



## A HARMONY OF JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY AND MESSIANIC PROPHECY

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**ABSTRACT:** *This essay presents a selective overview of the main themes of Judeo-Christian eschatological prophecy. Particular attention is paid to the significance of successive biblical covenants, prophecies of the “day of the Lord,” differences between personal and collective resurrection, and expectations of the Messianic era. Although the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament lived and wrote in diverse historical and social contexts, their foresights were remarkably consistent and collectively offered a coherent picture of the earth’s last days, the culmination of human history, and the prospects of the afterlife. This coherence reflects the interrelated character of Judaic and Christian theology and the unity of the Judeo-Christian faith.*

**KEYWORDS:** Eschatology, Judeo-Christian, Messiah, Prophecy.



## INTRODUCTION

The following is an analysis of the overarching subjects of Judeo-Christian eschatological prophecy and commonalities in Judaism and Christianity with regard to the Messiah. From the outset, certain terms should be defined. *Judeo-Christian* refers to the theology, values, and writings shared by Judaism (the monotheistic religion developed among the ancient Hebrews) and Christianity (the monotheistic religion focused on Jesus as the Messiah). *Eschatology* is the branch of systematic theology concerned with the end of earthly history, resurrection, the last judgment, and eternal existence. Eschatology derives from the Greek *eschatos* [last or farthest]. There is a pervasive perception that Judaism and Christianity have incompatible eschatological understandings based on differing beliefs about the identity and mission of the Messiah [1]. This essay cannot resolve that long standing debate. However, it will attempt to show the interrelatedness of Judeo-Christian eschatology and suggest the ancient prophetic texts provide a coherent, unified whole [2], [3].

The Hebrew Bible [or *Tanakh*] corresponds generally to the Christian Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible does not include a word for the abstract theological concept of eschatology [4]. The closest associated Hebrew terms in the early Scriptures are *aharit yom* [the last or latter days] (see Isaiah 2:2 NIV) and *aharit* [the end or the future] (Jeremiah 29:11). Toward the conclusion of the Hebrew Bible, prophets began using new terms and phrases with stricter eschatological connotations. For instance, Daniel wrote that the Lord had told him, “You will rest, and then at *the end of the days* [emphasis added] you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance” (Daniel 12:13). What is translated as “the end of the days” is the Hebrew *kez hayamim*, which means the duration of the days or the end of time [5].

The *Talmud* [study or learning] is a record of authoritative rabbinic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible’s *Torah* [teaching] and biblical prophecy that dates from the first through the sixth centuries [see 6]. Even by this relatively late period, the Judaic understanding of eschatology was evolving. The Talmudic rabbis used various terms interchangeably to describe the end times or last days, including *olam ha-ba* [the world to come] and *yemot ha-mashiah* [the Messianic era] (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1; Yevamot 24b; Sanhedrin 99a). The *Mishnah* [study by repetition] forms part of the Talmud and is an exegesis of the oral tradition of Judaic law and Judaism. The *Gemara* [supplemental teaching] follows the Mishnah. According to Mishnah Sanhedrin 10, “All Israel has a share in the world-to-come, as it is said, and your nation, all of them righteous, shall inherit the land. They are the shoot of my planting, the work of my hands, so that [I] shall be glorified (Isaiah 60:21). And these [are the ones] who have no share in the world-to-come: the one who says that the resurrection of the dead is not [derived] from the Torah, and [the one who says] the Torah is not from the heavens, and the *apikoros* [one who disrespects the Torah].” The Talmud reiterates what the Hebrew Bible taught: the people of Israel will share in the rewards of “the world to come.”

## A Chosen People

The Hebrew Bible has three sections: the Torah, also known as the Books of Moses or *Pentateuch*, the *Nevi'im* [prophets], and the *Ketuvim* [writings]. The Torah follows a chronological order through successive stages of history. It begins, in the book of Genesis, with a description of the creation of the heavens and earth. Next comes the age of the *patriarchs*



[father-rulers], Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel and his descendants were known as the Israelites (Genesis 32:22–32). The Torah then describes the Israelite's bondage in Egypt, their wanderings through the wilderness (including the giving of the Law of Moses and the construction of the Tabernacle), and their preparations to enter the land of Canaan. The Nevi'im contains historical books, from the conquest of Canaan through the fall of Judah and foreign exile, and the writings of the Latter Prophets, which include the bulk of Hebrew eschatological prophecy. The Ketuvim contains poetic books, the five *Megillot*, and three relatively late books including the prophetic book of Daniel.

The book of Genesis says the Lord visited Abraham at his home in Mesopotamia (ca. 1900 B.C.) to establish a special covenant or agreement: The Lord said to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1-3). This *Abrahamic Covenant* involved events that would extend far beyond Abraham's lifetime.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's descendants were conscious of being a chosen people (Deuteronomy 14:2). Perhaps because of this special spiritual status, the Hebrew Bible's eschatological vision focused on the collective destiny of the nation of Israel, rather than on the fate of outside nations or of individuals. Yet, since the Lord was not only the special sovereign of Israel, but also the sole supreme being of the whole world, Judaism "combined a certain 'particularism' ... with a certain universalism, which looked forward to ... God's [spiritual] reign over all mankind" [5], [see also 7]. Although the prophets, psalmists, poets, and historians of the Hebrew Bible seemed primarily concerned with the future of Israel (see, for example, Exodus 15:18; Isaiah 24:23; Micah 4:7), they also envisioned "the Lord as the *Only One*," who would establish His kingdom over the whole earth" [8, p. 209] (see Psalm 93:1, 96:10; Zechariah 14:9).

The Torah details the Lord's commandments to the Israelites and his expectations. Just before they entered the *Promised Land* of Canaan, the Lord spoke to the people through Moses and outlined blessings they could expect for obedience and penalties they would pay for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-68). The blessings included direct communion with the Lord, first at the Tabernacle in Shiloh and Gibeon, then at Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (the First Temple) (ca. 950-587 B.C.). The penalties included expulsion from Canaan and *diaspora* [dispersion] among *Gentile* [non-Jewish] nations, a dismal scenario the Israelites avoided for centuries before finally turning away from the Lord *en masse*.

### **Fallen Kingdoms and Exile**

A homeland in the region of Canaan was one of the main rewards the Lord provided the people of Israel (Genesis 12:6-7; 15:18-20) [9]. The Israelites conquered their Promised Land ca. 1400 B.C. and established a unified monarchy ca. 1100-930 that included the reign of David. They then divided into two separate kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which had Jerusalem as its capital (the term *Jew* comes from Judah and the region of Judea). The Assyrians conquered Israel's Northern Kingdom ca. 722 B.C., and the Babylonians conquered and exiled the Israelites of the Southern Kingdom of Judah ca. 590 B.C. The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. altered the Israelites' political identity and Jewish religious positioning, reflected in prophecy. The Hebrew Bible's books of



prophecy date from approximately the mid-ninth century through the mid-fifth century B.C.

Prophets were active during the *pre-exile* period, before the destruction of Jerusalem, and the *exile and post-exile* periods. Pre-exilic prophets included Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah; exile and post-exilic prophets included Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Hosea and Amos were active before the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Around 750 B.C., Amos condemned the kingdoms of Israel and Judah for embracing their neighbor's idolatrous practices and for rampant social injustice (Amos 2:4-5; 4-6). Through Amos, the Lord lamented what had become of his chosen people. "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3:2). Amos was the first prophet to use the term "the day of the Lord," to identify a coming time of punishment for Israel: "Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! ... That day will be darkness, not light ... [when] justice [will] roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:18, 24). Isaiah later wrote that on the day of the Lord the "stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light" (Isaiah 13:10). Amos and Isaiah's warnings foreshadowed the Lord's final judgment on all humanity. Prophetic descriptions of the end times frequently have a terrifying eschatological quality of cosmic upheaval and chaotic destruction.

Isaiah prophesied in the decades following Amos, when the Northern Kingdom fell. Isaiah warned the people living in Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah of their own forthcoming destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. However, like Amos, Isaiah emphasized the Lord would spare a remnant, yet "only a remnant" (Isaiah 10:22). This promise of divine deliverance of a select few had eschatological implications, in both Judaic and Christian views of the last days. The belief that someday the divine ruler would sit in judgment and punish humanity for its transgressions, but spare a righteous remnant, could serve as a dire warning or reassuring consolation.

Micah prophesied in Judah in the years before the Southern Kingdom fell to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (ca. 605-562 B.C.). One of the greatest miseries facing Micah's contemporaries was the prospect of an end to the dynasty of King David (ca. 1030-970 B.C.). After all, the Lord had promised David "when your days are over ... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-16). This was the *Davidic Covenant*. Micah uttered messages of doom and messages of hope. While David's earthly dynasty would soon end, his royal lineage would be revived and reach its greatest fruition in the time of a Messianic deliverer. "Bethlehem [birthplace of David and Jesus] ... though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times. ... He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. ... [His] greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace" (Micah 5:2, 4-5).

Jeremiah also prophesied the Lord would allow the Babylonians to destroy the holy city of Jerusalem and its temple (Jeremiah 22:1-22), but then he would renew his covenants with his chosen people. Nonetheless, in the post-exilic period, the renewed covenant would be a law written in the Israelites' (or Jewish) minds and hearts, "not an outward covenant of stones and



ceremonies” [10, p. 370], (Jeremiah 31:33). David’s dynastic line and kingdom would revive in a spiritual form overseen by a virtuous deliverer, rather than in a temporal, earthly form. “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior’” (Jeremiah 23:5-6). The authors of the Christian Gospels, who believed Jesus’ life fulfilled the Davidic Covenant, were careful to show his familial lineage stretched back to David, to show Jesus was a “son of David” (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Zechariah each prophesied the Lord would eventually welcome people of all nations, “penitent Jews” and “penitent Gentiles,” to his worship in Jerusalem [10, p. 370], (Jeremiah 3:17; Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 2:11).

A decade before he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, King Nebuchadnezzar began exiling members of Judah’s elite families and royal class to Babylonia, including the prophet Ezekiel. The Lord came to Ezekiel and told him that he would punish the pagan enemies of Israel and return the exiles to Jerusalem so they could rebuild the temple and restore a purer, holier nation of Israel (Ezekiel 37:1-28). The Lord revealed he had the power to resurrect, figuratively and literally, the lifeless bones of the exiled nation. “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land” (Ezekiel 37:12-14). Post-exilic Israelites would be a recovered people, cleansed from religious impurities and idolatry, and filled with a “new spirit” (Ezekiel 36:25-26).

In addition, Ezekiel prophesied there would be an improved temple, which he described in meticulous detail, a future sanctuary filled with “the glory of the Lord” (Ezekiel 40-43; 43:4-5). Exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem and built a structure known to historians as the *Second Temple*, which stood from ca. 516 B.C. through A.D. 70, but the Second Temple was not the immense structure Ezekiel described. The hope for and expectation of Ezekiel’s so-called *Third Temple* remains sacred in modern Judaism. The *Amidah* [standing prayer] is the central prayer of Judaic liturgy. When reciting the *Amidah*’s *Avodah* blessing [worship, service], Jews ask the Lord to restore the sacred worship of the temple.

The Third Temple factors into the eschatology of Judaism and Christianity, although there are varied interpretations of how it relates to the Messianic era and whether it will be a physical sanctuary or a spiritual dwelling [see 11]. In the New Testament Gospel of John, Jesus described himself as a temple (John 2:19, 21) and, later, the Apostle John described his vision of a “new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven.” John wrote that he did not see a temple in the city, “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:2, 22) [see also 12, pp. 209-221]. Perhaps Ezekiel and John used distinctive literary styles to describe the same thing: the eternal dwelling of the Lord. The Hebrew Bible, New Testament Scriptures (and *intertestamental* books) recorded visions of a splendid New Jerusalem (see, for example, Isaiah 54; Ezekiel 40-48; Tobit 13; Revelation 21), a city made of “sparkling jewels” and “precious stones” (Isaiah 54:12; Revelation 21:11). In these prophecies, it is often difficult to distinguish pure description from symbolism. Ezekiel saw a marvelous new temple in all of its architectural specificity, representing Jerusalem or Zion’s spiritual renewal; John wrote of a city that “does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Revelation 21:22-23). The New Testament Scriptures say a New



Jerusalem awaits after the last judgment (Revelation: 21:1-6), when the Messiah will replace the earthly Jerusalem, the ancient center of Judaism, with a New Jerusalem, over which the Messiah will reign forever (Galatians 4:21-31).

### **The Exiles' Return and A Clarified Covenant**

Several prophets foretold of the regathering of the Jewish exiles (or *kibbuzgaliyyot*), the return of the diaspora (Deuteronomy 30:3; Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 39:27; Micah 4:6). Zechariah wrote that the return would precede a time when “the Lord will be king over the whole earth” (Zechariah 14:9; see also Psalms 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; Zechariah 12). While establishing such a worldwide kingdom might seem to necessitate the political-military conquest of all Gentile nations, it is more likely the prophecies indicated a worldwide spiritual kingdom involving the conversion of Gentiles either to Judaism or later to the Judeo-Christian faith (Isaiah 56:6; Zechariah 14:16-19; see Acts 15:22-35). The Torah explicitly states the Lord’s spiritual covenants with the people of Israel would eventually triumph over the false religions and practices of Gentile nations (Exodus 19:5; Numbers 24:17-24; Deuteronomy 4:6).

Jewish exiles began gradually returning to Judea following a decree by King Cyrus of Persia (ca. 600-530 B.C.), after Cyrus conquered Babylonia. The Persian king endorsed religious tolerance and he allowed prisoners of war and their descendants to return to their ancestral homelands [13, p. 80]. Cyrus gave the Jewish exiles financial support to go to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, and establish a *theological state*. The Lord told Jeremiah the Babylonian captivity would last only seventy years and, through the intercession of the coming “Righteous Savior,” he would make a “new covenant” with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. “It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant ... This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law *in their minds* and write it *on their hearts* [emphasis added]. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jeremiah 23:6; 25:11-12; 29:10; 31:31-33). The term “new covenant” comes to us through Latin translations as “new testament,” the name given to the distinctly Christian segment of the Bible.

Isaiah offered insight into the Lord’s authority over the entirety of humanity, by emphasizing he alone directs the course of world history from its beginning to its culmination. “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isaiah 46:10). Isaiah foretold the Lord would use the people of Israel to bring spiritual understanding and salvation to all people. The Lord, “Creator of the heavens ... who spreads out the earth ... who gives breath to its people,” says I “have called you [Israel] in righteousness; ... I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind” (Isaiah 42:5-7). Isaiah prophesized the Lord would bring salvation to the world through his “servant” and “chosen one,” who would be “despised and rejected by mankind,” suffer for mankind’s transgressions and bear “the sins of many.” The servant would be slaughtered, then “raised and lifted up and highly exalted” (Isaiah 42:1; 52:13-53:12). Christians see these prophecies pointing to the life and death of Jesus (John 1:10-11; 1 Peter 2:24). Through divine intervention and the servant’s redemptive mission, the Lord would transform his relationship with humanity, and “people of all nations and languages ... [would] come and see [his] glory” (Isaiah 66:18). In the end, the Lord would resurrect and “execute judgement on all people.” Some “who dwell in the dust [will] wake up and shout for joy,” while others will wake and face punishment “for their sins.”



Then the Lord will “lay waste the earth, and devastate it” (Isaiah 24:1-13; 26:19, 21; 66:16).

While living in exile in Babylon, the prophet Daniel had a series of visions, presenting an even more comprehensive overview of the end times (Daniel 7-12). Daniel symbolically described the progressive rise and fall of the ancient empires of Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Daniel 7:2-12; 8:20-21). Perhaps in reference to Roman persecution of the early Christian church, Daniel wrote that the final empire will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people ... The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, ... [but] his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High" (Daniel 7:25-27). Centuries before the life of Jesus, Daniel prophesied, “In my vision ... There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [the Lord] and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14). Daniel's words were echoed in the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Mark 8:31; 14:62).

Isaiah's Messianic prophecies were even more explicit, particularly his *Immanuel* passage. Immanuel is a Hebrew term meaning “God [is] with us.” Isaiah prophesied to King Ahaz of Judah, “[T]he Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Though this prophecy may have been initially realized during Ahaz's lifetime, the Apostle Matthew recognized it as a foreshadowing of *types* representing the Virgin Mary and her son Jesus (Matthew 1:22-23) [14, pp. 159-160]. Isaiah went on to foretell that in the future the Lord “will honor Galilee,” the region where Jesus spent his childhood. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ... He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isaiah 9:1, 6-7).

### **Collective Vs. Individual Eschatology**

The central narrative of the Hebrew Bible is the Lord's interaction with the nation of Israel, his concern for his chosen people as a whole. This narrative subordinated the self-interest of individuals to the collective welfare. Whereas individuals received retribution for wrongdoing and rewards for righteousness during their earthly life (see, for example, Genesis 3:16-19; Esther; Jonah 1-2), there was always the overriding theme of greater, shared hopes. Those hopes resulted from the Lord's promises to Abraham: “I will make you a great nation” through which “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). They also resulted from the Lord's promises to David: Your offspring “will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever” (1 Chronicles 17:12). When the kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians, and the Jewish people went into exile, the divine assurances of an enduring kingdom appeared in doubt. It was during this time, the Hebrew prophets began looking beyond the nation of Israel to emphasize individual retribution and rewards in the coming Messianic era and the end times.

The view that the Lord dispenses sufficient recompense or penalties for a person's earthly acts only during their earthly life would seem to negate the purpose of individual resurrection. Yet, discussions of personal resurrection and attendant judgement are found throughout the Hebrew Bible (see Genesis 18:25; Exodus 32:33; Deuteronomy 7:10; 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; Isaiah 3:10;



Jeremiah 17:5-10; Ezekiel 14:12-20; 18:4, 18; Proverbs 11:19). The book of Psalms and the book of Job most passionately express individual longing for an eternal union with the Lord, and a sincere belief in that eventuality. King David wrote, “[M]y heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:9-11). Job lived a virtuous life, but nonetheless faced the harshest of human suffering. In spite of his difficulties, Job’s faith in the Lord persevered, as did his belief in resurrection and his ultimate vindication. “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes ... How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27). In reference to the resurrection of wicked and righteous individuals, the prophet Daniel wrote, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise [or “who impart wisdom”] will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:2-3; see John 5:24-27).

Talmudic interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures also shine light on what happens when a person dies. The Talmud includes two types of discussions: *halakha* [legal matters] and *aggadah* [narrative, explanatory materials]. The aggadah suggests that one of two destinations await the soul when it separates from the body at death: *Gehenna* [hell] and the Garden (or *Gan*) of Eden, a paradisiacal abode of righteous souls. Sotah, a tractate of the Talmud, includes this passage: “Master of the Universe, You created the Garden of Eden and You created Gehenna, You created the righteous and You created the wicked. May it be Your will that men shall not stumble because of me and consequently go to Gehenna” (Sotah 22a).

Both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament distinguish between individual (or personal) eschatology and the collective eschatology of all humanity. Personal eschatology involves individual death and resurrection, the destiny of individual souls (perhaps *personal immortality*), and how earthly life affects the eternal fate of the soul. Collective eschatology involves the world’s final days, the general resurrection, the last judgment of all humanity, and signs and harbingers that these grand events are impending. According to Jesus, it is futile to attempt to discern harbingers of the last days or his *Second Coming* because “the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Luke 12:40; see also Mark 13:32). Furthermore, within the context of the totality of human history, relatively few people will live to see the end. Jesus did offer one indication of when to expect the final day. He said, “[T]his gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

The Scriptures suggest there will be a period of great turmoil at the very end of history, before the Messiah’s arrival (as taught in Judaic eschatology) or when the Messiah returns (as taught in Christian eschatology). It will be an epoch of natural disasters, warfare and violence, cosmic disturbances, “fearful events, and great signs from heaven” (see Isaiah 24:1-27:3; Ezekiel 38-39; Daniel 12:1-2; Luke 21:11; 4 Ezra 7:28-29, 32-33). After these proceedings, known as *hevlo shel mashiah* [the birth pangs of the Messiah], the chosen one will appear and triumph over the forces of evil (Revelation 19:11-21:4). Daniel wrote that at the end of the turmoil the “Ancient of Days” will confer the savior with never-ending “authority, glory, and sovereign power” over all nations, and people of every language will worship him. (Daniel 7:14). Similarly, the Apostle Paul prophesied, in the last days the savior will exert his authority over





all dominions, authorities, and powers, and the last enemy he will destroy will be death (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). This all pertains to collective eschatology, or the collective end times.

A person's individual end times begin at death, when the soul separates from the body, when the Lord takes back his "breath of life" (see Genesis 2:7). Some Christians believe in the doctrine of *original sin*, that human beings are born into a condition or state of condemnation as a result of the guilt of Adam and Eve's disobedience (see Genesis 2:17; 3:1-19; Romans 5:12). Other Christians do not believe every person is tainted by Adam and Eve's transgressions, but, rather, that all are individually guilty for having sinned and fallen "short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and, therefore, all individually rely upon divine grace and redemption.

Whatever the case may be, the New Testament Scriptures say each person's earthly life serves as a probationary period determining the eternal destiny of his or her soul (see John 9:1-4). Jesus taught that a day is coming "when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out" (John 5:28-29). The Apostle Paul wrote that on that day all must "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those destined for eternal life will stand before the "Son of Man's" "glorious throne" resurrected in "imperishable, spiritual" bodies prepared for personal immortality (1 Corinthians 15:42-43; Matthew 25:31). Based on Christ's judgment, the condemned "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matthew 25:46; see John 5:28-29). [T]he "children of God" will then enter into "a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13; Romans 8:19).

### **Apocalyptic Foretelling of the Day of The Lord**

The Scriptures contain several extended *apocalyptic utterances*: symbolic, eschatological prophecy expressed during particularly distressing conditions and usually offering hope of future relief. From the Greek words *apocalypsis* [uncovering] and *apocrypha* [hidden], such utterances uncover unseen realities and reveal future events that are at present concealed.

The apocalyptic prophets foretold a cataclysmic "day of the Lord," when all people will face a divine reckoning. Zephaniah prophesied, "On the day of the Lord's wrath ... the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth" (Zephaniah 1:18). Isaiah described it as "a cruel day," a day of the Lord's "wrath and fierce anger," when he will "punish the world for its evil [and] the wicked for their sins" (Isaiah 13:9-11). The Apostle Peter wrote, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10). Although the Scriptures describe a devastating, transformative final day, Malachi and others offered hope for the faithful remnant who continue to fear and honor the Lord's name. "'On the day when I act,' says the Lord Almighty, 'they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not'" (Malachi 3:16-18). A few prophets proclaimed "in the last days" the Lord would spare not only a "remnant of Israel" but also converts from "all nations" (Zephaniah 3:13; Isaiah 2:2; see also Jeremiah 6:9; 31:7; Ezekiel 9:8; Isaiah 10:20-21).

Apocalyptic utterances mention both collective and individual judgment. While there are earlier Scriptures stating the Lord will judge each person for their own behavior (see 1 Samuel



26:23), Ezekiel was the first to expound on retribution for individual deeds. Ezekiel wrote, “The one who sins is the one who will die. ... The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them. ... [I]f a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. ... I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent!” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20, 21, 30). This divine system of retribution is often difficult to ascertain, however, within limited, earthly existence, where “the wicked” often prosper and “the righteous” often suffer (see the book of Job). The system becomes clearer with a realization that the scheme of retribution stretches beyond physical death.

### Resurrection

The Torah usually only tacitly acknowledges the resurrection (and the *afterlife* generally), though the Talmudic writers suggest it is often alluded to (Sanhedrin 90b-91a). Rabbi Joseph Telushkin has provided one reason why: “I suspect that there is a correlation between [the Torah’s] non-discussion of afterlife and the fact that the Torah was revealed just after the long Jewish sojourn in Egypt. The Egyptian society from which the Hebrew slaves emerged was obsessed with death and afterlife. ... [In contrast, the] Torah is obsessed with this world” [15]. It is essential to distinguish resurrection from afterlife. The term resurrection appears frequently in the New Testament and derives from the Latin *resurgere* [rise again]. The term afterlife is less specific and means the continued existence of the soul after the death of the body.

Since the time of Daniel, at the latest, resurrection has been a tenet of Judaism (see Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1). *Gevurot* [meaning strength or mighty deeds] is the second blessing of the Amidah. *Gevurot* says, “You are mighty forever, my Lord; You resurrect the dead ... He sustains the living with loving kindness, resurrects the dead with great mercy, supports the falling, heals the sick, releases the bound, and fulfills His trust to those who sleep in the dust. ... [Who] who can be compared to You, King, who brings death and restores life, and causes deliverance to spring forth! You are trustworthy to revive the dead. Blessed are You Lord, who revives the dead.” The medieval Sephardi scholar of the Torah, Maimonides (1138-1204), or Rambam, wrote a treatise on tractate Sanhedrin 10 that included his “thirteen principles of faith” [16, pp. 402-423]. Some regard these principles as fundamental beliefs of Judaism. Maimonides’ final principle affirmed a “complete faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead at the time that will be pleasing before the Creator.” Maimonides also affirmed his “complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he tarry in waiting ... I will still wait expectantly for him each day that he will come.”

The Talmudic rabbis foresaw a reunion of the resurrected body and soul as a prerequisite to the final judgment. Talmud tractate Sanhedrin teaches, “The Holy One, Blessed be He, brings the soul on the day of judgment and casts it back into the body, as they were when they sinned, and He judges them as one, as it is stated: ‘He calls to the heavens above and to the earth that He may judge His people’ (Psalms 50:4). ‘He calls to the heavens above’; this is the soul, which is heavenly. ‘And to the earth that He may judge His people’; this is the body, which is earthly” (Sanhedrin 91b).

The Scriptures portray the final judgment as a great blessing for some and a terrible day to fear for others. The psalmist poetically described what is at stake: “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take ... but whose delight is in the



law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither ... Not so wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. ... For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction” (Psalm 1; see also Isaiah 65:13-14).

### **The Messianic Era**

As a side note, it is interesting that the authors of the intertestamental *Jewish Apocrypha*, or “outer books,” also wrote at length about the resurrection of the dead. The intertestamental writings, of ca. 516 B.C. through ca. A.D. 70, were never part of the Hebrew Bible’s canon, yet many followers of Judaism and Christianity consider them valuable for spiritual contemplation and edification. The books of Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Sirach, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and the Wisdom of Solomon were included in the fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible, *The Vulgate*, and in the third-century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, *The Septuagint*. They are part of the biblical canons of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. In addition, some Christian Bibles include certain *Pseudepigrapha* [works written in a biblical style but with seemingly spurious attributed sources]. These books are relevant for this essay because they include extensive eschatological and apocalyptic content, and information about the Messiah, reflecting ideas found in the canonical Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

The English word Messiah derives from a long line of translations and transliterations. The ancient Aramaic (Semitic) *meshiha* and Hebrew *mashiah* [the anointed (of the Lord)] were adapted to the Greek *messias*, and then translated into Latin as *Messias*, which finally became the anglicized Messiah. The Greek Septuagint translated *mashiah* as *Christos*.

Intertestamental authors evidenced a widespread Judaic belief in the imminent arrival of the Messiah. They anticipated the Lord would first send a messenger to prepare the Messiah’s way, but they were unsure who that messenger would be. Some thought Jeremiah would return to prepare a path for the savior (see 2 Maccabees 15:14); others believed Elijah would return. The author of Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus) wrote, “The scripture says that you [Elijah] are ready to appear at the designated time, to cool God's anger before it breaks out in fury” (Sirach 48:10). Sirach’s author was referencing a prophecy found in Malachi, the final book of the Christian Old Testament: “I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents” (Malachi 4:5-6).

During his ministry, Jesus endorsed the verity of Malachi’s words, but revealed Elijah’s prophesied return was a foreshadowing of the trailblazing mission of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13). Jesus said, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and [the teachers of the law] did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands” (Matthew 17:11-12). The authors of the New Testament Gospels understood John the Baptist to be the spiritual heir of Elijah. Luke wrote that John would “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:11, 17; see also Matthew 11:13-14; Mark 9:11-13). Before he was martyred, the Scriptures say John the Baptist did indeed proclaim Jesus was the Messiah and paved the way for his ministry (John 1:29-34; Matthew 14:1-12).



The Messianic era, known as *yemot ha-mashiah* [the days of the Messiah], is a crucial epoch in Judaism's eschatological system. Since the age of King David, the people of Israel have awaited the time when the Lord raises up David's successor to establish "the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:11-14). The prophets promised the coming Messiah would restore Israel and Jerusalem's prominence and bring other nations under his authority, leading to an idyllic period of peace and spiritual harmony. "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many people will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

A magnificent Messianic future is a consistent thematic thread woven throughout Hebrew biblical prophecy. The prophets foretold the Davidic Messiah would establish a new "covenant of peace" and reign over *Malkuta de-Adonai* [the Kingdom of God] (Ezekiel 34:23-25; Daniel 7:27), which would begin on earth yet transcend earthly existence [17, p. 502-503]. The Lord told Isaiah that in the Messianic age "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord," causing people to "come trembling to the Lord their God [the Messianic king]" (Isaiah 11:9; Hosea 3:5).

The hope of resurrection went hand-in-hand with Messianic hope. The Lord told the prophets he would create a "new heavens and a new earth," where former pain and sorrows "will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17). The prophets proclaimed every person whose name is written in "the book of life" will be resurrected and awakened to "everlasting life" (Isaiah 25:1-8; Daniel 12:1-2; Revelation 20:15). Resurrected Jewish martyrs killed for following the Mosaic commandments were expected to be among the first recipients of heavenly recompense, when the Messiah bestowed his just rewards (see Jubilees 23:30). The prophets also said all the nations will share in the glory of the Messianic era (Isaiah 41:1). The Lord told Zephaniah, "I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Zephaniah 3:9). Maimonides wrote the Messiah would be a universally adored Jewish king, who would preside over a period of peace between Israel and the Gentile nations. Maimonides paid special attention to Isaiah's symbolic Scripture: "The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat" (Isaiah 11:6), [16], [18, p. 34].

New Testament authors accepted the Hebrew Bible's eschatological scheme (Luke 4:16-21; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-12), but they contended the religious leaders had misunderstood or misinterpreted the old prophecies. As previously stated, this brief essay cannot resolve ancient Judeo-Christian disagreements over whether Jesus was the Messiah. Still, it is appropriate to at least point out a selection of prophecies the New Testament claims he fulfilled (see Luke 24:26-27). The Apostles and Gospel evangelists indicated that Jesus was a direct descendent of Abraham and David, and heir to David's throne (Genesis 12:3; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 9:7; Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:33; Romans 1:3; 9:5). The Apostle Matthew contended Jesus' birth in Bethlehem bore out prophecies that the Messiah would be born in "the city of David," the miraculous child of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Malachi 5:2; Matthew 1:22-23; 2:6). The Apostle Philip stated Jesus embodied the Lord's "suffering servant" described by Isaiah centuries before (Isaiah 53:5-8; Acts 8:26-36). The Apostles also claimed Jesus' life story satisfied prophecies of the Messiah's suffering and death (Psalm 2:1-2; 22:1; Isaiah 53:7-8; Matthew 27:46; Acts 3:18; 4:25-26; 8:32-33), resurrection (Psalm 16:10; 49:15; Matthew



28:2-7; Acts 2:22-32), ascension to heaven (Psalm 24:7-10; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51), and inheritance of an eternal throne (Psalm 45:6-7; Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:33; Hebrews 1:8-12).

Christians accept Jesus as the foretold Messiah, although various groups and denominations have different understandings of his Second Coming, or future return. To a great degree, the differences are based on opposing interpretations of the Apostle John's apocalyptic prophecy in the book of Revelation (and Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-28; John 14:25-30). John described seeing "an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss" from the Greek *abyssos* [a bottomless pit or place of the dead]. John wrote the angel "seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him [and threw him into the Abyss] for a thousand years," during which time Jesus Christ, and his resurrected martyrs, will "reign." Then, after Satan is finally defeated, all of humanity will be resurrected and stand before a "great white throne" to be judged "according to what they had done as recorded in [the books of life]" (Revelation 20:1-3, 6, 12-15). The condemned will go to punishment and God's "people" will go to a beautiful city in the presence of the "throne of God and of the Lamb," through which flows "the river of the water of [eternal] life" (Revelation: 21:3; 22:1). Christians hold conflicting views 1) on whether John meant a literal thousand-year reign or spoke figuratively of a very lengthy reign of undetermined duration, and 2) on whether the reign will occur on earth, in heaven, or in both places.

There are three main schools of thought about the *Millennium* or *Millennialism*, from the Latin *mille* [thousand] and *annus* [year] [see 19]. In general, *Premillennialists* believe Jesus will return in glory to intervene in human history by setting up an earthly kingdom (sometimes called the New Jerusalem) and reign over the nations of the world for a thousand years. He will then judge the living and the resurrected dead [20]. This view is called Premillennialism because it postulates Jesus will return before the millennium begins. In general, *Postmillennialists* believe John prophesied of a lengthy era, of undetermined length, when the Christian church, under the leadership of Jesus in heaven, will complete its earthly mission. After the gospel message has been sufficiently preached to all nations (Matthew 24:14), Jesus will return for the general resurrection and final judgement [21]. This view is called Postmillennialism because it proposes Jesus will return at the end of the metaphorical millennium. Finally, *Amillennialists* believe the thousand years John described should be understood symbolically. Amillennialists do not anticipate a future thousand-year physical reign, rather, they hold that the millennium began with the advent of the church and will end when Jesus returns for the resurrection and judgment [22] (Strimple, 1999). Many Roman Catholics hold this view; for example, Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a prominent "doctor of the [Roman Catholic] Church" was a noted proponent of the symbolic interpretation of the millennial reign [23].

Christian theologians acknowledge the prophets of the Hebrew Bible often intermingled visions that, only from the advantageous perspective of hindsight, clearly belonged only to either the Old Testament era, the Messiah's *First Coming*, or to his *Second Coming*. Consider, for example, when Isaiah prophesied, "Your dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy" (Isaiah 26:19), or when Daniel prophesied, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). While these might be interpreted as referring to contemporary events or a singular, distant Messianic "day of the Lord," greater historical perspective, though, suggests these refer instead to the final resurrection and the final "day of the Lord" and the *Second Coming*. Prophetic intermingling tends to give to the whole



picture of the Messianic kingdom an eschatological character that belongs in reality only to its final stage. ... It is not, therefore, surprising that the religious hopes of the Jewish nation [became] so predominantly eschatological, and that [Judaism] should have learned to look for the establishment on earth of the glorious Kingdom of God" [24], which Christians anticipate will only be completely realized in heaven following earth's final days. It should also be noted that certain New Testament Scriptures closely juxtaposed prophecies that would be fulfilled at different times (see, for example, Matthew 24:3-35; Luke 21:5-28).

### **The Spiritual Kingdom of God**

During his ministry, Jesus taught the *gospel* [good news] that the time had finally arrived for the establishment of "the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15), but that his kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). Jesus instructed his "gospel of the kingdom" should be "preached in the whole world," though his disciples should look for their rewards in the afterlife, when they would live in his "Father's house" (Matthew 24:14; John 14:2-3). The kingdom Jesus described is a heavenly theocracy, from the Greek *theocratia* [the rule of God], a system in which the divine ruler has all authority and his commandments are the supreme law. There were reflections of this spiritual kingdom in the Lord's promises to David. "The Lord declares ... [w]hen your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring [and] establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom *forever* [emphasis added]," even when the earth passes away (2 Samuel 7:11-14).

Jesus centered his "kingdom message" throughout his recorded discourses and in multitudes of illustrative *parables* (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 13:18-29). He conceptualized the kingdom as more than merely a place or a goal to attain; it is also "an influence which must permeate men's minds if they would be one with Him and attain to His ideals" [24]. "The kingdom of God is within you," Jesus proclaimed, revealing it is both spiritual (eternal and heavenly) and internal (or personal) (Luke 17:21). In the New Testament Scriptures, membership in the kingdom became synonymous with membership in the Christian church (Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12) [see also 25, p. 35]. Early Christians saw the dawning new dispensation as a time of fulfillment of a multitude of Messianic kingdom prophecies. However, many others maintain[ed] a material, even political interpretation of the Messianic kingdom that conflated the ancient Israelites' status as a spiritually 'chosen people' with expectations the Lord will eventually provide them with a worldwide domain [26]. One reason for this may be that prophecies of the day or kingdom of the Lord do not always mention a specific person (or Messiah). For example, Isaiah wrote, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor. ... [I will] make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:3, 6). This seems to leave open the possibility that the "servant of the Lord" is the nation of Israel as a whole, though elsewhere Isaiah more clearly indicated the Lord's servant is a particular person, who has the same characteristics as Jesus (see the "servant song" Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

### **CONCLUSION**

The Judeo-Christian faith presents a unified eschatological vision, based upon the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, which Jesus and his disciples substantially clarified. Whereas the early Hebrew prophets focused on the Lord's dealings with his chosen people, the writers of the New



Testament emphasized the expansion of the divine mission to all nations and all people, through the Christian church. The earthly promises contained in Judaism's Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants found realization in the new advent and spiritual promises of the Christian New Covenant. Genesis begins with a description of the Lord's creation of humanity and the earthly paradise of Eden and explains how humanity lost access to paradise through sin and rebellion (Genesis 1-3). Revelation ends with a description of the Lord's heavenly paradise and with the Messiah's blessing on all those who accept his invitation to follow the "way of the righteous" to the gates of his eternal city (Revelation 22:14). The Judeo-Christian eschatological prophecies and Messianic messages are consistent and complementary.

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