

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH PROJECT

The Noahide Laws – Moshiach Part II



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The Messiah II

Introduction

In our previous lesson we examined the events of the pre-messianic era and the coming of *Moshiach ben Yosef* (Messiah son of Joseph). *Moshiach ben Yosef*, however, is only one of two messiahs. The second, final messiah is *Moshiach ben David*, the Davidic messiah. When most people speak of the messiah, they are referring to this final messianic figure. In this lesson we will examine the criteria for identifying the messiah, his duties, and the messianic age.

Criteria for the Davidic Messiah

The Torah belief¹ is that the final Messiah, *Moshiach ben David*, will be identified by six criteria:

- 1) He will be a direct descendant of King David,
- 2) He will be anointed as king of Israel,
- 3) He will complete the return of the Jewish people to Israel,
- 4) He will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem,
- 5) He will bring peace to the world, ending all war,
- 6) He will bring knowledge of God to the world.

These six criteria are not metaphorical – they are literal, observable, verifiable facts. They are the minimum that one must accomplish before he is accepted as the Messiah.

¹ Hilchos Melachim 11:1.

Writes the Rambam²:

If there arises a ruler from the family of David, immersed in the Torah and its mitzvos as was his ancestor David, who observes both the Oral and Written Torahs, who leads Israel back to the Torah, strengthening its observance and waging God's battles, then we may presume that he is the Messiah. If he then succeeds in rebuilding the temple upon its original site and gathering in the exiles of Israel, his identity as Messiah will then be confirmed.

Once a candidate meets criteria 1, 2, 5 and 6, we may presume he is the messiah. Once he completes stages 3 and 4, he is confirmed as the messiah. Our sages teach us to nevertheless remain skeptical of messianic claims:

Said Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: If you are holding a sapling in your hand and someone tells you, 'Come quickly, the messiah is here!', first finish planting the tree and then go to greet the messiah.³

When Will the Messiah Arrive?

The messiah can come at any time and will arrive (reveal himself) on any day except a Shabbat or a Holiday.⁴

However, we should never try to calculate or predict the time of the arrival of the messiah. The sages curse⁵ those who attempt to predict the dates and times of his arrival because doing so ultimately damages the faith of others:

Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan, "The bones of those who calculate the end should rot! For they would say that since the predetermined time has arrived and yet he has not come, he will never come. Rather wait for him, as it is written, 'Even though he might delay, wait for him'⁶

Furthermore, studying, fixating, or obsessing on the messiah as a goal of one's religious thought and practice is discouraged:

² Hilchos Melachim 11:4.

³ Avos 31b.

⁴ Eruvin 43a.

⁵ Sanhedrin 97a.

⁶ Isaiah 30:18

A person should not involve himself with the Aggadot [Talmudic sections regarding Masbiach] nor with the words of the Midrash that speak about this topic. Do not make them the prime focus, because they do not bring a person to love or fear of God. Also do not calculate the end [time of Masbiach's arrival] ... Rather wait for him and believe in the general principle, as we have explained.⁷

The goal of our study and service of God should be to fulfill His will in this world at every moment. Focusing on the future redemption only diminishes one's *Avodah* (divine service) in the here-and-now.

1. A Descendant of David

A shoot will come forth from the family of Jesse and a branch will grow from his roots
Isaiah 11:1

This is one of many verses indicating that the messiah will arise from the family of David.⁸ As mentioned, this is not a metaphor – he will actually be able to trace his lineage definitively to King David. There are many, many Jewish families today who can trace their ancestry to King David. Many of them are descendants of the Maharal, Rabbi Yehudah Loewy (1512 to 1609). Rabbi Loewy was a descendant of King David via his *Geonic* ancestry.

Jewish Ancestry

*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh; there shall step forth a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise **out of Israel**, and shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth.*
Numbers 24:17

When you come into the land which the Lord your God gave you, and shall possess it, and dwell within it, and say: 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around about me,' then you will set over you as king a wise man whom the Lord your G-d shall choose. You shall set one from among your brethren as king over you. You may not place a stranger over you who is not your brother.

Deuteronomy 17:14-15

⁷ *Hilchos Melachim* 12:2.

⁸ See the commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Radak to Isaiah. See also Sanhedrin 98a and *Eikhab Rabbah* 1:51.

These two verses inform us that the messiah must be Jewish. Since the messiah will also be anointed as a King of Israel, he must be Jewish. Jewish is defined as born of a Jewish mother.⁹

**From the Tribe
of Judah**

The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet as long as men come to Shiloh; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be. Genesis 49:10.

The messiah must come from the tribe of Judah. Tribal affiliation is only passed through the father's lineage.¹⁰

2. A King of Israel

The term *Moshiach*, messiah, literally means “anointed with oil.” Throughout the Tanakh there are many individuals who are called *Moshiach* on account of being anointed. Anointing with oil at the hands of a prophet was one of the many requirements for Jewish kingship. For example, the prophet Samuel anointed both Kings Saul and David with oil.¹¹

Since the messiah will be crowned king, he must be anointed by a prophet. This is one of the reasons for the prophet Malachi's prophesy that Elijah would return prior to the messiah.¹²

3. Return of the Jewish People to Israel

He will arise a banner for the nations and assemble the castaways of Israel; and He will gather in the dispersed ones of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Isaiah 11:12

It shall be on that day that Hashem will thresh, from the surging [Euphrates] River to the Brook of Egypt, and you [Israel] will be gathered up one by one, O Children of Israel. It shall be on that day that a great shofar will be blown, and those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those cast away in the land of Egypt will come [together], and they will prostrate themselves to Hashem on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

⁹ See Lev. 24:10 and Ezra 10:2-3. Kiddush 68.

¹⁰ See Numbers 34:14, Numbers 1:18-44, Leviticus 24:10.

¹¹ See I Samuel 15:1, 16:1 to 13.

¹² Malachi 3:23-24.

Isaiah 27:12-13

I will return the captivity of Judah and captivity of Israel, and will rebuild them as at first.
Jeremiah 33:7

The return of the Jewish people to the land is not only part of the restoration of the glory of Israel, but is necessary for the return of prophecy. As we saw in the previous lesson, the Messiah will be the greatest prophet ever, second only to Moses.¹³ As it is written:

He will be filled with the spirit of God; he will not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear.
Isaiah 11:13.

Among the many requirements for prophecy is that the majority of the Jewish people live in the land of Israel.¹⁴

Restoration of Tribal Identities

Using his power of prophecy, the messiah will clarify the tribal identities of the Jewish people. In particular, he will determine the legitimacy of the *Kobanim* and *Leviim*.¹⁵ He will then divide the land according to the ancestral heritage of each.

4. Rebuilding of the Temple

I will seal a covenant of peace with them; it will be an eternal covenant with them; and I will emplace them and increase them, and I will place My Sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be among them; I will be a God to them and they will be a people to Me. Then the nations will know that I am Hashem who sanctifies Israel, when My Sanctuary will be among them forever.
Ezekiel 37:26-28

¹³ *Hilchos Teshuva* 9:2.

¹⁴ See Yoma 9b, Sanhedrin 11a, Brachos 57a, Sukkah 28a, Bava Basra 134a and many, many others.

¹⁵ See Malachi 3:3.

It will be in the end of days that the Mountain of the Temple of Hashem will be firmly established as the most prominent of the mountains, and it will be exalted up above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.

Micah 4:1

It will happen in the end of days; The Mountain of the Temple of Hashem will be firmly established as the head of the mountains, and it will be exalted above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will go and say, 'Come, let us go up to the Mountain of Hashem, to the Temple of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths.

Isaiah 2: 2, 3

The Messiah will accomplish the rebuilding of the Third temple according to the details prophesied by Ezekiel.¹⁶ According to many,¹⁷ this is the act which definitively proves the identity of the messiah.

Many details of the rebuilding, such as the precise location of the altar, must be determined using prophecy.¹⁸ For this reason, we know that the messiah must have prophecy. This also means that rebuilding the temple prior to the advent of the messiah is impossible.

Reestablishment of the Sanhedrin

The Messiah will also reestablish the Sanhedrin, which is a precursor to the re-establishment of the Temple:

I will restore your judges as at first, your counselors as in the beginning. Afterwards you will be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with justice...

Isaiah 1:26-27.

At some point between the coming of Elijah and the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin, formal *Semicha* (rabbinic ordination) will be restored. This is necessary for one to serve on the Sanhedrin. The chain of ordination from Moses was broken by Roman oppression in 358 CE. The possibility of renewing this ordination and reconstituting the Sanhedrin prior to the Messiah has been raised in the past, in particularly by Rabbi Yaakov Beirav in Tsfas in the 16th century.

¹⁶ Chapters 40 to 48.

¹⁷ *Hilchos Melachim* 11:4.

¹⁸ *Zevachim* 62a. When Ezra rebuilt the temple only a few decades after its destruction, prophecy was required to locate the place of the altar. So too it will be needed to rebuild the final temple.

However, the attempt failed upon the ruling of the Radbaz, Rabbi Dovid ben Zimra, that the establishment of Semicha was not possible in our times.

**The Temple
Service**

The messiah will also restore the sacrificial system to whatever degree it will apply in the Messianic era. He will also reestablish the Sabbatical and Jubilee year observances.

5. Establishing Peace and the End of All Wars

I will seal a covenant of peace with them; it will be an eternal covenant with them; and I will emplace them and increase them, and I will place My Sanctuary among them forever.

Ezekiel 37:26

He will judge between many peoples, and will settle the arguments of mighty nations from far away. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation will not lift sword against nations, nor will they learn war anymore.

Micah 4:3

He will judge among the nations, and will settle the arguments of many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift sword against nation and they will no longer study warfare.

Isaiah 2:4

The Messiah will be a great political leader who will make peace among the nations. All war will come to an end and the nations will work for the mutual benefit of the world.

6. He Will Bring Awareness of God

They will neither injure nor destroy in all of My sacred mountain; for the earth will be as filled with knowledge of Hashem as water covering the sea bed.

Isaiah 11:9

The glory of Hashem will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of Hashem has spoken.

Isaiah 40:5

For then I will change the nations [to speak] a pure language, so that they all will proclaim the Name of Hashem, to worship Him with a united resolve.
Zephaniah 3:9

They will no longer teach - each man his fellow, each man his brother-saying, "Know Hashem! For all of them will know Me, from their smallest to their greatest - the word of Hashem - when I will forgive their iniquity and will no longer recall their sin.
Jeremiah 31:33

The most important mission of the Messiah will be to bring awareness of God to the world. Under his leadership all mankind will effortlessly achieve the highest levels of divine inspiration.

Free Will Man will still have free will at this time and the potential to do evil will still exist. However, the awareness of God will be so intense and immediately apparent that there will be no incentive to do evil.¹⁹ Instead man will endeavor only to understand God and his Torah.

Conversion As the messiah approaches, many non-Jews will rush to convert to Judaism.²⁰ Once the Messiah ben David is revealed, however, converts will not be accepted anymore.²¹

The Messiah's End

The Messiah will be a human being like any other.²² He will have human parents and, like all men, will die a human death.²³ However, his reign will last for a very, very long time because lifespans in *Olam HaBa* (the messianic world) will be greatly extended.

¹⁹ Sotah 52a; Zohar I:109a; See also Ramchal *Maamar Ikkarim*.

²⁰ See Zephania 3:9; Avodah Zarah 24a; Berachos 57b.

²¹ Avodah Zarah 3b and *Maharal Chiddushei Aggados* ad loc.

²² *Hilchos Melachim* 11:3.

²³ See Rambam to Sanhedrin 10:1.

Summary

- There are six criteria that one must fulfill in order to be the messiah:
 1. He will be a direct descendant of King David,
 2. He will be anointed as king of Israel,
 3. He will complete the return of the Jewish people to Israel,
 4. He will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem,
 5. He will bring peace to the world, ending all war,
 6. He will bring knowledge of God to the world.
- The Messiah will be human, born of human parents, and will die a human death.
- Calculating the time at which he will arrive is forbidden and those who do so are cursed.
- While the messiah is a tenet of Torah faith, it should not be overly emphasized. Our duty is to fulfill God's will in the here and now.