

American individualism says "God helps those who help themselves. If you don't save yourself, you'll not be saved."
The biblical religions (Judaism & Christianity) say "If you think you can save yourself, you're lost."

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"JEWISH MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS"

The quotation marks on this Thinksheet's title indicate that I was asked to speak on this topic. Yes, this is a defensive note: (1) I'm comfortable addressing my own religion, & hesitant about doing so to others--almost as though I were invading their privacy; certainly I sense the danger of polluting their faith with perspectives from my own, or ignorantly distorting; (2) I'd rather discourse on the whole sweep of messianism in the semitic religions (Judaism's messiah, Christianity's Christ, Islam's mahdi): understanding what's common in our three attitudes toward the future could somewhat reduce our mutual misunderstandings & so improve our relationships; (3) It's more painful for me, a Christian, to have to disagree with Judaism than with any other religion: Judaism is my mother as Mary was the mother of my Lord.

What follows is assertions to aid private thought & public discussion after I speak.

1 Has the messiah come? Jews say no, we Christians say yes & no:

YES: "When the time set by God had arrived, he sent out from himself his Son, born from a woman, born under torah" (my rendering of Gal.4.8 as I arrived at it this morning in my daily continuous reading of the [Greek] NT).

NO: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (the Bible's penultimate words, just before "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen."). Since we Christians believe that the Lord who came, lived, died, rose is the Lord who is coming, why would I say "no"? (1) To affirm the obvious fact that God's promise has not yet fullcome; (2) To be in solidarity with Jews, who more simply make this affirmation (though their religion, like ours, contains a return-expectation: Elijah, first of the prophets, is to come again in the end-time: Mal.4.5, the OT's penultimate verse).

2 Jews expect a deliverer, Christians experience the Savior. I've put this essential distinction starkly: the difference is stark, though both sides of the sentence need nuancing. The fundamental linguistic fact here is that the Hebrew words (including "messiah" on the root/verb *mashach*, to anoint as setting aside/apart for a special service; the n. *mashiach* [transliterated "messiah"], a person--prophet, priest, king--thus consecrated) do not directly indicate either deliverance or salvation, nor does the Greek parallel transliterated "christ," from the verb to anoint.

How came it then that "Christ" means the Savior? Because the title was so thoroughly blended with Jesus as to form a second name: "Jesus Christ," who was as christ prophet-priest-king & as savior, Jesus (Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *Joshua*, the historical character who became for Jews the personal symbol of "deliverance," the meaning of his name's root, viz. *yasha'*, give width & breadth to, deliver, liberate, grant victory; Joshua's original name, "Hoshea," is the same as that of the prophet "Hosea").

Each of the above two ¶s expounds a Hebrew root. Put those roots together in your mind, & you'll grasp the first clause of this §: "Jews expect a deliverer" somewhat on the model of Joshua. But "Joshua" & "Jesus" are the same name! (In Heb.4.8, KJV has "Jesus," but RSV & NRSV rightly have "Joshua.") But the nouns on the 2nd Heb. root sometimes speak of moral/spiritual deliverance; & the military force of "Joshua" appears in Christian eschatology, Jesus' final fulfilment of the political dimension of the divine promise of shalom, total prosperity/peace: the boundary between Jews & Christians in "messianic expectations" is osmotic.

3 We who are now living missed Act I (the remote past, which we can only represent as myth & memory, aided or not by divine revelation); we came into the drama at Act II (the present as experienced/experienceable); & probably all of us must leave before Act III (the future as denouement, the fulfilment of all previous trajectories of myth-memory-meaning, tragedy/triumph, despair/hope)... "Myth" here means a transhistorical explicative story. Eg the "big bang" in an Act I myth, not science but our experience of explosions retrojected onto the origin of the universe; when used by science, it's a scientific myth. And the "kingdom of God" is an Act III myth projected (eg, by Christians' daily praying of the Lord's Prayer) onto the future (& because it's theocentric, God as King of the coming kingdom, its a religious myth).

4 Note that this Thinksheet's title has not the noun "messiah" (which we Christians capitalize when referring to Jesus in his messianic roles) but the adjective "mes-" +

sianic," a Jewish & Christian holophrase for **hope** as it existed for us in the past, exists now, & will exist. Alex. Pope is famous for "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," but that generalization needs qualifiers: (1) What's worthy of the term human hope is not objectively natural, as is eg one's nose; there are always cultural determinants, as in our biblical heritage; (2) Hope can die out in the human heart & even in streams of history. When that happens, the soul feels imprisoned, has the reverse of the experience of "width & breadth" (the 1st meaning of the 2nd Hebrew root in §2)... The American mind has been messianic in that the poor, instead of envying the rich, have aspired to material success & have accordingly been poor prerevolutionary material--until the present underclass, under the incubus of hopelessness. When the people get to feeling hopeless in themselves, they are ripe for *messianic claimants*, of which there were scores in the Palestine of NT times (the last being Bar Kokhba, killed by the Romans AD/CE 135, of whom Rabbi Akiva said "This is the King Messiah"--but in NY's Jewish Museum I read the original of a despairing letter of his: as the Romans closed in on him, progressively shrinking his space, his soul lost "width & breadth," hope of victory). (Beyond NT times, Judaism continued to experience what THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE JEWISH RELIGION calls "Messiahs, false." In American Jewry, the most recent near-claimant, Rebbe Schneersohn of Brooklyn, died early this year.... That encyclopedia's articles on "Messiah" & "Jesus" also are accurate & fair.)

5 Please reread the 1st sentence in §2. The Christian experience of Jesus as Savior (in the traditional phrase "from sin, death, & the devil") **colors** the OT's use of the two Hebrew roots/words in §2. We see the world, read the past, & hope for the future all through, from the perspectives of, our own experience--so Christians read as OT what Jews call The Hebrew Scriptures--so "deliver" becomes "save" (with all its Jesus-Savior connotations) & "messiah" means Jesus-"Messiah" (as in Jn.4.25-26 [the only passage the Random House Dictionary 2 alludes to under "Messiah"]): The Samaritan woman says to Jesus "'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ)." Then Jesus says to her "I am [he], the one who is speaking to you." This Gospel often has Jesus identifying himself with the OT's YHWH, God as "I am.")

Honest, & therefore hopeful, Jewish/Christian relations demand **mutual respect** in Scripture reading, & even mutual help. That many-splendored thing, hope among today's Jews, must be viewed in continuity with The Hebrew Scriptures, which Jews & Christians are to read together to discover authorial intent. And as Christians become more understanding of the whole sweep of Judaism, its heritage & hope, Jews may feel somewhat less ripped off by Christians' **canonical reading** (reading the OT with NT eyes) of their Scriptures. (The term "Old Testament" comes from the NT's only essay, Hebrews, which begins in the NRSV "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word...." Of course the words are blasphemous to Jews & orthodox to Christians: the twin mystery of our solidarity & our divergence will continue till Act III.)

6 For Jews & Christians, the essence of the messianic hope is that God's covenant **promise** will not fail of fulfilment. In a just-published book, THE ELECTION OF ISREAL, Rabbi David Novak says "All that can be known about the final redemption is that the estrangement between God and Israel and God and the world will ultimately be overcome. And God's redemption of Israel will be central to this cosmic redemption." Franz Rosenzweig taught that the endtime would transcend both Judaism & Christianity (but Novak speaks of the "Judaization" of universal history, & Christians see ultimate Christianization [under God the Second Person of the Trinity] as eventually inevitable). Jesus' resurrection directs Christians' attention to nextworldliness as well as thisworldliness, & Emil Fackenheim uses Holocaust victims to stress the Jewish hope in "the world to come": "If there is no hereafter for such as these, then the hereafter does not exist" (traditional Jewish messianism being thisworldly, but Rabin's granddaughter at his funeral expressed the hereafter hope for her messianic grandpa, who'd been a shekinah to Israel, a holy presence, a "pillar of fire before the camp").... The Dead Sea Scrolls have two messiahs, one political (king) & one ritual (priest).... Gush Emmunim: Messiah will come when the land is all repossessed.