



## Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### The image of the Messiah in Judaism and Christianity

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The Hebrew word "Mashiach," meaning Messiah, means "the one anointed with oil." The custom of anointing with oil is a ritual act designed to elevate those designated for priestly, royal or sometimes even prophetic roles (such as the prophet Elisha).

The Messiah in Judaism is a significant figure, with the characteristics of a priest and king, who will change the world order in accordance with the will of God: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:6-9).

#### **The characteristics of the Jewish Messiah:**

1. He will be a servant of God: "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." (Isaiah 42:1).
2. He will build the kingdom of God: "He shall build a house for my name." (II Samuel 7:13).
3. He will be a national hero who will vanquish the enemies of Israel: "In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely." (Jeremiah 33:16); "And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies; also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee a house." (II Samuel 7:11); "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him." (Psalms 72:11).
4. His kingdom will be eternal: "And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

(II Samuel 7:13).

5. He will have wonderful abilities: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:2).

6. He will engage in acts of moral judgment: "But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." (Isaiah 11:4).

7. He will be a light onto the nations: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and I will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people for a light of the gentiles. To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." (Isaiah 42:6-7).

8. His success will be the result of spiritual, not violent activities: "But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." (Isaiah 11:4).

9. He will be a stricken and suffering figure who will bear the pain of society: "Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5).

10. He will be a scion of the house of David: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." (Isaiah 11:1).

11. We do not know exactly when he will appear.

According to what is written in the book of Zechariah, the Messiah will arrive riding on the foal of a donkey: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." (Zechariah 9:9).

In Judaism, the belief in the concept of the Messiah and his essence is given to debate, and has undergone changes over the course of time in accordance with the historical and social contexts throughout the various eras.

In Christian doctrine, Jesus is identified as the Messiah and is called Christ (from the Greek for Messiah). In the New Testament, Jesus is called Messiah several times, for example the Gospel according to Mark begins with the sentence "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1). The Gospel according to Matthew

identifies Jesus as the Messiah and even as the son of God: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matthew 16:16). This statement expresses the belief that Jesus, as the son of God, possesses divine attributes. In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus admits to the high priest that he is the Messiah: "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? and Jesus said, I am." (Mark 14:61-62).

**Aside from the statements in the New Testament regarding Jesus being the Messiah, in the actions described in the story of his life and death, Jesus does, indeed, show the characteristics of the Messiah as understood in Judaism:**

1. He acts in the name of God: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor... This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:18-21).
2. He will establish the kingdom of God forever  $\dot{\text{H}}$  the kingdom of heaven: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2).
3. He has wonderful abilities that enable him to perform miracles, including raising the dead: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (Matthew 11:5).
4. He engages in acts of judgment: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25:31-32).
5. He is presented as pursuing peace and opposing violence: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whoever shall smite thee on they right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matthew 5:39)
6. Jesus is depicted as suffering, both during the time of his ministry and in his death: "But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation." (Luke 17:25).
7. His ministry is directed not only at the people of Israel but at the gentiles as well: "Whosoever believeth in him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." (Romans 10:11-12).
8. He is a scion of the house of David: "Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David." (Romans 1:3).
9. Jesus is described as riding a donkey foal into Jerusalem: "And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him: and he sat upon him." (Mark j. 11:7).

10. We do not know when he will come, except for the fact that this event will occur at the End of Days: "Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come...Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." (Matthew 24: 42-44).

**Despite the similarity in the concepts, there are basic differences between the concept of the Messiah in Judaism and in Christianity:**

1. In Judaism, the Messiah is flesh and blood. Even though the Tanach states that God will be a father to him and he will be a son to God: "I will be his father and he shall be my son." (II Samuel 7:14), but the meaning of this verse is apparently symbolic: the Messiah will enjoy the benevolence of God as a son enjoys the benevolence of his father.

In Catholicism, the Messiah is the son of God (while also being mortal): "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever." (Romans 9:5).

2. Contrary to the common belief in Judaism that the Messiah has yet to come, in Christianity the Messiah has already arrived: "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he." (John 4: 25-26). He will return at the End of Days.

According to the Christian concept, if Israel sinned by refusing to recognize Jesus as the Messiah: "...a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ," (Galatians 2:16). If they recognize his Messianism, they will be saved: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9).

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