Lesson

1. There are a number of stages to the coming of the Messiah.
2. The first is a period of social, spiritual, and political decline.
3. According to contemporary understandings of the Zohar, there will be an explosion of secular wisdom concurrent with these travails.
4. There will be tremendous difficulty discerning truth from falsehood in these times. The wise will see and recognize the greater significance of these events.
5. Concurrent with or following this era will be a return of the Jews to their ancestral land. This return is an intrinsic part of the eventual return of prophecy.
6. The land will be cultivated and bloom again.
7. As the population increases and the former glory of Israel approaches its return, there will be a Great War: the War of Gog and Magog.
8. This war will be waged on behalf of God by Moshiach ben Yosef, one of the two Messiahs.
9. Either immediately before or after this war (after, according to most) Elijah the prophet will appear to announce and make final preparations for the final Messiah, Moshiach ben David.