CHALLENGING MESSIANISM AND APOCALYPTISM: 
A STUDY OF THE THREE SURVIVING MESSIAHS, THEIR 
RELATED COMMONALITIES, PROBLEMATIC ISSUES AND THE 
BELIEFS SURROUNDING THEM 

by
Lilian Krawitz

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of 

Doctor of Literature and Philosophy 

in the subject 

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY 

at the 

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA 

PROMOTER: PROF C L VAN WYK SCHEEPERS 

November 2010
I declare that:

CHALLENGING MESSIANISM AND APOCALYPTIM:
A STUDY OF THE THREE SURVIVING MESSIAHS, THEIR
RELATED COMMONALITIES, PROBLEMATIC ISSUES AND THE
BELIEFS SURROUNDING THEM

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been
indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.
SUMMARY:

The thesis is concerned with two issues, modern messiahs and their appeal, namely the highly successful Rebbe M.M. Schneerson from Chabad; and hostile, modern day, militant messianists and their beliefs, namely the USA Christian evangelicals and their rapture belief. The study directs attention at the three successful (in the sense that their movements survived their deaths) Jewish Messiahs, the 1st century Jesus, the 17th century Sabbatai Sevi and the present day, but recently deceased (1994) Rebbe Schneerson. The focus in the study falls on the latter two Jewish Messiahs, especially Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad, from Crown Heights, New York, whose messianic beliefs and conduct the thesis has been able to follow in real time. The thesis argues that Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad’s extreme messianic beliefs and praxis, and the marked similarities that exist between all three Jewish Messiahs and their followers indicate that Chabad will probably, over time, become another religion removed from Judaism.

The thesis notes that the three Jewish Messiahs share a similar messiah template, the “suffering servant” messiah” template. The thesis argues that this template is related to the wide appeal and success of these three Jewish messiahs, as it offers their followers the option of vicarious atonement which relieves people from dealing with their own transgressions and permits people to evade the demanding task of assuming personal accountability for all their actions, including their transgressions.

The recommendations in this thesis are prompted by the “wall of deafening silence” which is the result of political correctness and the “hands off religion” position, that prevents debate or censure of hostile militant messianism, despite the inherent dangers and high cost attached to the praxis of hostile, militant messianism and militant messianists’ belief in exclusive apocalyptic scenarios, in modern, multicultural and democratic societies. The thesis argues this situation is not tenable and that it needs to be addressed, especially where modern day, hostile, militant messianists, unlike their predecessors at Qumran, now have access to the military and to military hardware, including nuclear warheads, and are able to hasten the End Times should they simply choose to do so.

KEY TERMS:

Apocalyptism; Apostasy; Chabad; Christian evangelicals; Christian Zionism; Compassion; Deification; Dual Covenant Theology; Evangelical right-wing; Hassidism; Heresy; Incarnation; Jewish Messiahs; Jewish messianism; Jewish resurrection imagery; Kabbalah; Lubavitchers; Lurianic Kabbalah; Maimonides; Messiah templates; Militant messianism; Mishneh Torah; Modern messiahs; Qumran; Rapture; Sabbatians; Sabbatai Sevi; Schneerson; Suffering servant messiah template; Gabriel Stone; Vicarious atonement.
CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 2

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY ................................................................................................. 2

1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY ................................................................................................................ 15

1.2.1 The Research problem ........................................................................................................ 15

1.2.2 The research problem in relation to the Chabad/Lubavitchers sect ................................. 16

1.2.3 The research problem and Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis and the Gabriel Stone ....... 17

1.2.4 The research problem and hostile, modern-day, militant messianism ............................. 18

1.2.4.1 Militant Islam and its apocalyptic based jihad ............................................................ 18

1.2.5 The research problem and the Christian evangelicals’ belief in the Rapture .................. 19

1.2.6 The research problem and the lack of rational criticism and debate .............................. 20

1.3 THE TWO CENTRAL PROPOSALS OF THE THESIS ......................................................... 22

1.3.1 First Proposal: Emergence of new messianic-based religious beliefs ............................. 22

1.3.2 Second Proposal: That the three Jewish messiahs share a common messiah template .... 22

1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................................................................................. 23

1.4.1 First recommendation: Abolition of the “politically correct” approach to the discussion and criticism of religion ....................................................................................... 23

1.4.2 Second recommendation: Obligations of leaders .............................................................. 25

1.5 METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................................... 28

1.5.1 Survey of messianism and apocalypticism ......................................................................... 28

1.5.2 Jewish Messiahs whose movements survived their death ............................................... 28

1.5.3 Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis and the Gabriel Stone ................................................ 30

1.5.4 The Evangelicals and the Rapture ..................................................................................... 32

1.5.5 Key sources, including literary and other mediums used in this thesis ......................... 33

1.5.5.1 Sources for Jewish messiahs, Jewish messianism and apocalypticism and Jewish messianic groups .............................................................................................................. 33

1.5.5.2 Sources consulted for Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad ............... 34

1.5.5.3 Sources related to the three Jewish Messiahs’ messiah template ................................. 36

1.5.5.4 The Christian evangelicals and their militant rapture belief .................................... 37

1.5.5.5 Other sources consulted ............................................................................................... 38

1.5.6 Outline of the Study ............................................................................................................. 38

CHAPTER 2: JUDAISM(S), MESSIAH(S), MESSIANISM AND APOCALYPTIC BELIEFS, FROM THE PAST TO PRESENT: A BRIEF SUMMARY ......................................................... 42

2.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE IDEAS THAT UNDERLIE MESSIANIC AND APOCALYPTIC MOVEMENTS ............................................................................................................ 42

2.1.1 Talmon’s Summary ............................................................................................................ 43

2.2 THE TERM “MESSIAH” AND MESSIANISM IN JUDAISM ..................................................... 45

2.2.1 Clarifying the messianic idea in Judaism ......................................................................... 45

2.2.2 The messianic idea and key elements of Jewish Messianism .......................................... 46

2.2.3 The Day of the Lord concept ........................................................................................... 47

2.2.4 The Term “Messiah” in Judaism ....................................................................................... 48

2.2.4.1 The root of the term “Messiah” .................................................................................. 48

2.2.4.2 The term “messiah” in the Hebrew Bible .................................................................... 48
2.4.1 The existence of the messiah/ruling king construct not unique to Judaism

2.5 THE MESSIANIC IDEA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT AT QUMRAN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

2.5.1 Putting the Scrolls in perspective

2.5.2 The Dead Sea Scrolls: Messiahs and messianic beliefs

2.5.3 Clarifying Messiah(s) constructs and messianic expectations at Qumran

2.5.3.1 Lichtenberg: Ideas and belief about Messiahs and messianism not confined to scribal exegesis

2.5.3.2 Oegema: The Maccabean and Hasmonean period

2.5.3.3 Oegema: The Roman-Herodian period including the destruction of Qumran in 68 BCE

2.5.4 Vermes: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

2.5.5 Shanks: Messiahs, messianism and the end of days

2.5.5.1 How many messiahs at Qumran?

2.5.5.2 The apocalyptic and eschatological idea: Intertestamental biblical literature

2.5.5.3 The apocalyptic and eschatological idea: The Dead Sea Scrolls

2.5.6 VanderKam and Flint: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

2.5.6.1 Messiahs at Qumran

2.5.6.2 The End of Days

2.5.7 Schiffman: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

2.5.7.1 The Essene hypothesis versus the Sadducean origins of Qumran

2.5.7.2 Messianic figures in the Qumran texts

2.5.7.3 The End of Days

2.5.8 Talmon: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

2.5.8.1 Talmon’s understanding of the Qumran messiahs

2.5.8.2 The New Age and the Messianic Age

2.5.9 Qumran messianism: final observations

2.6 THE MESSIANIC AND APOCALYPTIC IDEA: FROM THE RABBIS TO THE PRESENT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

2.6.1 Post-biblical Judaism and the messianic idea

2.6.2 The Rabbis and the messianic and apocalyptic idea

2.6.2.1 The Rabbinic perception of the Messiah

2.6.2.2 The Rabbis and the messianic age

2.6.2.3 The restorative, utopian and conservative elements of rabbinic Judaism

2.6.2.4 The messianic age and the final redemption

2.6.3 Medieval rationalism, Maimonides and the messianic ideal

2.6.3.1 The move to medieval rationalism

2.6.3.2 Maimonides’ work and the messianic ideal

2.6.3.3 The concept of the Few Righteous Men and the Messianic secret
### 2.6.3.4 The shift from medieval rationalism to the Zohar and kabbalistic beliefs

#### 2.6.4 Modern Jewish Thinking: Messiahs, messianism and the end of days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.1</td>
<td>The Cornerstone of Jewish faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.2</td>
<td>Modern Orthodox Jewish tradition and the messianic ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.3</td>
<td>Orthodoxy, Zionism and the messianic ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.4</td>
<td>Reform (Progressive) Judaism and the messianic ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.5</td>
<td>The Conservative (Masorti) Movement and the messianic ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.6</td>
<td>The Reconstructionists and the messianic ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.4.7</td>
<td>Modern Jewish thinkers and the messianic ideal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2.7 SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>SABBATAI SEVI AND THE SABBATIAN MOVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td>The Sabbatian Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.1</td>
<td>The Sabbatian movement stands apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.2</td>
<td>Sabbatianism and Lurianic Kabbalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.3</td>
<td>Events, social protest and the Sabbatian movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>SABBATAI SEVI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1</td>
<td>Sabbatai’s early youth and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2</td>
<td>Sabbatai’s marriages and the onset of his bipolar disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3</td>
<td>Sabbatai’s followers see him as a Suffering Messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>THE PROPHET, NATHAN OF GAZA, AND SABBATAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>Nathan of Gaza, Sabbatai’s main proponent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>Nathan persuades Sabbatai that he is the messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>Nathan’s messianic doctrine reveals Christian characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>THE SABBATIAN MOVEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1</td>
<td>The movement begins in Palestine in 1665, and spreads throughout Western Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>Sabbatai and the Polish Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3</td>
<td>The Sabbatian Movement in the East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4</td>
<td>The Turks arrest and imprison Sabbatai on February 8, 1666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5</td>
<td>Sabbatai’s apostasy: September 16, 1666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.6</td>
<td>Nathan and Sabbatai’s apostasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.7</td>
<td>The Sabbatian movement after the apostasy 1667-1668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.8</td>
<td>The Sabbatian movement and Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.9</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>THE HASIDIC CHABAD/LUBAVITCHERS, MODERN-DAY MESSIANISTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>A brief overview of Hasidism and its key teachings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.6 HASSIDISM: WAS IT A MESSIANIC MOVEMENT AT ITS INCEPTION?

### 3.7 THE SPREAD OF HASSIDISM AND THE OPPOSITION OF THE ORTHODOX RABBIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.7.1</td>
<td>Hassidism and the Mitnaggedim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7.2</td>
<td>The Hassidim Today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.8 THE CHABAD/LUBAVITCHERS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW FROM THEIR INCEPTION TO THE PRESENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.8.1</td>
<td>Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Lyadia, the founder of Chabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8.2</td>
<td>Rebbe Yosef Schneerson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Rosenberg’s first letter sent to Rebbe Schneerson ……………… 206

Figure 2: Rosenberg’s second letter sent to Rebbe Schneerson …………….. 207
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

And almost every one, when age,
Disease, or sorrows strikes him.
Inclines to think there is a God,
Or something very like Him.
Arthur H Clough, *Dipsychus*, 1850.

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The oppression-redemption or messiah myth as it is also known, which entails a belief in the coming of an agent (usually with supernatural powers) known as a saviour or messiah, who will save/redeem his/her followers from oppression, whether real or perceived, is an ancient belief that forms an integral part of the three mainstream organised monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The messiah myth is, however, also in found in many other cultures and in many other different forms dating back to the earliest records of civilisation. Some of the more recent and well known messiah myths include the 19th century Native American Ghost Dance, also known as the 1890 Ghost Dance, the Cargo Cults of the South Pacific (Shermer 2000:174-186), as well as South Africa’s own oppression-redemption inspired myth, the Xhosa cattle-killing incident of 1856-57 that was triggered by the Nongqawuse prophecies. This oppression-redemption incident has been discussed in depth by Peires in *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (JB Peires, 1989, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball).

The first century Mediterranean CE world was also familiar with the concept of oppression-redemption messiah myths. Apollonius of Tyana is probably one of the most notable first century messiahs from the first century Mediterranean world, besides Jesus. Apollonius is said to have had powers that were virtually identical to Jesus, in that he too could raise the dead and heal the sick and, like Jesus, he also preached love and forgiveness as well as the worship of one true God. Just as in the case of Jesus, the Roman authorities were troubled by Apollonius’ expanding movement and the possibility that he could pose a social or political threat. This is why the Romans arrested Appolonius and killed him in 98 CE (Shermer 2000:186).

The messiah myth has also permeated modern pop culture. The messiah myth motif can be seen across the spectrum, from children’s toys, books and television programs,
such as “He-Man and the Masters of the Universe” (which first appeared in DC Comics in 1982, then went on to become a popular TV series, a film and a range of toy figures made by Mattel in the 1980s), to adult comic books and films that feature a variety of well-known superhero comic book type figures. The list of superhero comic book figures, with supernatural powers, is particularly impressive and includes Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster’s Superman (created in 1934 and sold to DC comics in 1938), Batman created by Bob Cane and Bill Finger in 1939, Marvel Comics’ Spiderman (designed by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko in 1962), as well as heroes such as Marvel Comics’ Captain America (created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in 1941).

It is probably the result of my secular upbringing and my childhood love of comic books and comic book superheroes that I, like Rushkoff (2003:151), have also found that people’s beliefs in religious messiahs simply remind me of men and women’s ancient, but enduring longing for redemption/salvation from an external agent (usually with supernatural powers) as typified by comic book superheroes, like Superman, who are constantly swooping down from the sky to “save” people.

Rushkoff’s sardonic view on messianism is also evident when he refers to messianism as a “messianic fantasy” and, for me, his observation simply serves to underscore the literally fantastic nature of the messiah myth. It is nevertheless the fantastic and otherworldly component of messiahs, particularly recent and modern day Jewish messiahs and the suspension of rational thought that these beliefs require; as well as the so-called spectacular and violent end-of-time scenarios, specifically the well planned military-oriented scenarios of certain groups such as the Qumranites, and especially those of certain modern-day militant messianic groups, which intrigue me and which ultimately led to this thesis.

I also tend to concur with Rushkoff’s eloquent and accurate critical evaluation of messianic beliefs. In the following quote, Rushkoff explains why belief in messianism negates humanity’s ability to exercise free will, and prevents people from being active participants in the story of humanity:

The adoption of messianic legend as a reason for being disqualifies Jews from actively participating in the human story. It accepts, instead, that history and the future have already been written. Jews become mere players in a predetermined story, their roles in Judaism reduced from free-thinking autonomous individuals to those of genetically preordained members of a
race. And the aspiration for universal understanding and tolerance is limited to the artificial construction of a particularised nation-state (Rushkoff 2003:152).

Although in the quote above, Rushkoff is only referring to the Jews whose messianic destiny, in this instance, is predetermined by the genetic fortune of belonging to the “right” messianic group, other messianic groups also tend to believe that particular mutual beliefs and/or qualities determine their groups’ messianic destiny.

My deeply ingrained scepticism, as well as recent history, most notably the Holocaust, has also taught many Jews, including myself, to be more cynical about any type of saviour/redeemer, supernatural or otherwise. Consequently, my perceptual framework prevents me from

- simply accepting certain scholarly statements at face value such as “In the history of western culture no concept has been more crucial than messianism”¹;
- subscribing to a belief in any type of “superhero” figure or agent, which includes religious messiahs;
- accepting any literal interpretation of any biblical text. This includes texts that would permit me “to preserve the belief that there was a great moment back in time when everything was perfect, and that a similar perfection awaits [humanity] at some moment in the future” (Rushkoff 2003:151).

Yet, despite this, my interest in Jewish messianism and apocalyptism, and its numerous messiahs, particularly the three successful Jewish Messiahs, was literally ignited in the very early 1980s. This was the result of a riveting series of adult education lectures which dealt with mysticism, kabbalah, Jewish Messiahs, and messianism, by the late, highly erudite Rabbi Adi Assabi, from what was then the Jewish Reform, Imanu-Shalom Congregation, of Johannesburg.

Rabbi Assabi’s lectures introduced me to the highly controversial, but seldom mentioned, seventeenth century, Jewish Messiah Sabbatai Sevi (also referred to in the thesis as Sabbatai or Sevi), and his followers the Sabbatians, whose well-documented movement has survived to the present day. These lectures also introduced me to a

modern-day Jewish Messiah, the extremely controversial, but exceptionally charismatic Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) who is known as the Rebbe (i.e., Hassidic leader) (also referred to as Schneerson or M.M. Schneerson) and his highly successful and thriving, present-day followers, known as the Chabad/Lubavitch sect (also known and referred to as Chabad and/or the Lubavitchers, or Lubavitch), who are part of Hassidic Judaism\(^2\).

By the early 1980s, Rebbe Schneerson’s beliefs in his own messiahship and messianism was rapidly becoming common knowledge amongst his followers at Chabad, as the Rebbe had already begun to convey his messianic beliefs to his followers, from his very first discourse as the official Rebbe in 1951 (albeit that it was initially done in a very subtle and indirect manner). Although the majority of Jews beyond Chabad were not familiar with Rebbe Schneerson’s messianic beliefs at this stage (i.e., in the early 1980s), there were, however, many informed rabbis from beyond Chabad, like Rabbi Assabi, who were well aware of Rebbe Schneerson’s contentious beliefs about his own messiahship and the Rebbe’s belief in the coming messianic age, which is why Rabbi Assabi had included Rebbe Schneerson in his discussion of Jewish messiahs.

It was therefore with great interest that I began, soon after these lectures, to follow the messianic beliefs and events that surrounded Rebbe Schneerson, who was then the seventh and most recent Rabbi and spiritual leader of the Chabad/Lubavitch sect. I also realised that the emergence of a modern-day Jewish Messiah, namely Chabad’s Rebbe Schneerson, was a unique occurrence that offered any person who was interested in Jewish messiahs and the very early development of messianic movements, an excellent opportunity to observe how a modern-day Jewish messiah and his messianic episode unfolds during the life of the messiah and as I discovered in 1994, in the period immediately following his death – in real time.

Chabad’s deliberate public face and its well organised outreach and proselytising programs made it very simple to track Rebbe Schneerson’s beliefs about his messiahship as well the messianic beliefs and trends within Chabad during the Rebbe’s lifetime. Unlike Jesus, the majority of Schneerson’s discourses and speeches

\(^2\) Hassidic Judaism, also known as Hassidism, is a branch of Judaism that emphasises ecstatic devotion and spiritual piety, and was founded by the Ba’al Shem Tov in the early 18th century in the Ukraine (Baumgarten 2000:216).
made during his lifetime (primarily in Yiddish or Hebrew), have been preserved, either on audio-tape, video-tape and/or were written down. Consequently, most of Schneerson’s discourses or speeches, where he refers to, and/or speaks about messianism, and/or about his messiahship (directly and/or indirectly), are not only on record, but have been published as well.

Max Kohanzad who was an ardent follower (and believer) of Rebbe Schneerson during the Rebbe’s lifetime, has examined the Rebbe’s discourses, as well as many of the Rebbe’s speeches in depth. Kohanzad’s analysis of Rebbe Schneerson’s words in these discourses reveal that, although Chabad had a messianic legacy which Rebbe Schneerson inherited, it was Rebbe Schneerson himself who was ultimately responsible, from the very first discourse he made as the official Rebbe in 1951, for instigating messianic fervour within Chabad. Kohanzad’s study of the Rebbe’s discourses and speeches also reveals that the Rebbe is personally responsible for initiating the belief (amongst his followers) that he is the Jewish Messiah, and for the fact that the majority of his followers in Chabad believe, and openly declare, that the Rebbe is indeed the long awaited Jewish Messiah. Chabad’s declarations about its belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship began well before the Rebbe’s death, and continue to this day (Kohanzad 2000: 89).

By following Chabad and the Rebbe over the years, I was able to, firstly, observe the emergence, once again, of another mortal, Jewish man, who believed that he was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. And, secondly, with Rebbe Schneerson, I was able to see the way in which he (very successfully) presented himself to his followers as the Messiah, and the manner in which he led people to believe that they were living in a messianic age. Throughout the 1980s and up to the time of Rebbe Schneerson’s death in 1994, the Rebbe’s presence and the power of his charismatic personality was such that he continued to have a major impact on people who heard him speak, and on those who met him personally, to the extent that his followers’ ardent belief in his messiahship and their subsequent proselytising allowed Chabad to grow rapidly and significantly.

It was during this period, when many of his followers began to boldly refer to the Rebbe as the Messiah in public that I began to study Rebbe Schneerson’s messiah template. I did this as I believed that, not only was Rebbe Schneerson’s extraordinary
appeal and success as messiah directly linked to his specific messiah template, and what it represented and offered his followers; but that the appeal and success of the two other Jewish Messiahs who preceded Rebbe Schneerson, namely the first century (CE) Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and the seventeenth century Jewish Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, was also linked to their messiah templates.

Rebbe Schneerson’s death in 1994 also enabled me to observe how the followers of a modern-day messiah respond to their messiah’s death, and what they claim to believe immediately after their messiah’s death. This time period (from 1994 to the date the thesis is written – 2010) is approximately equivalent to the time period that runs from c 33 CE (when Jesus was executed by the Romans) to c 50-55 CE (which is more or less the time that Paul wrote his letters). This period in the history of Jesus is, unlike that of the other two Jewish messiahs, not well documented, and the result is that there is very little information about the beliefs or actions of Jesus and his early followers immediately after his death. The marked similarity of the documented beliefs and conduct of the two later day Jewish messiahs and their followers, has however led me to consider the possibility that the undocumented beliefs and conduct of Jesus’ followers immediately after his death (when the Jesus messiah myth began to emerge), may well have been similar to that of the Sabbatians and the Rebbe’s followers from Chabad.

By tracking Rebbe Schneerson’s followers, I was able to observe how, after Rebbe Schneerson’s death, the pro-messianist faction (known as the Meshichists) within Chabad, conducted themselves and how they continue

- to believe in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship, despite his death;
- to run their proselytising and outreach programs to disseminate their group’s messianic beliefs and increase their membership in a very successful manner;
- to formulate beliefs about their Messiah, Rebbe Schneerson, immediately after his death;

During the 1980s and 1990s, I also began to follow the manner in which Chabad’s Meshichists (pro-messianists) gradually, but deliberately, started to deify Rebbe Schneerson. The move to deify the Rebbe gained extra momentum after his death and is so successful today that many of his followers now publicly state that they believe
that Rebbe Schneerson, their long-awaited Jewish Messiah, did not really die in June 1994, but that he is simply “hiding” beneath the throne of God and that he is also, somehow, here with us on earth, and that the Rebbe will soon return as the messiah.

These statements by Chabad, in relation to their belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship, and their move to deify Rebbe Schneerson, all lie beyond the accepted limits of traditional, rabbinic-based Judaism, and reveal that what Chabad is currently doing, is that they are literally transforming Rebbe Schneerson from a mortal man into a god. Chabad’s successful deification of the Rebbe has become so widespread and entrenched among Chabad’s pro-messianist/Meshichists that it is becoming apparent that Chabad’s radical messianic beliefs and its persistent deification of the Rebbe will eventually influence the path that Chabad chooses, or is obliged to follow, in the long run.

I was also completely fascinated by the various well-orchestrated religious activities and campaigns that Chabad began to mount during the 1980s, under Schneerson’s leadership, which ran right up to the period before he took ill in the early 1990s. Chabad’s various activities and print and media campaigns were all extremely well thought out and were intentionally executed in a manner that was designed to draw as many Jewish people’s attention as possible to Chabad itself. These religious campaigns also endeavoured to familiarise people with Rebbe Schneerson’s messianic beliefs and the promise of the coming messianic age, which the Rebbe had revitalised and fostered, and which the Rebbe and Chabad continue to embody today.

It was also during the 1980s when Chabad began, under the initial directives of Rebbe Schneerson, to conduct its highly visible and very public proselytising programs. These proselytising programs are deliberately designed to attract and encourage all Jews to return to the fold of traditional observant Judaism (preferably to Chabad). Chabad’s outreach and proselytising programs are not confined to Jews either, as Rebbe Schneerson also instructed his followers to teach and encourage all Gentiles and non-Jews to follow the Seven Noahide Laws as well.

Under Rebbe Schneerson’s leadership, Chabad was swiftly transformed from a small, unknown Jewish sub-sector into a well-known, highly visible and successful, worldwide network of Chabad synagogues and community centres (individually known and referred to as Chabad House), schools and charity organisations. Chabad’s belief in
Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship, and the movement’s messianic legacy and Chabad’s overall belief in messianism, which underlay the movement’s initial success during Schneerson’s lifetime, has remained the principal driving force within present-day Chabad. Chabad’s messianism is also the primary catalyst that enables the movement to flourish and continue to grow since Schneerson’s death, to the extent that Chabad has, in the last decade, in certain areas in the Diaspora, notably Australia, France and the former Soviet republics, become the public face of Judaism. The Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad messianic incident has therefore become an exceedingly well publicised, and contentious, on-going messianic episode within Judaism itself and in present day Jewish circles, although it has remained relatively unknown outside Jewish circles.

I have also been paying special attention to the predominantly Meshichists (pro-messianist) faction within Chabad. As I believe that, in the light of the rabbis’ response to Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian movement, that Chabad’s extreme messianic beliefs are not only shaping the future of the movement, but that their unorthodox and extreme messianic beliefs will eventually compel Chabad to stand apart as a new religion, removed from Judaism.

The other successful, highly disruptive and charismatic Jewish messiah that the thesis examines is the 17th century Jewish messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, who is not as well known as Rebbe Schneerson, neither within nor beyond the Jewish community. The reason for this is that the rabbis set out to deliberately and zealously suppress any knowledge or information related to the catastrophic Sabbatian messianic episode until the later part of the 1800s, in an attempt to prevent any recurrence of similar messianic debacles. The rabbis’ fierce suppression of the Sabbatai Sevi messianic incident and their intense effort to eradicate Sabbatai Sevi’s very name from the living memory of all Jews, has been so successful (despite the fact that there are still Sabbatians today), that the majority of present day Jews still do not know anything about Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatians. The rabbis’ anti-Sabbatai campaign (of the past) was also so virulent that it still prompts certain Jews, who recognise his name, to spit three times if the name Sabbatai is spoken aloud. This is done in order to ward off the evil, which their rabbis have told Jews, which the mere mention of the name Sabbatai Sevi represents to traditional, Orthodox Judaism.
Rabbi Assabi’s lectures on messianism also mentioned Qumran and the fact that the Dead Sea Scrolls revealed that the Qumranites were an eschatological movement that saw itself as people who were living in a period known as “the end of days” or “the last of days” (also referred to as “the end-of-time”), when there would be apocalyptic battles and when the messiah would come. Although there are other apocalyptic battles in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ezek 38:7-16; 39:2; Joel 3:2; Zech 12:1-9;14:2), and many other Jewish writings that deal with similar themes (such as 1 Enoch 56:5-7; 90:13-19; 99:4; Jub 22:23; 4 Ezra 13:33-34; and the Sibylline Oracles 3:663-68), it was the very precise militant nature of the “end-of-time battles”/eschatological wars, between the Sons of Darkness and the Sons of Light, described in War Scroll, that initially captured my imagination and attention.

My curiosity was further aroused after I read Neil Silberman’s The Hidden Scrolls: Christianity, Judaism and the War for the Dead Sea Scrolls (1994), in 1995, where Silberman drew attention to the fact the Scrolls’ apocalypticism was essentially expressions of “powerful political ideology”, despite their biblical-style poetry and apocalyptic oracle format and presentation (Silberman 1994:256). And, that these apocalyptic scrolls enabled the Qumranites to express their attitude towards their oppressors and to describe how their oppressors would not be able to escape their total annihilation on Judgment Day.

Silberman notes that the Qumranites clear-cut and pitiless apocalyptic vision was neither a sanguine daydream, nor a typical “vague, mythic biblical encounter” but that their vision was “an ideological preparation for rebellion” that included a “strangely down-to-earth plan for a great liberating war” with all the military and battle aims and details clearly laid out (Silberman 1994:256,258). Cantor (1994:76) agrees with Silberman’s description (above) and notes that Qumran’s apocalyptic vision was certainly not compassionate and conservative but angry, intense, brooding and problematic instead. He also adds that

Qumran apocalypticism did not envisage the conversion of the Gentile world but rather militant confrontation with it and the physical destruction of it, as the children of light, in some kind of eschatological and messianic upheaval, overcame the followers of darkness and the devil. (Cantor 1994:77)

Cantor also draws attention to the differences that existed between Pharasaic-rabbinical Judaism and Qumran apocalypticism. He explains that, where the rabbis stood
for stability, the phlegmatic acceptance of suffering, a religion grounded in forbearance and the daily observance and praxis of religious ritual, Qumran wanted social and political destabilisation, an instant redemption that would end all Jewish oppression and suffering, and that they sought the immediate cessation of all restrictions and obligations and the fundamental fulfilment of total liberation (Cantor 1994:77, 78).

The messianic and apocalyptic hopes of all Judeans, including the militant apocalyptic dreams of the Qumranites, which were meant to mark a turning point in history of all mankind, were, however, all crushed along with the Jews and their temple by Titus in the spring of 70 CE. Yet, despite this, the Jews’ belief in the messiah myth endured this defeat and proceeded to underlay the Diaspora revolt of 115-117 CE, as well as the ill-fated Bar Kochba revolt of 132-35 CE (Silberman 1994:265). After the Bar Kochba revolt, Jewish belief in messianism, along with the militant messianic and apocalyptic dreams of Qumran, continued to persist and slowly rose to the fore again within Judaism to the present day where the modern-day heirs of Qumran apocalypticism, within Judaism, the Israeli empowered elite, practice political Zionism (Cantor 1994:78).

Jewish messianic beliefs also took on a new life as the original messianic gospel was reworked by the Apostle Paul (Silberman 1994:265), who could not possibly have imagined the extent to which later Christians, such as the present day USA evangelicals, would eventually carry the messianic and apocalyptic belief across into their transformed and exclusive, militant and blood-soaked rapture and tribulation narrative.

My growing interest in militant, apocalyptic beliefs that contained descriptions of armies and military battles, was further aroused after I read Hershel Shanks’ *The Mystery and Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1998), where he notes the similarities between the apocalyptic New Testament Book of Revelation and the War Scroll (also known as 1QM) (Shanks 1998:165). Although I had read the Gospels, Acts and the Letters of Paul in the New Testament, for the light that they shed on the Jesus of history, Shanks’ comparison now led me to read the Book of Revelation, with its violent apocalyptic battles and its extraordinary eschatology that perturbs me as much today as it did when I first read it.
It was therefore hardly surprising that in the late 1990s, my attention was caught by the modern-day USA Christian evangelicals (also referred to as the evangelicals) and their apocalypse, known as the Rapture, and their popular rapture and tribulation literature that described their graphically violent, militant apocalypse, which strongly resembles the militant apocalyptic scenario of the Qumranites. The existence of a modern messianic group whose apocalypse also sought social and political destabilisation and instant redemption through a hostile and militant eschatological and messianic cataclysm, which also includes the total physical destruction of all the non-evangelicals (i.e., the followers of darkness) and the devil, was once again an extremely fortunate reality that afforded me the unique opportunity of observing a hostile militant messianic group and its beliefs and conduct, as well as the repercussions of the group’s hostile beliefs and conduct in real time.

The marked upsurge of messianic belief in American Christian mainstream culture and popular USA culture, during the late 1980s, and 1990s, which revolved around the Christian Evangelicals’ 150-year-old belief in rapture, is directly linked to the prolific production of popular rapture literature. The most successful rapture novels are the Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, whose first novel in the Left Behind series, Left Behind: a novel of the earth’s Last Days, was first published on December 31, 1995, in the USA. These evangelical rapture narrative authors’ end times’ depictions do, however, provide a more contemporary twist to the end times, with incidents and ideas that are shocking and cruel, as well as being very militant and exceptionally, blood soakingly, violent.

The evangelical rapture narrative is unique to the American Fundamentalist tradition. It is primarily derived from the Dispensationalist teachings of a travelling British preacher, John Nelson Darby, who crisscrossed the USA and Canada between 1862 and 1877 (Frykholm 2004:15). The Darby-derived rapture and tribulation belief and narrative has since become an integral part of modern, present-day American Christian...

---

3 Darby’s understanding and use of the word “rapture” is drawn from the Latin vulgate translation of the Greek text of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” The Vulgate translated the words “caught up” as rapiemur, from the Latin verb rapio. The verb rapio became a noun, raptura, in medieval Latin, which in turn became ‘rapture’ in English. Darby thus saw rapture as the literal “taking up” the true church to heaven in the Last Days combined with religious and emotional ecstasy that the word implied (Frykholm 2004:17).
fundamentalist belief, as well as a part of popular American culture and its expectations, fears, dreams and mythology (Frykholm 2004:13). The successful dissemination of the evangelical rapture beliefs in popular, present-day, American culture (within the Christian evangelical arena and beyond), is primarily due to the efforts of a group of well-known evangelical prophecy writers.

These prophecy writers include the evangelical Zionist, Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord from the Dallas Theological Seminary, as well as Tim LaHaye, and Jerry Jenkins. Hal Lindsey⁴ wrote the most popular, best-selling prophecy book in American history in 1970, namely, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which has sold more than thirty million copies to date (Guyat 2007:149; Frykholm 2004:21). Lindsey’s success quickly prompted other prophecy writers, who had been more cautious in their assertions, to emulate his bold prophecy style, and soon there were many others who promised that the Rapture was, indeed, very close at hand.

John Walvoord’s earlier books such as *Israel in Prophecy*⁵ were timid by comparison, but spurred on by the success of Lindsey, Walvoord wrote a more audacious prophecy book in 1974, namely, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*⁶ that sold 750,000 copies (Guyat 2007:149,150). The success of these two specific prophecy books are worth noting as they mark the period where Christian evangelical prophecy books began to find a vast, crossover audience (Guyat 2007:150).

Tim LaHaye⁷ and Jerry Jenkins are, however, responsible for taking prophecy writing to a new level with the first book that they co-authored in the *Left Behind*⁸ series, which has sold more than 60 million copies to date (Guyat 2007:1; Frykholm 2004:3). The authors’ open-ended approach as well as the books’ connections to commercial and media culture, have made the *Left Behind* series the most successful dispensationalist texts ever written.

---

⁴ Hal Lindsey is the author of many prophecy books, including the 1980 publication *Countdown to Armageddon and Planet Earth: 2000 AD* (Guyat 2007:190, 191).
⁷ Time Magazine named Tim LaHaye one of the top 25 most influential evangelicals, in 2005.
⁸ The books use the myths and stories drawn from the specific dispensational and fundamentalist beliefs that Darby shaped, as well as the current USA apocalyptic cultural landscape, that provides the contemporary readers’ context.
The psychology of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’ rapture narrative and the way it affects believers, is examined in more depth in Chapter 5, as are the beliefs and conduct of the evangelicals, especially their right-wing, who are becoming a hostile and dangerous group, whose powerbase and influence within the USA should not be ignored nor dismissed.

There are two particular aspects of the evangelicals’ rapture that the thesis discusses in Chapter 5. The first aspect is the Christian evangelicals’, particularly the right-wing evangelicals’, steady infiltration into the USA government and military, where they are steadily gaining control as well as access to military hardware, including nuclear weapons, which they could utilise, unlike their hostile and angry apocalyptic-centred forerunners at Qumran, to literally realise rapture, if they should choose to do so. The second issue is that the Jews figure prominently and negatively in the rapture narrative and that the Jews’ significance in the rapture narrative also affects and determines the evangelicals’ daily relationship with the state of Israel and the Jews both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

The thesis would like to note that the primary focus of this thesis falls primarily on the two Jewish Messiahs, Rebbe Schneerson and Sabbatai Sevi, and the probability that Chabad’s highly unorthodox messianic beliefs and conduct, which are already setting Chabad apart from mainstream Jewish Orthodoxy, will eventually lead Chabad, like Sabbatianism, to become a religion removed from Judaism. Whether this will occur due to choice on Chabad’s part, or due to decree issued by the rabbis and rabbinical courts, remains to be seen. The thesis also directs attention to the three successful Jewish Messiahs’ common messiah template, namely that of the “‘suffering servant’ dying and rising messiah” messiah template and the significance and appeal of this messiah template.

The secondary focus of the thesis stems from the militant apocalyptic end-times envisioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls and is directed at the modern day USA based Christian evangelicals’ belief in their imminent, exclusive and militant rapture. The recommendations in this thesis are directly related to the evangelical right-wing’s obsession with power, violence, the military and their own paramilitary force, Blackwater, which are all intrinsically bound to their rapture belief. The thesis would like to note that the reservations expressed in the thesis relating to Blackwater have
subsequently been vindicated by Julian Assange’s posting of 391,813 Pentagon documents on the Iraq war, that were published in the New York Times on October 22, 2010. Assange’s posting included documents that revealed the extent to which the USA’s use of private security contractors in Iraq, particularly Blackwater, compounded the chaos in Iraq and led to the unnecessary death of many Iraqi civilians as well as members of the security contractors themselves.

The scope of this thesis precludes the progression and latter development of any of the respective Jewish messiahs’ latter-day followers and their movements and their religious beliefs. This thesis is not concerned either with the attempts of the latter day followers (of any of these three messiahs) to discover what their respective messiah means to those who gather in these messiahs’ names, within their specific movements’ places of worship, many decades and generations after their messiahs’ deaths either.

1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

1.2.1 The Research problem

The research problem behind this thesis is multifaceted and deals with successful Jewish Messiahs (in the sense that their movements survived their deaths to the present day), and their followers, as well as these Jewish Messiahs’ messiah templates. The focus falls mainly on the two Jewish Messiahs (besides Jesus) whose movements survived their death, as well as the significance of all three Jewish Messiahs’ “‘suffering servant’ dying and rising messiah” template. The research problem also examines certain problematic issues that are related to the beliefs and conduct of hostile, militant, modern-day, messianic groups that are related to the recommendations in the thesis.

The research begins with an overview of Jewish messianism from the past to the present. It also examines the beliefs and conduct of the seventeenth century Jewish messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, his prophet Nathan and his followers, the Sabbatians, who

---

9 Refer to: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/world/middleeast/24contractors.html

This article is one of several published by the New York Times, as well as The Guardian, and Der Spiegel, based on the posting of a store of valuable secret field reports from the battlegrounds of Iraq. The documents consist of 92,000 individual reports that were made available to the New York Times and the European news organizations by WikiLeaks. Refer to http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/26/world/26editors-note.html
were mainly from the Turkish Ottoman Empire. It then proceeds to research the beliefs and conduct of the modern-day Jewish Messiah, Rebbe Schneerson and his followers.

The thesis also researches the USA Christian evangelicals and the effects of their hostile and militant rapture belief on their perceptual framework and their conduct. The research is directed towards two specific aspects that are directly related to the evangelicals’ rapture belief, which this thesis regards as problematic.

1.2.2 The research problem in relation to the Chabad/Lubavitchers sect

The research problem directs attention at the well-documented beliefs and conduct of the modern-day Jewish Messiah, Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad, whose public, yet complex, messianic beliefs raise more questions about messianism and messiahs than the group claim to answer. Chabad’s beliefs and conduct since the Rebbe’s death and the way the movement is currently operating and promoting itself, is constantly being monitored by Jewish journalists, certain scholars and critics as well as rabbis beyond Chabad. This attention has produced a vast quantity of information related to Chabad that can be found in all media formats, including the official Chabad website and critical blogs on the internet, on a daily basis, which this thesis has utilised.

The research problem directs attention at Chabad’s beliefs, particularly its continuing belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship and the way that Chabad has dealt with, and rationalised, Rebbe Schneerson death, which stands in sharp opposition to the messianic beliefs of mainstream Orthodox Judaism. The research problem also notes the way in which Chabad’s messianic beliefs shaped Chabad’s response to the predicament of the Jews in Europe during the Holocaust, which was in direct opposition to the directives of American Jewry, as well as Rebbe Schneerson’s and Chabad’s deplorable response (once again against the clear directives of American Jewry and their rabbis) towards the plight of Ethiopian Jewry in 1983. The thesis refers to the two letters that Shmarya Rosenberg wrote to Rebbe Schneerson regarding the plight of the Ethiopian Jews, as well as Rebbe Schneerson’s reply, which clearly reveals Rebbe Schneerson’s total indifference to the predicament of Ethiopian Jewry.

The research directed at Chabad’s response to the suffering of fellow Jews beyond Chabad is linked to the thesis’ attempt to understand modern messianists indifference and selective compassion towards the plight of people who are part of their circle,
albeit that it is not the messianic sect’s specific circle. Chabad’s indifferent response to the plight of fellow Jewry not only runs contrary to the socially just and compassionate responses that are ingrained in Judaism, or the morally acceptable responses that exist within functional, modern, democratic society, but Chabad’s response (in both instances) blatantly defies the directives that were issued by American Jewry and their rabbis. The nonchalant indifference and/or selective compassion of modern-day messianists, such as Chabad and the evangelicals, is not only immoral, but also in the case of Chabad, so extreme that these modern messianists’ response to the plight of people beyond their sect(s), can be said to resemble the 17th century Puritans, in that they were also people who loved (their) God with all their souls, but hated their neighbours with all their hearts (Baumgarten 1998).

1.2.3 The research problem and Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis and the Gabriel Stone

The research problem is concerned with Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis from his work, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2000) and the messiah template of the “‘suffering servant’ dying and rising messiah” that Knohl posits for Jesus, which he based on his particular reading and interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The research problem also examines the recent research of the text on the Gabriel Stone (also known as the Dead Sea Stone), which is connected to, and appears to support, Israel Knohl’s messianic hypothesis. The recent discovery of the text on the Gabriel Stone (also called “Gabriel’s Revelation”10 (*Hazon Gabriel* in Hebrew)) that followed in the wake of Knohl’s messiah hypothesis, is written on a 3-foot tall Dead Sea Scroll stone. The corresponding research into the meaning and significance of this text which has been undertaken by archaeologist Ada Yardeni, is therefore a serendipititous discovery in relation to the research problem and its examination of Knohl’s “‘suffering-servant’ dying and rising” messiah template, which the thesis has identified as the common messiah template of the three successful Jewish messiahs.

---


Accessed online on August 28, 2008.
The research problem also looks at the Biblical text, which deals with the Azazel/scapegoat, to cast light on the concept of vicarious atonement, which is what a “suffering servant” messiah offers his followers, and the thesis attempts to understand the reason(s) why this ancient concept is still so appealing.

1.2.4 The research problem and hostile, modern-day, militant messianism

1.2.4.1 Militant Islam and its apocalyptic based jihad

The research problem is concerned with some of the problematic aspects that certain modern-day militant messianists’ beliefs in chaotic and confrontational end time beliefs, such as the Rapture and jihad engender. The thesis touches very briefly on the beliefs and lethal conduct that the extreme militant messianic Islamists produce, which the general public is more familiar with since the deadly attack on the twin Towers in New York on 11th September 2001.

Although moderate Muslims do not heed the parts of their scripture that call for and condone violence, it does not negate the fact that mainstream Islam becomes problematic in a democratic, multicultural and diverse religious society. This is before it even begins to shift into the realm of Islamic extremism, as it has a major disadvantage in that it is a belief system whose very scripture repeatedly condones and commands violence (Harris 2004:31-33):

Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate. (Koran 9:73)
Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is righteous. (Koran 9:123)

It is also an unfortunate reality that words like these (as seen in texts above), tend to become greatly magnified when Muslim fundamentalists utilise them, along with texts like the one below, to justify their modern-day jihad:

The believers who stay at home – apart from those that suffer from a great impediment – are not the equal of those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and persons. God has given those that fight with their goods and persons a higher rank than those who stay at home. God has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who fight for Him … He that leaves his dwelling to fight for God and His apostle and is then overtaken by death, shall be rewarded by God … The unbelievers are your inveterate enemies. (Koran 4:95-101)
When the above texts’ invitation to martyrdom is viewed in light of the fact that Islam does not distinguish between religious and civil authority, the twin terror of Koranic literalism springs into view. This means that on the level of the state, a Muslim’s aspiration for world domination is explicitly enjoined by God, and on the level of the individual, the metaphysics of martyrdom provides a rationale for ultimate self sacrifice toward this end (Harris 2004:34). Hence Harris notes that

The metaphysics of Islam are particularly inauspicious where tolerance and religious diversity are concerned, for martyrdom is the only way that a Muslim can bypass the painful litigation that awaits us all on the Day of Judgment and proceed directly to paradise. Rather than spend centuries moldering in the earth in anticipation of being resurrected and subsequently interrogated by wrathful angels, the martyr is immediately transported to Allah’s Garden, where a flock of “dark-eyed” virgins¹¹ awaits him (Harris 2004:34).

Consequently Islam’s many incidents of violent bombings clearly reveal that the lethal nature of the Muslim metaphysics of martyrdom is derived from their belief in the apocalyptic-based concepts of Jihad/holy war, which Islam inherited from Christian and Jewish apocalypticism, and chose to translate into their own apocalyptic tradition in a lethal and literal sense, in current real time.

1.2.5 The research problem and the Christian evangelicals’ belief in the Rapture

The research into the Christian evangelicals and their belief in the Rapture revealed that scientific surveys, such as PEW (www.people-press.org) and www.gallup.com, indicate that there has been a significant increase in the USA in the belief of messianic redemption, particularly the Christian evangelical belief in Rapture with its promise of a very imminent apocalypse and its accompanying redemption and salvation (Harris 2007a:93).


A recent Gallup poll (referred to in “Notes to The Reader” in Sam Harris’ New York Times bestseller, *Letter to a Christian nation: a challenge to faith* (2007a)), reveals that 44% of the present day American population are convinced that the Biblical prophecies of the Book of Revelation will literally come true, and that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead within the next 50 years (Harris 2007a:xv). The threat posed by the evangelicals’ hostile, militant rapture belief also becomes more disconcerting in the light of statistics provided by a Time CNN poll. The Time CNN poll reveals that a significant segment (44% or 60%) of the USA government holds the same beliefs as the evangelicals (purely on the basis of their religious dogma). The thesis therefore argues, along with Harris, that hostile militant apocalyptic beliefs, such as the evangelical rapture that redeems only a select few are harmful to humanity, and that these beliefs are not conducive to the creation of a stable and long-lasting future, neither socially, economically, environmentally nor geopolitically (Harris 2007a:xvi).

Consequently, the research in the thesis is directed towards the Christian evangelicals’ militant rapture belief, the manner in which the rapture scenario is depicted in the popular evangelical rapture and prophecy literature that began to emerge in the early 1980s, and the effect this belief has had on the evangelicals’ conduct and strategy. The thesis also notes the way the evangelicals’ rapture belief shapes their relationship towards their fellow Christians and those less fortunate than they are as well as their affection and support for the state of Israel and the Jews.

1.2.6 The research problem and the lack of rational criticism and debate

The silence, and seemingly unlimited tolerance, of present day democratic societies’ liberal institutes and its leaders, and the lack of rational debate and criticism from them, the general public, and the print and electronic media\(^\text{12}\), in relation to the

---

\(^{12}\) The most outspoken and publicly accessible criticism has, ironically, come from people within what is usually defined as the entertainment and/or film industry. The film and entertainment industry has produced two particularly powerful and noteworthy film documentaries that question beliefs, and organised religion. They are Bill Maher’s comedy/documentary “Religulous” (2008) and Michael Moore’s “Fahrenheit 9/11”, the winner of the Best Picture at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, and the highest-grossing documentary of all time (it earned US$200 million worldwide) which examined America in the aftermath of 9/11, as well as the relationship between the Bush administration and the links between the families of George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden (Moore 2004. Information accessed online). Moore is an American filmmaker, author and liberal political commentator, who has produced many documentaries, including this film. Bill Maher is an American stand-up comedian, television host, social and political commentator, author and advisory member of the Reason Project.
violence perpetrated due to certain messianic groups’ belief in militant apocalyptic end-times and the threat that hostile and militant apocalyptic beliefs and conduct pose to the peaceful co-existence of humanity, is also part of the research problem.

The research problem notes that it would appear as if there are unspoken, possibly even prescribed, limits when it comes to matters related to religion, especially in relation to any rational analysis and/or any type of scientific study/investigation (critical or otherwise) of religion, to the extent that Michael Shermer has noted this predicament and has attributed the lack of scientific examination/investigation and criticism of religion to what he describes as the “hands-off nature of religion”, noting that, in the main, the general attitude towards religion is that “religion is something to be followed, God is someone to be worshipped” (2000:266).

This “politically correct”, “hands-off religion” approach to all matters pertaining to religion is difficult to reconcile to the beliefs and (often lethal) conduct of certain modern militant messianists. The most notable are the modern-day Muslim extremists who regularly practice their lethal apocalyptically inspired jihad and the evangelicals whose belief in their very exclusive, hostile rapture is shaping their agendas, and conduct in a sinister fashion.

This thesis questions whether religious-derived militant apocalyptic beliefs are permissible simply because they form part of a religious belief system. This thesis also enquires whether people’s limitless tolerance, in the sense described by Popper, is wise when militant messianists, like the evangelical right-wing, have access to military hardware, including nuclear warheads. This situation grants credibility to the claim that hostile, militant messianists pose a threat to humanity’s well-being, as the evangelical right-wing could deliberately choose to hasten the end-times in a man-made nuclear holocaust – should they perceive themselves to be under attack, or overwhelmed by evil and/or marginalised, as their belief in the Rapture permits them to do so (Harris 2007a.ix).

He has always been highly critical of organised religion and this 2008 film, the comedy/documentary “Religulous”, is a good summation of many of the views he holds and has expressed over time in relation to organised religion and religious beliefs, including messianism. The film was made on a budget of US$2.5 million and has grossed over US$13 million. It was the highest earning documentary in the U.S.A. in 2008 and is presently the 7th highest grossing documentary in the USA (Maher 2008).
The thesis is also concerned with the manner in which the evangelicals’ belief in rapture is responsible for the evangelicals’ attitude towards the Jews and the way their rapture belief effectively shapes the evangelicals’ relationship with the state of Israel and the Jews, both in Israel and in the USA.

1.3 THE TWO CENTRAL PROPOSALS OF THE THESIS

1.3.1 First Proposal: Emergence of new messianic-based religious beliefs

The first proposal is that we could be witnessing the emergence of a new messianic-based religious belief system from within the fold of Judaism.

This thesis proposes that the present-day Chabad/Lubavitchers’ firm and publicly declared belief in the messiahship of their recently deceased Rabbi and leader, Rebbe Mendel Menachem Schneerson and their continuing deification of him especially since his death, could, once again, give rise to a new monotheistic belief system, that would lie beyond the limits and beliefs of Traditional Rabbinic-based Judaism (most notably as defined by Moses Maimonides’s *Mishne Torah*); and that Chabad would eventually become akin, but not identical to, Christianity, due to the fact that Chabad’s messianic ideas and beliefs resembles both of the two other successful messianic movements that arose from within Judaism, namely Christianity and Sabbatianism, that were led by their respective Jewish messiahs, Jesus and Sabbatai Sevi.

1.3.2 Second Proposal: That the three Jewish messiahs share a common messiah template

The second proposal is that the three Jewish Messiahs, Jesus, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson share a similar messiah template, which appears to be related to their wide appeal and success, both during their lifetimes and after their death.

The thesis proposes that the three successful Jewish Messiahs share a similar messiah template, namely that of the “suffering servant’ dying and rising messiah” (as described in Knohl’s messiah hypothesis (and which he posits for Jesus)) which Knohl

---

13 The *Mishne Torah* which literally translates as a “Review of the Law” was conceived by Maimonides as an all-inclusive *halakhic* compendium that could serve as a guide to the entire system of Jewish law, without referring to the Talmud.
has drawn from the original “suffering-servant’ and dying and rising messiah” who came from Qumran, who preceded Jesus. The thesis argues that this specific template, which offers these messiahs’ followers the option of vicarious atonement (over and above salvation), is related to the appeal and success of these three Jewish Messiahs precisely because it relieves people, whether it be consciously or unconsciously, from the onerous, and often unpleasant undertaking of dealing with their own transgressions and that the option of vicarious atonement is so appealing because it permits and enables people to evade the demanding task of assuming personal accountability for all their actions, which includes their transgressions.

1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.4.1 First recommendation: Abolition of the “politically correct” approach to the discussion and criticism of religion

This thesis recommends the abolition of the “politically correct” and “hands-off” approach in relation to any critique and discussion related to questionable religious beliefs, particularly hostile, modern-day, militant apocalyptic beliefs and conduct.

The recommendations in this thesis are connected to the thesis’ observations, discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, which are directly related to the lethal conduct and unpleasant repercussions that hostile, militant messianic beliefs engender. They include groups such as the present day militant Islamic extremists, and the notably USA based Christian evangelicals, particularly the Christian right-wing evangelicals. The thesis argues that modern-day; militant messianic beliefs are dangerous and non-functional in our present nuclear age, especially when militant messianists, like the USA evangelical right-wing, have access to military hardware that includes nuclear warheads.

This thesis concurs with Michael Shermer (2000:266) and Richard Dawkins that they are correct when they observe that the reason for both the “hands off” and “political correctness” approach towards religion is basically due to the fact that we are dealing with religion. In his essay ‘Time to Stand Up’ (from The Devil’s Chaplain (2004:184-190)), Dawkins draws the reader’s attention to part of a speech, made in 1998, by the
esteemed science fiction writer, the late Douglas Adams, which captures the essence of Dawkins’ view regarding the “hands off religion” attitude in the final paragraph:

Why should it be that it’s perfectly legitimate to support the Labour party or the Conservative party, Republicans or Democrats, this model of economics versus that, Macintosh instead of Windows – but to have an opinion about how the Universe began, about who created the Universe … no, that’s holy?

What does that mean? Why do we ring-fence that for any other reason other than that we just got used to doing so? There’s no other reason at all, it’s just one of those things that crept into being and once that loop gets going it’s very, very powerful. So, we are used to not challenging religious ideas, but it is very interesting how much of a furore Richard [Dawkins] creates when he does it! Everybody gets absolutely frantic about it because you are not allowed to say these things. Yet when you look at it rationally there is no reason why those ideas shouldn’t be as open to debate as any other, except that we have agreed somehow between us that they shouldn’t be (Adams in Dawkins 2004:185).

Doris Lessing, the 2007 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, reached a very insightful assessment of the origin of political correctness, which she discussed in a pertinent essay, 14 originally published on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times on June 26, 1992, and republished in the New York Times a few days after she won the Nobel Prize on October 13, 2007. In her essay, Lessing observed that political correctness is a concept that is drawn directly from archetypal communist thought patterns, and despite Communism’s demise, many thought patterns and concepts set up under Communism survive and continue, albeit unconsciously so, to direct our lives.

Lessing explains that the concept of “political correctness”, along with other classic communist ideas such as, “raising consciousness” and “commitment”, are simply the “continuation of that old bully, namely the party line”. Lessing’s explanation of political correctness should alert us all to political correctness’ true identity and intent, namely, to shut down honesty and rational enquiry. Consequently, Lessing’s observation should alert us to ignore political correctness’ poorly-disguised attempt to masquerade as a pre-requisite for multiculturalism in academic discourse and society at large.

1.4.2 Second recommendation: Obligations of leaders

The second recommendation is that liberal institutes and scholars, and democratic leaders, are obliged, as the proponents and guardians of tolerance and liberty, the hallmarks of a democratic society, to breach the walls of “political correctness”.

This thesis argues that it is morally incumbent upon all those listed above to acknowledge the problematic aspects related to humanity’s continued belief in irrational and inappropriate religious beliefs, most notably, modern, violent, militant apocalyptic beliefs, such as the Rapture and modern jihad/holy war.

Liberal institutes and scholars, the media, and democratic leaders need to re-assess the significance and cost of accommodating hazardous religious-based militant beliefs that produce intolerance, lethal conduct and violence that threaten the ideals of democracy as well as the lives of people.

The “hands-off religion” and the “political correctness” approach towards religion has been breached by certain scholars and authors. They include: Colin Bower, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, Charles Freeman and Sam Harris. Although Harris is the only author who is primarily concerned with the present-day dangers that exist due to the belief and praxis of militant apocalyptic beliefs, the other authors raise many pertinent observations related to religion and religious beliefs, that include messianism and hostile, modern, militant apocalyptic beliefs. ¹⁵

Bower’s work, *Open Minds, Closed Minds and Christianity* (2005) examines religion and its beliefs and concludes that Christianity’s demand for belief over evidence is a classic hallmark trait of a closed society, hence Christianity is the enemy of the open society (Bower 2005:3). Charles Freeman’s *The closing of the western mind: the rise of faith and fall of reason* (2002), is an erudite study of religion and its affect on the western mind, and concurs with Bower’s observations.

Hitchens’ acerbic best seller *God is not great: how religion poisons everything* (2007) discusses many facets of religion, notably religion’s hostile attitude toward, and

---

tendency to suppress, free enquiry as well as religion’s ability to predispose its followers to violence and unquestioning submission to authority. He also links these issues to militant messianic and apocalyptic beliefs, which this thesis examines. It is, however, Hitchen’s inclusion of the distinguished Israeli historian and diplomat Abba Eban’s opinion on the volatile issue of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (made while he was foreign minister and UN representative) and Hitchen’s response to Eban, to which this thesis draws attention. Eban’s opinion of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and Hitchen’s response are both exceedingly pertinent and are closely related to the thesis’ enquiry regarding the relevance and retention of religious-derived beliefs in messianism and apocalyptism and are therefore noted and included in this thesis.

Firstly, Eban’s opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is that “the first thing to strike the eye about the Israeli-Palestinian dispute … was the ease of solubility … [and] … that the essential point was a simple one. Two peoples of roughly equivalent size had a claim to the same land. The solution was, obviously, to create two states side by side … [and that] surely something so self-evident was within the wit of man to encompass” (Hitchens 2007:24). Secondly, Hitchen’s response to Eban’s opinion (that supports this thesis’ argument and recommendations regarding the danger inherent in beliefs in messianism, especially modern militant messianic and violent apocalyptic beliefs and conduct), is as follows:

And so it would have been, decades ago, if the messianic rabbis and mullahas and priests could have been kept out of it. But the exclusive claims to god-given authority, made by hysterical clerics on both sides and further stoked by the Armageddon-minded Christians who hope to bring on the Apocalypse (preceded by the death and conversion of all Jews), have made the situation insufferable, and put the whole of humanity in the position of hostage to a quarrel that now features the threat of nuclear war. Religion poisons everything. As well as a menace to civilisation, it has become a threat to human survival (Hitchens 2007:24-25).

The Jewish religious sector has also expressed outspoken views on religious beliefs and biblical accounts, most notably the American Rabbi David Wolpe16 (from Temple

16 David Wolpe has been named the number one pulpit Rabbi, as well as one of the fifty most important rabbis in America by Newsweek (2007), as well as one of a hundred most influential Jews in America (Forward 2003), and is the author of numerous books including Floating takes faith: ancient wisdom for a modern world (2004), as well as the recently published Why faith matters: God and the new atheism (2008). Refer to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Wolpe
Sinai in Los Angeles, California). Rabbi Wolpe is well known for his honesty regarding religion and its beliefs, and especially for his public negation of the factual aspect of the Exodus narrative, made during a sermon on the Jewish Passover. Rabbi Wolpe’s controversial public negation of the veracity of the Exodus narrative, as well as the research of Israeli archaeologist, Israel Finkelstein (The archaeology of the Israelite settlement (1988) (Brill Publishers)), and Finkelstein and Silberman’s The Bible unearthed: archaeology’s new vision of Ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts (2001), and William Dever (Who were the Early Israelites and where did they come from? (2006)), who found no archaeological proof of the Exodus episode either, have all served to undermine the veracity of any group’s religious based claims to the land of Israel.

This thesis also draws attention to the uncomfortable comparison that Chris Hedges draws between the Christian evangelical right-wing movement and fascism, and the evangelical right-wing’s intentional and successful infiltration of the US Military, in his book, American fascist: The Christian Right and the war on America (2007), which this thesis examines in Chapter 5.

The views, critical analysis and insights of men like Hitchens, Harris and Dawkins and women like Lessing are rational, and persuasive, and, along with the thesis’ examination of the problematical issues related to the evangelicals and their rapture belief in Chapter 5, underlie this thesis’ two recommendations. The application of the thesis’ recommendations would enable a more balanced and rational debate about inappropriate and hostile religious beliefs, regardless of whether we may perceive these beliefs and their praxis as sacred, and the recommendations would assist societies to actively safeguard tolerance and liberty, not to negate religion, but to, literally, restore faith.

17 Chris Hedges is a former Middle East Bureau chief and Pulitzer prize-winning foreign correspondent for the New York Times, and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School. He received the 2002 Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism. Hedges is currently a lecturer in The Council of Humanities, and he is an Anschutz Distinguished Fellow at Princeton University.

Refer to: http://www démocracynow.org/2007/2/19/chris_hedges_on_american_fascists_the and to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Hedges

He has also written numerous articles and books including: War is a force that gives us meaning (2002), What every person should know about war (2003), Losing Moses on the freeway (2005) and I don’t believe in atheists (2008).
1.5 METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Survey of messianism and apocalyptism

This thesis begins with an overview of Judaism’s main ideas and beliefs related to messiahs, messianism and apocalyptism up to the present day. Attention is directed at the beliefs of the Qumran sect. There is also a special focus directed towards the highly esteemed, medieval Jewish philosopher and Torah scholar, Moses Maimonides (1135 -1234), and his 14 volume *Mishne Torah*, which is still recognised as carrying canonical authority as a codification of Talmudic law, the cornerstone of modern-day, mainstream, traditional, Rabbinic-based, Orthodox Judaism. The thesis pays special attention to the text in Maimonides’s *Mishne Torah* that deals with beliefs related to the Jewish Messiah, both the Church-censored *Mishne Torah* text (that Chabad refers to) and the original, uncensored, text of Maimonides’ *Mishne Torah* to which mainstream Orthodox Judaism refers.

1.5.2 Jewish Messiahs whose movements survived their death

The thesis examines the well-documented lives, beliefs and conduct of the two Jewish men (after Jesus), who were perceived as messiahs by their followers, as well as the messianic beliefs and conduct of their followers. They are:

- **The charismatic seventeenth century, Jewish messiah, Sabbatai Sevi**, who declared himself to be the “*Meshiah Elohey Ya’aqob*” (anointed of the God of Jacob), in May 1665 (Scholem 1973:220), whose initial and early followers, the Sabbatians, were based in the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and whose present day followers, known as the Dönmeh and/or Salonikans, continue to live in modern-day Turkey (albeit as Crypto-Jews);

- **The recently deceased Jewish Messiah, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson** and his modern-day followers known as the Chabad/Lubavitchers, who are also known and referred to as Chabad or the Lubavitchers.

The thesis’ endeavour to comprehend the appeal and ultimate success of the two later day Jewish messiahs, is directly connected to what these two Jewish Messiahs meant and signified to their followers who followed these messiahs during their lifetimes and immediately after their deaths, and is consequently a similar undertaking to that of the
Jesus scholars, as described by Paula Fredriksen (1999:271-270). This thesis focuses on the lives, beliefs and conduct of these two Jewish Messiahs (after Jesus), and what these two Jewish messiahs signified and meant to their very early followers. This is fortunately a far simpler task than that of the Jesus scholars’ search for the Jesus of history, as the Jesus scholars only have a few indisputable facts that can serve as essential key criteria in their historical reconstruction of Jesus and his followers, while both Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson and their followers’ beliefs and conduct, both during the lifetime of their messiahs and in the period immediately after their deaths, are well documented.

None of Paula Fredriksen’s five indisputable facts speak of Jesus’ messiahship. The five indisputable facts are:

- Jesus’ encounter with John the Baptist;
- His popular following;
- His proclamation of the Kingdom of God;
- His crucifixion by Pilate in Jerusalem;
- The survival of his core followers who took up his proclamation of the Kingdom while identifying Jesus as the Christ, risen from the dead, and extending his mission from its Jewish matrix to also include gentiles (Fredriksen 1999:268).

The thesis examines Sabbatai Sevi, his prophet Nathan and his followers. This is done to facilitate an understanding of how Sabbatai Sevi and his movement captured so many followers and why it flourished throughout the entire Jewish Diaspora. The thesis seeks to determine whether the Sabbatian messianic episode reveals data that is pertinent to understanding the dynamics of the current messianic episode that is playing out within Chabad. It therefore notes the Sabbatians deification of their Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, and their response to their Messiah’s apostasy and to his death.

The thesis notes the origins and history of Hassidic Judaism and Chabad, and the life, beliefs and conduct of its most recent leader and Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson. The thesis examines the belief and conduct of Chabad before and immediately after the Rebbe’s death, its ongoing deification of Rebbe Schneerson, and
Chabad’s beliefs and conduct fifteen years after the death of its Messiah. The thesis also notes Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad’s messianic-influenced indifferent attitude towards the plight of Ethiopian Jewry, as well as Chabad’s beliefs regarding the fate of all gentiles, including the Christians, when the (Jewish) Messiah returns.

The thesis also observes the similarities that exist between the three Jewish men who became successful Jewish Messiahs, as well as the similarities between the belief and conduct of the early followers of these two Jewish messiahs (who followed after Jesus).

The thesis draws attention to the way in which Chabad is an extremely well structured organisation, with active outreach and proselytising campaigns, and that its leaders and key followers tend to be intelligent, educated, highly visible, and are inclined to be extremely vocal and active within Jewish society. The thesis comments on, and discusses, Chabad’s utilisation of all aspects of the media, as well as public opinion to promote their messianic beliefs and agenda.

This thesis uses information gleaned from this examination to support its proposal, namely, that we could be witnessing the emergence of a new messianic-based religious belief system from within the fold of Judaism, due to Chabad’s extreme and highly unorthodox messianic beliefs, which is moving Chabad beyond the accepted boundaries of traditional, Rabbinic Judaism and its fundamentals of faith.

1.5.3 Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis and the Gabriel Stone

The thesis discusses Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis, from his work The Messiah before Jesus: the Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls (2000), and examines his Qumran-derived messiah template of “the suffering, dying and rising messiah” (which Knohl proposes for Jesus), which the thesis has identified as the messiah template for the three successful Jewish Messiahs.

The thesis examines the text of the Gabriel Stone which is known as “Gabriel’s Revelation”, which is written on this recently discovered Dead Sea Scroll stone to see what light this text sheds on Knohl’s messiah hypothesis and whether the text on the Gabriel Scroll stone reveals any data on the subject of Jewish resurrection imagery prior to Jesus.
The thesis also looks, albeit very briefly, at the concept of vicarious atonement which both the Azazel and the “suffering servant” of Isaiah offer. The thesis notes that the belief that transgressions could be absolved by vicarious atonement (or sacrifice), which negated the concept of individual accountability, was prevalent in the ancient world, and in Judaism before the Axial Age (800-200 BCE), which was a period of cultural and civilisation transformation with consequences for all subsequent developments (Wittrock 2005:52). Israel’s Axial Age Hebrew prophets are responsible for altering this ancient perceptual framework by demanding that people assume individual accountability for all their actions, including their transgressions (Arnason 2005:22-23). Yet, despite this, the praxis of sacrifice only finally ceased when the Jerusalem Temple fell in 70 CE. The contentious belief in vicarious atonement has, however, not only continued to survive (which is seen in the Sabbatians and Chabad’s perception of their Messiahs as “suffering servant” messiahs), but vicarious atonement is also still practiced within certain modern-day Jewish sects, most notably amongst the Haredi\(^\text{18}\) sects. The Haredi’s belief in the controversial concept of vicarious atonement can be seen in their annual praxis of the “kapparot” (forgiveness) ritual on the day before Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement).

The thesis uses information related to vicarious suffering, as well as Knohl’s messiah hypothesis and the text of the Gabriel Stone, to support its proposal that the success and enduring appeal of the three Jewish messiahs is linked to their specific messiah template, namely that of the “suffering servant, dying and rising messiah” who offers vicarious atonement, and not only to the standard messiah myth promise of salvation and redemption, which is a recurring response motif throughout history in times of perceived hardship and oppression.

\(^{18}\) Haredi Judaism is the most theologically conservative form of Judaism. Haredi Judaism is often translated as ultra-orthodox Judaism, although Haredi Jews themselves object to this translation. They simply refer to themselves as Jews, and they consider more liberal forms of Judaism to be unauthentic. According to Haredi Jews, authentic Jews believe God wrote the Torah, they strictly observe Jewish Law (halakha), and refuse to modify Judaism to meet contemporary needs. The word ‘Haredi’ is derived from the Hebrew word for fear (harada) and can be interpreted as ‘one who trembles in awe of God’ (Isaiah 66:2,5) (Katz 2009).
1.5.4 The Evangelicals and the Rapture

The Christian evangelicals’ rapture belief directed the thesis’ research toward two specific aspects that are integral to the evangelicals’ rapture belief, which the thesis regards as problematic and to which the thesis draws attention.

The first aspect is related to the evangelicals’ militant rapture belief, and the disquieting fact that the modern-day, USA Christian evangelicals, unlike their angry, militant and apocalyptic-oriented predecessors, the Qumranites, who only had their detailed outline for war and combat in their War Scroll, have, due to their intentional and successful infiltration of the US Military, access to military hardware and nuclear weapons. The evangelicals who have attained positions of power in the USA government, Military and Armed Forces, are therefore capable of instigating and realising nuclear holocaust battles, which form an integral part of their rapture and tribulation scenario (and which they firmly believe would hasten the coming of their messiah), should they wish to do so.

The thesis examines the present day Christian evangelicals, especially the right-wing evangelicals, and their intentional infiltration of the US government and its Military and Armed Forces. The evangelicals’ successful establishment of the largest and most well-armed, private, paramilitary security force in the world today, known as Blackwater, is also noted, as are the agendas and overall influence of the militant evangelicals and their rapture beliefs on American society today.

The hostile rapture belief and conduct of militant messianists, most notably the right-wing evangelicals, underlies the thesis’ attempt to understand why present day democratic societies, and liberal institutes, their leaders and the media appear to be unable and/or reluctant

- to query the validity of the militant messianic groups’ beliefs;
- to condemn the detrimental influence of the militant messianic groups’ beliefs and conduct in modern, liberal, democratic, multicultural societies;
- to curb the widespread laissez-faire attitude towards current militant messianic groups, regardless of the beliefs and/or conduct of these militant messianic groups.
The research problem also deals with the effect that the evangelicals’ belief has on the evangelicals’ response to social issues, and human problems, both within and without the evangelical fold.

The second problematic aspect regarding the evangelicals is the way their belief in rapture underlies their affection and support for Israel and the Jews, despite the fact that their rapture narrative expects all Jews to either convert to Christianity or die at the final apocalyptic battle at Armageddon. The evangelicals’ beliefs about the Jews’ fate (i.e., death or conversion of all Jews) as described in the evangelicals’ rapture, has also become an awkward issue within certain present-day evangelical circles, most notably the evangelical Christian Zionists, who are actively striving to build pro-Israel relationships with certain Jewish communities (both in the Diaspora and in Israel). This situation has become so discomforting for some evangelicals, such as the Christian Zionists, that it has prompted a division within the evangelical fold – led by Pastor John Hagee, who has formulated a new evangelical theology known as Dual Covenant Theology, in relation to the Jews’ fate at the end-of-time. The significance of the affects of the rapture belief and Dual Covenant Theology on the state of Israel and the Jews is noted and discussed.

1.5.5 Key sources, including literary and other mediums used in this thesis

1.5.5.1 Sources for Jewish messiahs, Jewish messianism and apocalyptism and Jewish messianic groups

The focus of Chapter 2 was Jewish messiahs and messianic beliefs, which determined the choice of literary sources. The scholars referred to and to whom the thesis is indebted include the following authors (refer to the bibliography for details of the publications):

A. Cohen (1965);
S.J.D. Cohen and A. Meeks (1989);
J. Collins (1993);
I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman (2006);
W.S. Green (1993);
J.H. Greenstone (1948);
A. Hertzberg (1999);
H. Lichtenberger (1998);
S. Mason (2008);
J. Neusner (1993);
W.E. Nickelsburg (1993);
G.S. Oegema (1998);
L.H. Schiffman (1994);
G. Scholem (1971);
H. Shanks (1993) (1998);
S. Sharot (1982);
N.A. Silberman (1994);
S. Talmon (1993);
T. Thompson (2005);
J. VanderKam and P. Flint (2002);
G. Vermes (1997);

1.5.5.2 Sources consulted for Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad

Given the catastrophic nature and psychological impact of the Sabbatian messianic episode on Jewry in Israel and the Diaspora, and the successful suppression of the Sabbatian debacle, including Sabbatai Sevi’s very name, by the rabbis until the Enlightenment, Scholem’s work\(^{19}\), despite the fact that it has been criticised for linking the Sabbatian episode overtly to kabbalah, is considered to be the most comprehensive and detailed source for Sabbatai Sevi and his movement. Scholem’s work has also been criticised for skirting the social contexts and issues that relate to the Sabbatian incident, which is why Sharot’s social study of messianism provides the ideal foil for Gershom Scholem’s work on Sabbatai Sevi.

The thesis also refers to Simon Dubnow’s comprehensive History of the Jews, Volume 4: From Cromwell’s Commonwealth to the Napoleonic Era (1971), which deals with Sabbatai Sevi, as does Heinrich Graetz’s classical study, History of the Jews, Volume V: From the Chmielnicki persecution of the Jews in Poland (1648 C.E.) to the period

of Emancipation in Central Europe (c. 1870 C.E.) (1945), and to Max Dimont’s The Indestructible Jews: is there a manifest destiny in Jewish history? (1971) in the thesis’ examination of Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatians.

David Berger’s critical examination of Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad, The Rebbe, the Messiah and the scandal of Orthodox indifference (2008), is primarily used to underpin the first section of the thesis’ first proposal of this thesis along with Gill Students’ Can the Rebbe be Moshiach? Proofs from Gemara, Midrash, and Rambam that the Rebbe cannot be Moshiach\textsuperscript{20} and Stephen Sharot’s sociological study of Jewish traditions and movements in Judaism entitled Messianism, Mysticism and Magic (1982).

The thesis has intentionally chosen to refer mainly to David Berger’s The Rebbe, The Messiah, and the scandal of Orthodox Indifference (2008) as he is the Broeklundian Professor of History at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and is therefore a prominent and credible critic from the Orthodox community. Berger’s work is used along with Sharot to examine Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad’s messianic beliefs and conduct.


The current nature of the present-day Chabad/Lubavitcher movement also means that online websites on the internet related to Chabad worldwide are utilised to gain information about Chabad as well as interviews and articles from daily newspapers from the USA, the Diaspora and Israel, most notably the Israeli newspaper, Ha’aretz. The websites on the internet maintained by Chabad that propagate their messianic

\textsuperscript{20} Student’s book can be viewed and downloaded at http://www.moshiachtalk.com
beliefs and speak about Chabad’s various concerns and social programs, their outreach and proselytising (kiruv) campaigns, and provide information about their Messiah, Rebbe Schneerson, and his teachings, are also used.

Shmarya Rosenberg’s online blog, FailedMessiah.com, is invaluable for its up to date, wide-ranging and in-depth coverage of all the groups of extreme Orthodox Judaism (also known as Haredi Judaism), including the messianic-focused Chabad and its messiah Rebbe Schneerson and their beliefs and conduct up to the present. Rosenberg’s site provides well-researched, factual information such as recent records, documents, reports and current articles, interviews and news reports that provide a wealth of information on Chabad (its origins, messianic legacy, history, its worldwide proselytising campaigns and its current messianic beliefs) and about Rebbe Schneerson’s life (before and after he became the Rebbe), his wife, and his messianic beliefs. The Rebbe and Chabad’s fierce anti-Zionism, and Chabad’s messianic shaped indifferent attitude towards the predicament of European Jews caught up in the Holocaust (prior to Rebbe Schneerson), as well as the manner in which Rebbe Schneerson’s messianic beliefs and focus on proselytising campaigns shaped the Rebbe’s shocking response to the plight of the Ethiopian Jews, is also dealt with extensively by Rosenberg.

1.5.5.3 Sources related to the three Jewish Messiahs’ messiah template

The key sources related to the thesis’ discussion of the three Jewish Messiahs’ common messiah template are: Israel Knohl’s The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls (2000) and Yardeni’s recent research done on the text on the Gabriel Stone (also known as the Dead Sea Scroll stone), in her 2008 article “A New Dead Sea Scroll in Stone”, in Biblical Archaeology; as well as the 2007 article by Yardeni and Elitzur called “Document: A First-Century BCE Prophetic Text Written on Stone: First Publication”, in Cathedra 123 (in Hebrew). The Gabriel Stone’s text is related to, supports and elucidates Knohl’s messiah hypothesis21. The other sources referred to that are related to Knohl’s messiah template and its significance are:

---

21 Knohl’s messiah hypothesis precedes the translation and publication of the text on the Gabriel Stone.


1.5.5.4 The Christian evangelicals and their militant rapture belief

This thesis refers to many current, popular publications related to present-day Christian evangelicals and their belief in their imminent, militant rapture. They include Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’ spectacularly successful series of evangelical rapture novels, called the *Left Behind*, series, which has sold more than 60 million copies to date (Guyat 2007:1; Frykholm 2004:3), as well as the popular rapture literature and prophecy literature of John Hagee and Joel Rosenberg.


37
1.5.5 Other sources consulted

The work of Jesus scholar, Paula Fredriksen, the Aurelio Professor of Scripture at Boston University, namely Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews (1999), is referred to in the thesis when speaking of the Jesus of history, as are Burton L. Mack’s Who wrote the New Testament?: the making of the Christian myth (1995) and The Christian myth (2002). The thesis also refers to Michael Shermer’s How we believe: science skepticism and the search for God (2000).

1.5.6 Outline of the Study

The thesis is laid out in the following manner:

Chapter 2:

This chapter provides a brief overview of Messianic beliefs and expectations in Judaism and looks specifically at:

- the significance of the term “Messiah”, and the “End of Day” beliefs, from the past to the present;
- how this fluid and plastic Jewish messianic idea underlies the constantly shifting concept of Jewish Messiah(s), and the End of Day belief(s) within Judaism(s) to the present day;
- notable scholars’ views of the most prominent Jewish messiah(s) constructs over time, and the End of Days beliefs related to these constructs;
- any information related to Jewish messiah(s), and hostile and militant end of day scenarios that is relevant to this thesis’ observations and discussion of the three successful Jewish messiahs’, especially the present day Jewish Messiah Rebbe Schneerson, and to the problems related to beliefs in modern messianic groups;
- Moses Maimonide’s (1135-1204) Mishne Torah that deals with traditional, mainstream, rabbinic-based beliefs about the Jewish Messiah which is directly related to the first proposal of this thesis. The Mishne Torah literally translates as a “Review of the Law” and was conceived by Maimonides as an all-inclusive halakhic compendium that could serve as
guide to the entire system of Jewish law, without referring to the Talmud, and is regarded as one of the greatest and most innovative Jewish legal texts of all time.

Chapter 3:
This chapter examines the life, beliefs and conduct of the two Jewish men who claimed messiahship, and who were proclaimed messiahs by their early followers, namely, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Mendel Menachem Schneerson. It also investigates the belief and conduct of these messiahs’ followers, the 17th century Sabbatians and Sabbatai Sevi’s major proponent and accomplice, Nathan of Gaza, and the present-day pro-messianists from Chabad.

This chapter traces the history and development of these movements. It notes the impact of these messiahs on their followers as well as the impact of these messiahs and their followers’ beliefs and conduct on traditional Orthodox Judaism and their response to these messiahs. It notes the similarity between the beliefs and conduct of these two Jewish messiahs, as well as the way their followers (the Sabbatians and Chabad) both perceive their messiah as the “suffering servant” messiah. It also draws attention to the way in which both groups deified their messiahs and the manner in which they dealt with the death of their messiahs.

The influence of Chabad’s messianism on its attitude and its behaviour towards the plight of its fellow Jews is noted. The thesis directs attention toward Chabad’s response to non-Chabad Jews caught up in the Holocaust in Europe and it examines Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad’s indifferent response to the plight of Ethiopian Jewry in 1983. Chabad’s beliefs regarding the fate of gentiles and Christians at the end-of-time, is also noted.

The information obtained in this chapter will also be used to support the first proposal of this thesis.

Chapter 4:
This chapter examines the Gabriel Stone and Knohl’s messiah hypothesis as well as the messiah template that he proposes for Jesus in his work, *The Messiah before Jesus: the Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2000).
The chapter briefly notes and discusses the concept of vicarious atonement as offered by the Azazel and the “suffering servant” as described in Isaiah, which releases people from the task of dealing with, and assuming, individual responsibility for their own transgressions, as well the conditions and events that surround them. The information gleaned in this discussion is used to support the thesis’ second proposal.

**Chapter 5:**

This chapter, along with information provided in chapter 1, is directly related to the recommendations in this thesis. This chapter provides a brief outline of the USA Christian Evangelicals with special attention directed towards their belief in an exclusive, imminent and, militant rapture. The chapter notes the evangelicals’ popular rapture literature, most notably the *Left Behind* series by LaHaye and Jenkins, which is responsible for the recent upsurge in rapture belief, both within and without evangelical circles. This chapter also looks closely at the militant Christian evangelical right-wing, who not only believe in rapture but who hope to realise it, and it draws attention to the evangelicals’ deliberate infiltration of the USA Military and government, their desire and attempts to create a “Christian only” US Military, as well as the implications thereof. It also notes the evangelicals’ establishment of their own extremely powerful and well-armed paramilitary force, Blackwater.

The thesis uses this information to support its argument that it is incumbent on liberal institutions and leaders in functioning, multi-cultural democracies to step forward and speak up when militant messianists’ beliefs and conduct present a threat to society and the peaceful co-existence of humanity.

In this chapter, this thesis also examines the manner in which the Christian evangelicals’ belief in imminent rapture is responsible for limiting their sense of social justice and containing their compassion, and notes that their behaviour resembles Chabad’s response towards the plight of European Jewry in 1943 and Ethiopian Jewry in 1983.

Attention is drawn to the evangelicals’ beliefs regarding the fate of the Jews in the Rapture end-times, and the way in which the rapture belief is responsible for shaping the evangelicals’ affection and supportive relationship with the state of Israel and with the Jews. The chapter also notes that the evangelicals’ rapture belief that relates to the Jews, has divided the evangelicals and prompted one sect within the evangelical fold,
the Christian Zionists, led by Pastor John Hagee, to reformulate their theology, producing what is known as Dual Covenant theology.
2.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE IDEAS THAT UNDERLIE MESSIANIC AND APOCALYPTIC MOVEMENTS

Sharot (1982:11-12) explains that the core idea underlying messianic beliefs and expectations are two concepts that deal with believers’ anticipation, in the sense that these believers expect major transformations in the world to be brought about by or to take place under the auspices of supernatural beings or processes. Viewed as full of suffering, death, and other evils, the present world will be replaced by a perfectly good and happy one. The change will be ultimate and irrevocable; the millennium is not necessarily limited to the literal sense of a thousand years, but is often perceived as an eternal age. The coming transformation is seen as this-worldly, involving the union of terrestrial and the transcendental on this earth, and collective, merging the redemption of the individual with the group of faithful or all of humanity. In addition to these beliefs millenarian movements have been characterized by a belief in the imminent occurrence of the millennium; it is expected soon or at least during the lifetime of the majority of the members (Sharot 1982:11-12).

The more prevalent definitions tend to view religious messianic and apocalyptic movements with millenarian expectations as a collective religious response to what people perceive as repressive or tyrannical conditions, and/or contexts that induce extreme stress, unwarranted pain and anguish and marginalisation. Other factors that have been cited include:

- the disruption of cultural and social patterns, such as war, famine, epidemics or massacres;
- conditions of anomie, social disorganisation and perceived deprivation;
- an excess of structure, in the sense that the movements arise in reaction and/or in opposition to extremely rigid social and contextual structures and imposed hierarchies that limit and/or devalue status and curb identity (Sharot 1982:18).

However, Sharot (1982:19) also draws attention to the fact that the appearance and coalescence of messianic and apocalyptic groups on the landscape, is often far more
subtle and complex, and Sharot refers to James Beckford’s study of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Britain to illustrate this observation. Sharot points out that Beckford’s study did not find any evidence of “objective indicators of deprivation, no frustrated mobility, and no economic or social relative deprivation. In addition, he found no evidence that the Witnesses had sought a community of primary affectual relationships or that they had been in a state of anomie”.

Nevertheless, Beckford did discover that there was evidence that before the Witnesses became an affiliated group, they had experienced an overwhelming sense of “ethical deprivation”. Sharot explains that this “ethical deprivation” is to be understood as their perception and belief that there was a notable existing discrepancy between “what was happening in the world and what they believed should occur” (1982:19). This observation should be noted as its relevance to the current Jewish messianic group, the Chabad/Lubavitchers, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2.1.1 Talmon’s Summary

The flexibility and variety of messianic and apocalyptic groups’ (with their millenarian expectations, including modern Judaism and that of the Chabad/Lubavitchers’ beliefs, ideas, praxis and expectations), is relatively diverse and can be seen in Yonina Talmon’s comprehensive summary below. The summary is of value to this thesis as it illustrates the plasticity of messianic and apocalyptic movements and their traditions. It also enables this study to recognise which defining traits the modern messianic and apocalyptic groups under scrutiny in this study, have adopted.

Talmon’s assessment of standard differences found amongst millennial traditions and movements include:

History or myth

Millenarians differ in their relative emphases on concrete political and social hopes or on a cosmic drama where the image of the millennium is largely divorced from the empirical world.


Temporal or Spatial

There are different emphases on perfect time or perfect space. The extent to which redemption is located in a specified area or society is highly variable.

Catastrophe or redemption

In some cases, redemption is expected to occur suddenly and miraculously, without any preparatory struggle or cataclysm, but more often redemption is to be preceded by an apocalypse of upheavals, calamities and wars.

Redemption and redeemer

Millenarianism and messianism do not necessarily coincide. The expectation of a final redemption is not always accompanied by the expectation of a human-divine saviour. The millennium may be brought about directly by spirits of ancestors or by an unseen divine power. Messianism need not be millenarian; a living messiah may offer salvation from existing bodily ills rather than promise salvation in a future state of bliss.

Particular and Universal

Millenarians may believe that only a particular group, divinely appointed or otherwise ascriptively identified, will live to enjoy the millennium. Another possibility is that the group will have an elite status within the millennium. Alternatively, millenarians may believe that all members of the human species will live in a state of equality in the millennium.

Restorative or innovative

Some millenarians perceive the millennium as a return to golden past or mythical age of paradise. An emphasis on innovation and the birth of an entirely new order, with an element of antitradiationalism, is more common. However, movements show substantial differences in the extent to which they envisage the overthrow of prevailing values and norms.

Hyernomian or antinomian

Some movements emphasise the importance of self-discipline, strict conformity to rules, and ascetic conformity to rules, and ascetic behaviour. Antinomian movements attempt to break with all accepted norms and values, which often
include the taboos on sexual relationships. Millennial movements tend to display highly emotional patterns of behaviour, and this is especially the case in movements that reject traditional values and norms.

Active or passive

Movements vary greatly in the extent to which the members believe that they have an active part in bringing about the millennium. The passive types believe that supernatural forces alone will bring about the millennium while the more active believe that the members can contribute to the advent, although the kinds of activities involved will vary greatly from actions of a purely symbolic nature to active rebellion.

Amorphous or cohesive

The organisations of movements vary from the amorphous type, with a cohesive core of leaders and an ill-defined body of followers, to a cohesive, exclusive, sect-like type (Sharot 1982:12-13).

2.2 THE TERM “MESSIAH” AND MESSIANISM IN JUDAISM

The belief in the coming of the Messiah, the treasured hope of the Jew throughout all the centuries of misery and persecution, is regarded by most Jewish thinkers as the dogma of Judaism, some of them would not make this belief essential to Judaism. They consider it mainly as a “branch,” or corollary to others more important, but almost all agree that the belief in the coming of a Messiah is an important feature of Judaism. The nature and limitations of this dogma, however remained unsettled, the Jewish authorities differing widely in their conception of it, according to the material and intellectual position of the people at their respective times (Greenstone 1948:8-9).

2.2.1 Clarifying the messianic idea in Judaism

The thesis agrees with Scholem that the Messianic idea in Judaism is a very important aspect because this is precisely from where the quintessential point of difference and conflict between Judaism and Christianity springs and continues to exist. This section will therefore focus on Jewish beliefs and perspectives related to messianism as well as noting the difference between the two groups’ beliefs related to redemption. In Judaism, the concept of redemption is a public event that plays out in the visible world, within the community on the stage of history. In Christianity, redemption is a spiritual event that occurs in the unseen realm, which is reflected in the soul and the private inner world of the individual and which triggers an inner transformation that
need not relate to the world on the outside. Hence redemption, which for Jews, stood as the unconditional end time event in the profane realm, was transformed by the Christians into a prophetic promise in the inner sacred realm. Judaism, however, perceived this Christian concept of redemption to be an “illegitimate anticipation of something which could best be seen as the interior side of an event basically taking place in the exterior world, but could never be cut off from the event itself” (Scholem 1971:1-2).

When considering the term Messiah, in its Jewish context, it is also worth remembering, as Cohen, (1965:206) rightly reminds us that

[t]here is no question but that the Jews of the first century, exacerbated as was all of the Near East by portents and signs, natural wonders and historical monstrosities, religious ecstasies and enthusiasms, prophecies and adumbrations, expected a redeeming advent. The Jews were not alone in expectation – Greeks and barbarians, Egyptians and Near Eastern imperialists, displaced Romans and alienated Hellenists, all sought a way beyond the depredations, wars, famines, holocausts of history. The Jews no less than others. The Talmud records the coming – and disappearance – of many messiahs, some by name, most anonymously. Messiahs were a Jewish statistic (Cohen 1965:206).

2.2.2 The messianic idea and key elements of Jewish Messianism

The messianic idea comes from the biblical doctrine that

- King David is the “anointed one” (mashiah, messiah), whose descendants shall rule forever (II Samuel 22:50-51 = Psalm 18:50-51);
- David and his descendants were chosen by God to rule over Israel until the end of time (II Samuel 7; 23:1-3, 5);
- God (also) gave the Davidic house dominion over foreign nations (II Samuel 22:44-51 = Psalm 18:44-51; Psalm 2) (Schiffman 1994:318).

After Solomon’s death, when the Israelite kingdom was divided, there arose, in the Kingdom of Judah, a strong hope for the eventual restoration of the Kingdom’s past and ancient glories. This restorative-based hope envisioned a reunited Davidic monarchy that would also control neighbouring countries that had been a part of the original Davidic and Solomonic regnal period. The defining character traits and justness of rule of this future Davidic king are described in Isaiah 11:1-9 (Schiffman 1994:318).
There are two identifiable basic elements of Jewish messianism, namely, the restorative and the utopian (Schiffman 1994:317; EJ 1971, s.v. “Messiah”).

The restorative element is focused on the return and recreation of Israel’s past ancient glories, which the Israelites have come to perceive as the ideal (Schiffman 1994:317; Scholem 1971:3). The restorative element thus turns humanity’s hope backwards, to the past, which is then perceived as that which was truly authentic, and to a “life with the ancestors” (Scholem 1971:3). The restorative element is the more rational element of Jewish messianism as it only expects improvement and perfection of the present world (Schiffman 1994:317).

The utopian element is a vision of the future and aims at a state of being that has never existed (Scholem 1971:3). The utopian element is far more apocalyptic. It looks forward to immense, catastrophic changes that will accompany the messianic age. Consequently, the perfect world, envisioned in the utopian future, can only be built on the ruins of this world, after the total destruction of all this world’s iniquity and evil transgressions (Schiffman 1994:317).

Despite their opposing natures, these two elements are closely intertwined. Neither one exists independently of the other, nor has there ever been a measured balance between the two elements within Judaism (Schiffman 1994:317; Scholem 1971:3). Scholem explains that the reason for this is simple: the restorative contains some utopian aspects, and the utopian contains some restorative aspects (1971:3-4). Scholem points out that it would be correct to say that the messianic idea springs forth from both of these intertwined elements/tendencies. Schiffman (1994:317) also explains that it is the balance, or creative tension, between these two tendencies that is responsible for determining the specific characters of the various messianic strands within Judaism.

2.2.3 The Day of the Lord concept

There are other concepts that also are interlinked with the belief in a messiah and the messianic idea per se. They include the resurrection of the dead, reward and punishment (both individual and national), the Last Judgment, Paradise and Hell (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’). Schiffman (1994:318) also notes that another important concept connected to messianism and the messianic idea is the biblical concept of the Day of the Lord.
In Prophetic writing, the prophets’ concept of the Day of the Lord signifies a certain but as yet unrevealed, time when God will bring triumph of justice and righteousness and punish the wicked. The writings reveal that this day will be one that is marked by a sense of doom with images of darkness and wailing (Schiffman 1994:318). The Book of Isaiah portrays the messianic era as one that has two facets – catastrophic, namely the Day of the Lord, and utopian, when the House of the Lord will be founded on a mountaintop, to which all the men and women on earth will hasten for spiritual fulfilment (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.2.4 The Term “Messiah” in Judaism

2.2.4.1 The root of the term “Messiah”

The term “messiah” is an Anglicisation of the Latin Messias, which is borrowed from the Greek Μεσσιας, which in turn is an adaptation of the Aramaic meshiha. The Aramaic term is a translation of the Hebrew (ha-melekh) ha-mashi’ah, “the anointed” (as in the anointed King). Anointment with oil in the sense described above, was understood in antiquity as a sign of consecration. In ancient Judaism, the concept of eschatological salvation was more important than the concept of a Messiah. This is why we find that there are books24 such as the Book of Tobit, where the term “Messiah” does not occur, although it refers to eschatological salvation of Jerusalem, the return of the Diaspora, and the conversion of the nations to the God of Israel (Encyclopaedia Judaica 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.2.4.2 The term “messiah” in the Hebrew Bible

The term, “the Messiah”25 does not appear in the Old Testament or Hebrew scripture. Nonetheless, the word, mashi’ah, is first found in Leviticus 4:3-5, where it refers to an “anointed one” (as in “consecrated”) priest, and is used elsewhere to refer to any person, such as a priest, prophet or king, with a great destiny and/or a divine mission

---

24 Other books include the Book of Ben Sira and the more ancient version of the prayer, the Amidah, no personal messiah is mentioned, only a hope for the return of the Diaspora and the building of the eschatological Jerusalem and temple (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

25 The term “Messiah”, would in this sense refer to “an expected figure of the future whose coming will coincide with the inauguration of the era of salvation”. However, Talmon then points out that, despite the absence of what he terms “Messiah-futurism” in Hebrew scripture, one should nevertheless heed the truth in Martin Buber’s claim that “messianism must be deemed ‘die zutiefs originelle Idee des Judenstum’” and that it is deeply rooted in the ancient Israelites’ conceptual universe (Talmon 1993:83).
Green points out that the word messiah/mashiach (used as a noun, meaning simply the anointed or “anointed one” in Hebrew) appears 38 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is used once when referring to Cyrus, twice when referring to the patriarchs, six times in relation to the high priest and 29 times when the Bible refers to Israelite kings, primarily to Saul, then to David, as well as an unnamed Davidic monarch (Finkelstein & Silberman 2006:7, 63; Green 1993:2).

Green26 (1993:2) is correct when he observes that a survey of Israelite and early Judaic literature, produced and preserved by Jews, tends to reveal that the concept and/or belief in a messiah, was tenuous at best. The term “messiah” was therefore not only scarce, but often contradictory as well in early Jewish texts. Neither the main body of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Pseudepigrapha, nor the complete Apocrypha, contains references to the “messiah”. Furthermore, a messiah construct is not essential to the apocalyptic genre nor is it a key feature of ancient apocalyptic writings27 (Green 1993:2).

Green explains that when the term is used in these contexts, it usually refers to a person who has been invested with power and leadership by God, as opposed to an eschatological figure (1993:2). He also draws attention to the fact that when the term messiah is used in relation to an eschatological figure, namely in the book of Daniel (9:2ff), the term in Daniel is referring to a murdered high priest. Thompson (2005:290) concurs with Green that the term “messiah” and the use of the word itself, appear to be relatively unimportant in the Hebrew Bible.

Thompson elaborates when he notes that the first Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian origins in 1985, was also unanimous in its understanding of the term “messiah” in the Hebrew Bible as referring to “a political and religious leader who is appointed by God, applied predominantly to a king, but also to a priest and occasionally to a prophet”28 There is of course the single exception, note by both

---

26 In his essay, “Introduction: Messiah in Judaism: Rethinking the Question”, contained in Judaisms and their messiahs at the turn of the Christian era (Green 1993:1-14).

27 The Maccabean documents ignore the term completely and scorn the revival of the Davidic dynasty. There is no mention of a messiah in Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses, the Sibylline Oracles or in Enoch 1-36 and 91-104 (Green 1993:2).

Green (above) and Thompson (2005:290), when the term is used in relation to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1).

Charlesworth (1992:11) points out that the Old Testament does, however, contain very important texts that were absolutely messianic such as Psalm 2, 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 7, 9 and 11, Zechariah 9 and Daniel 9:26. He explains that these texts must be understood as “messianic” in the sense that the adjective is “not used to denote the prediction of an apocalyptic, eschatological ‘Messiah’” (Charlesworth 1982:12).

Green (1993:6) also points out that the term “messiah” in Jewish writings prior to, or during, the emergence of Christianity, “appears neither as an evocative religious symbol nor as a centralizing native cultural category. Rather it is a term of disparity, used in few texts and in a diverse way”. Consequently an examination of the term “messiah” in ancient Judaism places little value to the role or meaning of the term. Hence he notes that Franz Hesse claims that “none of the Messianic passages in the OT can be exegeted messianically. Nevertheless the so-called Messianic understanding is implied in many of the passages, although this is more evident in the texts in which mashiah is not used”.

Geza Vermes concedes that the meaning of the term “messiah” will appear inconsistent even if “each single usage of the term in the Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls and rabbinic sources is taken into account and accorded equal importance”. However, Vermes has reservations about the value of this approach. Thus Vermes states that “it would seem more appropriate to bear in mind the difference between the general Messianic speculations of Palestinian Jewry, and the peculiar Messianic speculations characteristic of certain learned and/or esoterical minorities” (Green 1993:6).

In addition to the above, Charlesworth (1993:228) observes that the Jews and early Israelites used the term “messiah” to refer to a person anointed by God, such as king, high priest and occasionally prophet. But that gradually, over time, Jewish messianic hopes began to lean toward idealising the monarchy, which in turn led to David eventually becoming “the prototype of the Lord’s Anointed, God’s Messiah” (1993:228). Consequently, the Hebrew noun mash’ah as used, for example, in 1 Samuel 24:7, must be translated not as “Messiah”, but simply as “anointed”, in the sense that David is referring to God’s selection of Saul, which Samuel sanctions when he anoints Saul’s head with oil (1 Sam. 10) (Charlesworth 1993:229).
Charlesworth (1982:12) also points out that although the term “the Messiah” appears rarely in the literature of Early Judaism (±250-200 BCE), that it does, however, appear with what he describes as “unusual frequency and urgency” much later in the first century BCE to 135 CE. He also points out that Mowinckel was initially correct when Mowinckel observed in He That Cometh (1956) that “the word ‘Messiah’ by itself, as a title and a name, originated in later Judaism as the designation of an eschatological figure; and it is therefore only to such figure that it may be applied” (Charlesworth 1993:230,256).

2.2.5 Biblical texts and the term “messiah”

These observations would therefore suggest, as Green (1993:6-7) points out, that the best way to discover what the term “messiah” meant in ancient Judaism would be to study texts where the term does not appear! He therefore notes that “the devaluation of empirical textual references and the concomitant emphasis on such terms as ‘understanding’ and ‘expectation’ show the real object of the research is not a figure entitled ‘messiah’ but the religious ideology that purportedly made one possible”.

This view has influenced the research of scholars like Mowinckel and Emile Schurer. Their work clearly reveals that they pay more attention to the debate of a so-called religious mind-set, namely the ostensible concept of “future hope”, which supposedly lies at the centre of Israelite and Jewish experience, as opposed to the study of concrete textual references. Hence, Mowinckel29 states that “an eschatology without a Messiah is conceivable, but not a Messiah apart from a future hope” (Green 1993:7).

Schurer30 points out that in Judaism,

it was … expected that Israel’s faithfulness would be suitably rewarded in the life of both the nation and the individual. Yet it was obvious that in actual experience the reward came neither to the people as a whole, nor to individuals, in the proportion anticipated. Accordingly, the more deeply this awareness penetrated into the mind of the nation and the individual, the more they were forced to turn their eyes to the future; and of course, the worse their present state, the more lively their hope. It may therefore be said that in later eras religious consciousness was concentrated upon hope for the future. A


perfect age to come was the goal to which all other religious ideas were 
teleologically related. As the conduct of the Israelite was essentially 
observance of the Torah, so his faith was centered on awaiting God’s kingdom 
(Green 1993:7).

This focus on “future hope” (alone), without the qualifying concepts of eschatology or 
the term “messiah,” had three important outcomes:

- It enabled scholars to utilise just about any textual reference to the future, 
eternity, or an idealised figure as valid concepts for inclusion in their 
studies; to the extent that this focus allowed Joseph Klausner to begin his 
history of the messiah idea in Judaism with Moses (Green 1993:7).

- It allowed scholars to arrange these various assorted texts in a 
chronological manner, which they believed ostensibly revealed both a 
continuous and uniform messiah tradition.

- This approach was also underpinned by these scholars’ belief that 
messianic belief and/or expectation sprung from ancient Israel’s 
experience which over time grew into Judaism, despite the absence of 
supporting evidence (even by the reluctant admission of scholars such as 
Hesse31) and in the face of contradictory evidence (Green 1993:7).

Green (1993:8) is therefore correct when he observes that such a direct violation of 
what he calls “ordinary principles of evidence and inference with such forced 
arguments requires powerful external motivations”. He also adds that we are simply 
dishonest if we fail to admit that the importance of the messiah in relation to 
theological interests, both Christian and Jewish, was a prime catalyst in this instance.

---

31 Hesse’s closing summary of his survey of messianic references in biblical and postbiblical writings 
stated:

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct a history of the messianic movement in 
Israel and post-exilic Judaism from these scanty passages, many of which cannot be dated with 
any certainty. There undoubtedly must have been such a movement. This is shown by the 
examples given and it may be concluded from the fact that messianism emerges into the clear 
light of history in later centuries, not merely as a trend that has just arisen in Judaism, but as a 
movement with hundreds of years of history behind it (Green 1993:8).

Green then points out that if the evidence is slight and inconclusive by Hesse’s own admission, then it is 
hard to fathom exactly how one is to know for certain that there “must have been” a messianic 
movement in the ancient Israelite religion and Judaism. It also raises serious doubts about the 
(unsubstantiated) claim that the later form(s) of messianism was the result of “hundreds of years of 
history” (Green 1993:8).
2.2.6 Theological agendas: The study of messianism and the term “Messiah”

Green draws attention to the fact that these theological-driven agendas ultimately served to short-change the study of messianism and the messiah. Consequently, this approach enabled Mowinckel to conclude that “Jesus definitively refashioned the Israelite-Judaic messianic tradition” (1993:9). As, In Jesus (1993:9), Green declared:

The Jewish messianic concept is … transformed and lifted up to a wholly other plane. In fact, the Jewish Messiah, as originally conceived, and as most of Jesus’ contemporaries thought of him, was pushed aside and replaced by a new redeemer and mediator of salvation … For Jesus, the Jewish Messianic idea was the temptation of Satan, which he had to reject. The new conception of a saviour, which Jesus created, unites in itself the loftiest elements in both the Jewish and Aryan spirit, and fuses the theme in a true unity, which is realized in Jesus himself.

It also allowed Klausner to state that “in the belief in the Messiah of the people of Israel, the political part goes hand in hand with the ethical part, and the nationalistic with the universal” (Green 1993:9). Green then points out that Klausner’s statement is such that it not only serves to undermine the ethical universal messianism that he ascribes to Christianity, but that it also makes it seem a “mere shadow of the real thing” (1993:9).

In keeping with the discussion of the deleterious affects of theological agendas, Thompson (2007:385) notes how recent theological imperatives that allowed the Bible to be perceived as the origin tradition of Christianity, ultimately led to the fiction of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible as the defining part of Christianity and the New Testament. He draws attention to the fact that this approach comes at a cost to all scholarly pursuits as:

[t]his supersessionist contrast, which sees the New Testament as the (legitimate) successor of the Old, has had profound effects on how this literature is read. It has not only devalued great parts of biblical literature in the lives of Christians. It has also removed the New Testament from its literary and intellectual context. The implicit anti-Semitism of Evolutionary schemes of salvation history, culminating in the stories of Jesus is a well recognized European theology. The transformation of the Old Testament into a historical world, has however given such an Old Testament the function of a rather harmless introduction to the New Testament. This tradition has robbed the tradition of its soul. Such misuse carries its own falsification of the New Testament as well. The distortions are all the more apparent when historians of religion mimic their theological colleagues, perversely reading our displaced Old Testament literature as the origin story of Judaism (Thompson 2005:385).
2.3 MESSIANISM, APOCALYPTISM AND THE TERM “MESSIAH” DURING THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

2.3.1 The shift from prophecy to apocalypse

Judaism became a complex phenomenon in the Second Temple period. During this period, Judaism created the Bible that we know today and it became a “book religion”, with the “Tanakh”32 also known as the Old Testament, forming the central core of Judaism (Cohen & Meeks 1989:24). Cohen and Meeks proceed to describe how the Jews of the Second Temple period understood that they lived in a post-classical age, which allowed them to study the books of the ancients whose work competed with theirs. They chose therefore to embrace new literary genres and new forms of expression that saw the important transition from Israelite religion to Judaism, producing many of the works related to messianism such as the Book of Enoch, the wisdom book of Ben Sira and the Book of Daniel. These works marked the shift in form of classical prophecy’s role33 to one of apocalypse in the second century BCE (Cohen & Meeks 1989:196).

Cohen and Meeks (1989:199-200) point out that the shift from prophecy to apocalypse had already begun in the Persian period34, and that the transformation was complete by the middle of the 2nd century BCE. He explains that during this period, there was a distinct move in the focus of apocalypse from “cosmology to theology and eschatology”, and “the canonization of the prophetic books”. It was also during this stage that we find clear testimony that many Jews believed that classical prophecy had come to a close35. This perception is clearly seen in two passages in First Maccabees

---

32 The Tanakh is an acronym for Torah (the five books of Moses), Neviim, (the prophets), and Ketubim (the writings), which makes up the Hebrew Bible, which is also known as the Old Testament (Cohen & Meeks 1989:174).

33 In classical prophecy (8th to 6th century BCE), the prophet received direct revelations from God, which he in turn communicated to the people. This was done with the use of phrases such as “Thus says the Lord” and “The word of God”. These divine messages seldom had image or symbol representation and when there were images they were of normal objects and phenomena. It was also the divine voice that spoke to the prophets of their meaning. The prophet was also important, as he was the intermediary between God and humanity. Consequently, his identity was important and all the prophetic books in the biblical canon are ascribed to named individuals whose identities were preserved along with their words (Cohen & Meeks 1989:195-196).

34 Cohen and Meeks (1989:199) point out that the prophecies of Zechariah illustrate this and that Zechariah (1:4, 7; 7:12) refers three times to the “former prophets”, which reveals an understanding that one era has passed and that the new one is about to be ushered in.

35 Later Jews believed that prophecy had ended in the Persian period and if this is seen in the sense that prophecy was “transformed” as opposed to “ceased” then Cohen and Meeks (1987:200) explain that
(1 Macc. 4:46; 14:41) that report that “the Jews took a certain course of action that would remain valid ‘until a true prophet should appear’ and instruct them (1 Macc. 4:46; 14:41) otherwise. True prophets were a phenomenon of the past and the future, not the present”. Consequently, “prophecy became apocalypse, and prophets became apocalyptic seers” (Cohen & Meeks 1989:200).

Cohen and Meeks explain that the other heirs of this prophetic tradition were “‘holy men,’ miracle workers, ‘charismatic’ healers, foretellers of the future, and ‘mystics’” whose numbers increased significantly from the second century BCE up to the end of antiquity (1989:200). Cohen and Meeks, however, draw attention to the fact that the general populace in antiquity saw the prophets as men who could foretell the future (1989:200-201). This is despite the fact that

- the scholarly understanding of the Hebrew term for prophet (Nabi) means one who is called by God or is called by God (Armstrong 1993:54; Cantor 1994:25);
- Cantor describes them as “visionaries and moralists who made public pronouncements communicating Yahweh’s current message to the people” (Cantor 1994:24).

This perception and the reputation of the Jews as skilled practitioners of foretelling the future, as well as being magicians, performers of miracles and healers, was well known amongst the Greeks and Romans. During the first century BCE and the first century CE, Judean society was rife with these types of holy men who were magicians, healers and predictors of the future (Cohen & Meeks 1989:201). Cohen and Meeks note that this context, and the fact that Jesus performed miracles and healing, is the reason why the Jews of Galilee who encountered Jesus saw him as “one of the prophets”.

Although the depiction of Jesus in the Gospels and the later Christian tradition has thus been formed by the belief that classical prophecy had returned and that Jesus was,
indeed, a prophet like Moses, it is difficult to judge to what extent the ideas and perceptions of the contemporaries of Jesus shaped the Gospels and later writings (Cohen & Meeks 1989:201). This observation, however, does not negate the fact that his followers also perceived him in other ways, such as high priest, son of God, king and of course, as “the messiah” (Cohen & Meeks 1989:201).

2.3.2 The move towards messianism and eschatology

During the Second Temple period, Judaism became more of a messianic-focused religion with clear eschatological significance. Collins points out that there was no uniform “orthodox” concept of “the Messiah” during this period (Collins 1993:106). The term mashi‘ah also began to acquire a meaning or implication that it did not possess in the First Temple period and Messianism become an important aspect of Second Temple literature, such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’; Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’). The Pseudepigrapha, written before the 1st century BCE, that speak of Messiahs and the “suffering servant”, include the Psalms of Solomon, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra (not the Fourth Book of Ezra, but the Jewish chapters 3-14) and 2 Baruch (Charlesworth 1993:234).

As the Jews’ life under Rome became more difficult, their messianic fervour and speculation increased accordingly. Consequently, Charlesworth notes that

Jewish messianology developed out of the crisis and hope of the non-messianic wars of the second century BCE Palestinian Jews who yearned for salvation from their pagan oppressors. For an undeterminable number of Jews this yearning centered on the future saving acts by divinely appointed, and anointed, supernatural man: Messiah. This eschatological figure will inaugurate the end of all normal time and history. I, therefore, use the term “messiah” in its etymological sense, to denote God’s eschatological Anointed One, the Messiah (1982:3-4).

Charlesworth’s observation is linked to Cohen and Meeks’ above (see 2.2.1 Clarifying the messianic idea in Judaism).

2.3.3 Second Temple Messianic figures and the rise of Davidic messiah

There was also a greater array of messianic figures in this period than there would be later on, yet Nickelsburg points out that, despite the marked rise of messianism and messianic figures, a belief in a messiah was not an essential aspect of Jewish theology during the Second Temple period (1993:65). “The Assumption of Moses” mentions no
messiah nor does it speak of any human agent of salvation. It speaks instead of a messianic figure – an angel of God. And it wishes for the destruction of the wicked (Schiffman 1994:321).

During the Second Temple period, the two messianic trends, the restorative and the utopian, were still part of the Jewish messianic idea, shaping messianic beliefs of the groups of this period. The groups who followed the restorative element placed more emphasis on the reconstitution of the Davidic dynasty, while those who favoured the utopian and apocalyptic messianic elements that followed the biblical concept of the Day of the Lord thinking, were (or tended to be) more focused on the destruction of the iniquitous (Schiffman 1994:319).

Schiffman (1994:319) continues to explain that in the first part of the Second Temple period, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah not only expected the Davidic kingdom to be restored under Zerubabel, a descendant of King David who governed Judea during the Persian period, but that Zechariah (6:9-11) also mentions two messianic figures – a high priest and a messianic king. This conceptualisation of high priest and messianic king is also found in rabbinic literature where the priest of righteousness (kohen zedek) is occasionally mentioned in conjunction with that of the Davidic king (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

Collins (1993:106) observes that “the presence or absence of messianism was primarily determined by the political attitudes and circumstances of the different groups within Judaism. Those who placed their hopes in the institutions and leaders of their day, whether the High Priests, the Ptolomies, or the Maccabees, had little interest in messianism” and that “Apocalyptic groups developed the idea of a transcendent saviour figure, either as an alternative or as a compliment to earthly messianism”. However, the popularity of a belief in messianism focused around that of a Davidic Messiah concept, became more prevalent and widespread from the period when the Maccabean Aristobulus I accepted the title of King. This action by Aristobulus I was perceived as the “usurpation of the rights of the family of David” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’) hence as a reaction, the Davidic messiah not only became a central idea but was preserved as well. The Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’) and Collins (1993:106) both point out that this move to embrace a Davidic messiah figure is clearly seen in the 17th Psalm, which was written in approximately 63 BCE.
Finkelstein clarifies the observation above, in relation to the rise in popularity, in the second century BCE, of a messianism focused around that of a Davidic messiah. He points out that this second century BCE Davidic Messiah template depicted David as “the standard of righteousness that would ultimately triumph” as opposed to the previous Davidic Messiah template that depicted the Davidic messiah as the founding father of the united monarchy. He explains that this new Davidic messiah template was directly connected to a revised perception of David (and Solomon) that emerged during the Hasmonean period, and that was driven by

- the rule of non-Davidic Kings in Judea;
- the dispossession of the Zadokite priesthood;
- the marked increase in Jewish sects (Finkelstein & Silberman 2006:237).

These factors shifted emphasis away from David (and Solomon) as “establishment founding fathers” and focused on them instead as “models of righteous behavior to be followed in order to regain control of the temple from a wicked, illegitimate priesthood and to lead the people of Israel piously” (Finkelstein & Silberman 2006:237).

This revised perception of David as embodied in the second century BCE Davidic Messiah template, is also found at Qumran, in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Finkelstein draws attention to a Dead Sea Scroll text known as 4Q505 which sees David as the eternally elected leader “with whom God had established a covenant so that he would be like a shepherd, a Prince over Your People, and would sit upon the throne of Israel forever” (Finkelstein & Silberman 2006:237, 238).

He notes that other texts await the arrival of a descendant of David who would “arise to destroy Israel’s internal oppressors and external enemies” while there were also groups who “began to see the return of the Davidic savior as a moral guide as much as a military leader who would destroy foreign domination and impiety in a single stroke” (2006:238). He draws attention to a collection of hymns, also known as “The Psalms of Solomon” that reveals these sectarians’ belief that a descendant of David would herald change, in the manner predicted by the prophets, which is seen in Psalm 17:21-25:
See, Lord, and raise up for them their King, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from the gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter’s jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth; at his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts (Finkelstein & Silberman 2006:238).

Finally, in closing the discussion of Second Temple messianic ideals which ended with the fall of the Temple in 70 CE to Rome, Charlesworth (1993:249) draws attention to three key observations related to the messiah(s) and messianic beliefs in the 1st century CE that are relevant to this section. They include the following observations:

- that nearly half of the 1st century Palestinian Jews did not expect the coming of the messiah (Charlesworth 1993:250);
- that 1st century Palestinian Jews held an assortment of different, and often “mutually exclusive, ideas and beliefs regarding the messiah” (Charlesworth 1993:248);
- that some religious Jews were calling for trust and hope to be placed in God alone and not on a coming messiah (Charlesworth 1993:251);
- that although the Hebrew noun mashiah/messiah refers to one who is anointed, the noun eventually become a title that gradually evolved to refer to an anointed king or priest. However, by the 1st century, the practice of the ceremonial anointment of priest or high priest had ceased36 and this, coupled with the collapse of kinship, meant that “there was no anointed one among God’s people” (Charlesworth 1993:229).

2.4 THOMPSON’S RESEARCH: NEW INSIGHTS INTO MESSIAHS IN ANTIQUITY

Thompson’s observations about the origins and use of concepts such as messiah, the ideal king, imperial ideology, and the eternal future of a universal kingdom of peace in

36 Charlesworth points out that there is no evidence that priests were anointed in the Hellenistic period and that it is therefore correct to conclude that this custom had ceased long prior to the 1st century BCE. During the 1st century BCE, the investiture of the high priest was marked not by anointment but by putting on distinctive traditional vestments (Charlesworth 1993:229).
The Messiah Myth: the Near eastern Roots of Jesus and David (2005) are very insightful and are relevant to this thesis. His research adds a new and highly feasible option to the way(s) that Judaism modified and utilised the ancient Near East concept of the messiah and messianism (and related facets such as an apocalyptic future, universal kingdom of peace and messianic time) to serve its particular needs.

2.4.1 Thompson questions Talmon’s delineation of the term “messiah” in the Old Testament and post-Old Testament

Thompson explains that certain Princeton Symposium scholars, such as S. Talmon (a contributing scholar at the symposium37), tend to sharply separate the use of the appellation “messiah” in the Hebrew Bible which is understood to refer to “an actual ruling king or his immediate successor” (based upon the earliest use of the term “messiah” as understood during Israel’s kingship period during the Iron Age) and to later forms of messianism that are connected to the future-oriented, superterrestrial saviour drawn from the Persian, Hellenistic and Greco-Roman time frames, which finally build up to an idealised figure after 70 CE (Thompson 2005:290). But Thompson is critical and explains that this understanding is misleading as it portrays messianism as something that arose from within Judaism and in doing so, it denies the existence of similar messiah constructs that were found throughout the Ancient Near East.

He continues by explaining that Talmon’s view, which also stresses the concepts of universal salvation, anointment and cosmic peace as particular to Judaism, in the sense that the practice of anointment was done by the Israelite monarchy to unite two aspects of leadership. These two aspects are: firstly, the charismatic leadership of Judges, defined by the election of a leader marked by the divine spirit; and secondly, the dynastic leadership/governance of the monarchy, which was perceived to be free from religious or spiritual dimensions (2005:291). Thompson points out that this perception then allows:

- the Bible to be understood in terms of “history and realism”;

• a division of messianism and the construct “messiah” into two separate and distinctive concepts, which enables us to associate one form of messianism and one specific messiah construct with the New Testament and the other with the Hebrew Bible.

2.4.1.1 The existence of the messiah/ruling king construct not unique to Judaism

Thompson also notes that the view that claims that dynastic kingship is free from any spiritual or religious connotation is also incorrect. There are many, comparable, familiar messiah-type constructs that are well known from Egyptian and cuneiform texts that date from the Bronze Age (2005:291).

He also points out how the concept of the ideal king, unlike that of the messiah, is important and found throughout the Hebrew Bible, and that it provides the basis for concepts such as the covenant, eternal reign and themes such as restoration and the golden age. He explains that:

[t]he figure of the king as a holy warrior with the power to determine destiny and rule the world, expressed in such stock metaphors of shalom, with its blessings of divine patronage and curses of judgment, as well as the king’s universal rule, are all aspects of early imperial texts. Moreover, biblical texts do not simply borrow metaphorical elements from royal ideology as Talmon asserts. They use them specifically to transform Yahweh into a universal and imperial god of the ancient Near Eastern Type. The metaphor of the messiah and the related motif of anointing priests, prophets and kings are metaphors and motifs belonging to this greater myth of the king. The messiah is a figure of myth – an element in an ancient story’s effort to speak of the transcendent, in which the human world has its reflection. It is used neither as a direct reference to any contemporary, historical king nor to any known historical expectations before Bar Kochba (c.135 CE). The Bible transforms an imperial ideology for theological purposes. The thematic elements cluster coherently around the messiah epithet and reflect a mythic reiteration of Near Eastern royal ideology in an effort to reflect divine immanence. Later Jewish messianism tends to historicize the transcendental and interpret the biblical and ancient Near East tradition by casting its language into an apocalyptic future. But historicizing is the only possible (although unlikely) reading that is particularly attractive to a modernist interpretation.

The collusion of the utopian metaphor of peace, expressive of the transcendent and eternal in well-recognized “apocalyptic” texts, hardly does more than reiterate themes already basic in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. cf. Num 24:17; Is 7:14; 9:16; 11:1-8). The eternal future of a universal kingdom of peace is basic to Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasty royal ideology, the Baal myth of ancient Ugarit, royal inscriptions throughout the ancient Near East and Assyrian campaign texts. It is used for example, as a metaphor in Babylonian prophecy:
He will renovate Uruk. The gates of the city of Uruk he will build with lapis lazuli. The canals and the irrigated fields, he will refill with the plenitude of abundance … After him his son will come as king in Uruk and he will reign over the four regions of the earth. He will exercise sovereignty and royalty over Uruk. His dynasty will last forever. The king of Uruk will exercise sovereignty like the gods.

The thematic elements of new creation and the maintenance of creation by the kings are not uniquely Jewish. They are fundamental to the ancient Near Eastern royal ideology. Rather than apocalyptic, they are utopian in their essence. They create what had been intended since the beginning of time (Thompson 2005: 291-292).

Thompson’s views stand in direct contrast to the previous “established consensus”, which had (incorrectly) stated that “the messiah is really indigenous to Judaism” (Charlesworth 1993:10). Thompson’s understanding of the term “messiah” in the Hebrew Bible not only concurs with most modern scholars views and with the overall consensus reached at the Princeton Symposium, but also explores and examines ideas that originally lay (prior to their inception into Jewish belief and thought) beyond the confines of ancient Israel, in the intellectual world of the Ancient Near East. His work also reveals that the concept of the messiah was, prior to its inception into Judaism, and up to the time of Bar Kochba, basically

a figure of myth – an element in an ancient story’s effort to speak of the transcendent, in which the human world has its reflection … neither as a direct reference to any contemporary, historical king nor to any known historical expectations before Bar Kochba (Thompson 2005: 291,292).

And that the Bible ultimately transformed this Ancient Near Eastern imperial ideology for theological purposes (Thompson 2005:291).

2.5 THE MESSIANIC IDEA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT AT QUMRAN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

As a preamble to this overview and any other further discussion in this thesis related to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran, I would like to point out that it would be mendacious not to note that this specific field is literally a mine-field that is fraught with intense and acrimonious academic rivalry and conflict, “in-groups” (or what

---


39 Silberman also notes that it has been said that the academic conflicts “are so bitter precisely because the stakes are so small. The entire Rockefeller funding for the Dead Sea Scrolls project from 1953-1960
Silberman refers to as the “inner circle” (1994:68-103), “out-groups”, renegades and unfortunately a lot of extreme ill will to the extent that a conference organised by Norman Golb of the University of Chicago in December 1992 in New York, was written up by Hershel Shanks in the “Biblical Archaeological Review” under the heading “Blood on the floor at New York Dead Sea Scroll Conference”\(^{40}\). This was a conference that Shanks subsequently went on to describe in this article as an “academic brawl”.

By 1994, Silberman noted that the tyranny of the “inner circles” paleographers and philologists had continued over time, and that the only thing that had basically changed over the past decades was the names and nationalities of the “inner circle” (1994:103). He also draws attention to the reality that:

- the scrolls and the people who wrote them continue to be seen in isolation;
- although the religious nature of the scrolls is perceived as an interesting but “ultimately sterile religious expression”, the scrolls’ significance was primarily viewed as “background material in the study of Rabbinic Judaism and of Christianity”; 
- what these observations (above) reveal is that “the old scholarly consensus, based on arguable paleographical, historical and archaeological assumptions, has survived the fall of the Inner Circle” (Silberman 1994:103).

This unfortunate situation persists and Silberman (1994:103) explains that it has made it very difficult for most scholars or/and students to approach the Dead Sea Scrolls in any fashion or manner, which is deemed acceptable by the “in-group” of the present. This is due to the fact that these respectable scholars continue to show only disdain for alternative interpretations. And the strident modern conflicts for possession of the once-hidden scrolls are merely the surface ripples of a much deeper and profound theological struggle – between those who would faithfully serve the established institutions of religious and higher learning and those who would dare to challenge them (Silberman 1994:103).

---

\(^{40}\) See “THE BAS LIBRARY” online for full article taken, on-line from BAR 19:02, March/April 1993, at: http://members.bib-arch.org/search.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=19&Issue=02&ArticleID=01&UserID=0&
In keeping with the ethos of this thesis, expressed at the start, I hereby acknowledge that I bravely intend to step very close to the boundaries of some of the conventional ideas and views espoused by mainstream Dead Sea scholars; not to challenge them, but rather in an attempt to cast light on the current upsurge in Messianism.

2.5.1 Putting the Scrolls in perspective

Vermes points out that when the scrolls were first released in the 1950s, the scholars of that period made the error of judging the scrolls “as self-contained and entitled to independent treatment” (1997:67). However, as time passed and more Scrolls came to light, and, with the benefit of many decades of intense research, it has now become standard to view the theology of the Qumranite community as “part of the general doctrine of ancient Judaism” (Vermes 1997:67). On the other hand, Vermes also notes that

it is no simple task to follow the developments of the theology of the Qumranite community itself. The reason is that the systematic exposition of beliefs and customs is not a traditional Jewish discipline. Consequently, the scroll “The Instruction of the Two Spirits”\(^{41}\), incorporated into the Community Rule, is an exception, forming the one and only doctrinal treatise among ancient Hebrew writings (Vermes 1997:67).

Vermes also explains that

\[^{41}\] Vermes (1997:27-28) explains that besides being bound by and obeying rules and instructions such as the example below:

Where to eat, bless, and deliberate in common (1Qs v1, 2-3);
How to live to ‘seek God with a whole heart and soul’ (1Q 1, 1-2)
That they were to study the Torah in the wilderness and in doing so ‘atone for the Land’ (1Q V111, 6)

That the monastic oriented Qumranites also had to “become proficient in the knowledge of the ‘two spirits’ in which all men ‘walk’, the spirits of truth and falsehood, and learn how to discriminate between them. They were taught in the so-called ‘instruction concerning the Two Spirits’, the earliest Jewish theological tractate incorporated into the Community Rule, how to recognize a ‘son of Light’ or potential ‘son of Light’, and how to distinguish a ‘son of Darkness’ belonging to the lot of Belial’ (1Q 111, 13-IV, 25) (Vermes 1997:28).
obscures the Jewish recognition of the humble realities of life prescribed by the Law as no mere “works” but as a path to holiness walked in obedience to God’s commandments (Vermes 1997:67).

This observation, in relation to the nature of Jewish law/halakha and the way it underpins a Jew’s daily striving to attain “a path of holiness walked in obedience to God’s commandments” (as elucidated by Vermes above), is worth noting, as this idea is retained and followed through in the later rabbinic perception of the three key elements of rabbinic messianism. They are: the utopian element, the restorative element and the rabbinic addition, the conservative element. The conservative element is primarily related to the concept of striving for holiness, via halakhic means, in an attempt to hasten the coming of the messianic age. The idea of hastening the coming of the messianic age via halakhic means is also relevant to this thesis’ examination of the Chabad/Lubavitchers as it forms part of their beliefs and praxis and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2.5.2 The Dead Sea Scrolls: Messiahs and messianic beliefs

The popular Essene hypothesis, subscribed to by many Dead Sea Scrolls scholars which claims that the scrolls (or at least the so-called sectarian scrolls) were written by the Essenes, a Jewish sect described by the Jewish historian Josephus, has recently been put to the test by Steve Mason. Mason is a scholar who has spent his entire academic life studying the works of Josephus. In an article published in the ‘Biblical Archaeology Review’ (Mason 2008), he draws attention to the fact that he has failed to find the convergences between the scrolls and Josephus, which the supporters of the

42 Although the veracity of this hypothesis, per se, is not under scrutiny in this thesis, it is mentioned here as the scholars’ choice of a particular hypothesis, be it the Essene Hypothesis (preferred, for example, by scholars such as Shanks (1998:132), or VanderKam and Flint (2002:240-250). According to a 2007 article in Biblical Archaeology Review (BAR 33:04, Jul/Aug), 900 scholars subscribed to this theory in 2007 (refer to the article online at http://members.bib-arch.org/search.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=34&Issue=6&ArticleID=11&UserID=0&), or the Sadducean hypothesis (put forward by Schiffman (1993:35-49; 1994:75). The scholars’ respective choices do colour their reading of the texts and their subsequent interpretations thereof.

43 Steve Mason is Professor of History and Canada Research Chair in Greco-Roman Cultural Interaction at York University, Toronto. He is the author of Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees (1991) and general editor of the twelve-volume series Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary (2000), as well as co-author with Michael W. Helfield of the publication Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories (2009).

44 Mason’s article from the Biblical Archaeology Review 34(06) Nov/Dec 2008, ‘Did the Essenes Write the Dead Sea Scrolls,’ used here, was accessed online on 15 Feb 2009, via The online Bas Library at: http://members.bib-arch.org/search.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=34&Issue=6&ArticleID=11&UserID=0&
Essene hypothesis rely on, and he therefore states: “If the scrolls were written by the Essenes that cannot yet be demonstrated by reference to Josephus”.

Masons’ thorough search, conducted from the view point of a scholar who is totally au-fait with Josephus’ work, has revealed that there are even more discrepancies than those mentioned by the Hebrew University Philosopher and Professor, Ullman-Margalit and even less points of resemblance than have generally been assumed by scroll scholars. Hence, he notes that although scroll scholars certainly may understand the scrolls, they are certainly not as conscious or as aware of the subtleties of Josephus’ historical narratives.

Mason is also critical of Ullman-Margalit’s so-called Essene default theory as he states that “Historians are not permitted to have default theories. The only acceptable default position is that we simply do not know the answer. That” he explains, “is the dust from which we begin, and if we cannot come up with a theory that convinces, to that dust we must return”. Consequently, he is firm in the principle that “[w]e must admit that we simply do not know the identity of the Judean community who wrote the scrolls” (for source details see Ulman-Margalit 2008).

Following through on the previous statement, Mason then aptly concludes the article by stating: “So far, like so much surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves, their authors remain a mystery”, which is a view supported by Wise, Abegg and Cook who state that “the identity of the sect has been and remains, a knotty problem” (1996:13).

2.5.3 Clarifying Messiah(s) constructs and messianic expectations at Qumran

Lichtenberg and Oegema help to cast some much-needed light on some of the interpretations and thinking behind the Dead Sea Scrolls. Lichtenberg touches on the source of messianic ideas and Oegema examines the two different periods of the sect’s conception of messiahs and messianic beliefs at Qumran that provides clarity to the fluid and constantly changing messianic ideas, expectations and beliefs contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These observations elucidate some of the ideas and interpretations of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

2.5.3.1 Lichtenberg: Ideas and belief about Messiahs and messianism not confined to scribal exegesis

Lichtenberg’s observation on the previously unacknowledged wide scope for the origin and design of ideas and beliefs related to Jewish messiah(s) and messianism is relevant because he draws attention to the fact that the focus of the search for a Jewish messiah(s) and Jewish messianism has been shifted from scribal exegesis by recent scholarship (1998:20). This observation is especially relevant to the period prior to, during, and after the time of Hillel and Jesus, and illustrates the extensive flexibility and diversity of the ideas and beliefs related to Jewish messiah(s) and messianism in this period (1998:20).

This shift in scholarly endeavour has enabled scholars to understand that beliefs and ideas about early Jewish messiah(s) and messianic expectations also had anarchic and revolutionary roots and expectations. Lichtenberg explains that this is an important realisation as it shows that Jewish messiah(s) and messianism do not always spring from, or are shaped by, groups that are influenced by “scribal explications of biblical expectations” alone (1998:20). He continues to point out that what this means is that ideas and beliefs in and about Jewish messiah(s) and Jewish messianism, also arose from people who were part of the lower classes, or non-elite, and that these ideas and beliefs were also embraced, as well as supported and propagated, by the very lower class group(s) where these different ideas and beliefs arose (Lichtenberg 1998:20).

2.5.3.2 Oegema: The Maccabean and Hasmonean period

Oegema explains that the scrolls show that prior to 100 BCE, a historical leader of the sect played a prominent role (1998:63-64), whereas the scrolls dating from the Maccabean and Hasmonean period (which began in the second part of the 2nd century and are often perceived as preceding the Qumran scrolls), contain “multi dimensional and therefore also multi-interpretable eschatological figures” (1998:63).

The scrolls written during the 2nd century also show that the Qumranites of that time expected one, two or occasionally three messiah figures, which were often similar but not identical (Oegema 1998:63). Oegema (1998:63) explains that the varied

---

46 Scrolls 1QS, 1QSa (Q28a), 1Qsb (1Q28b), 4QTestim (4Q175), CD45 (Oegema 1998:63).
The multiplicity of these shifting messianic expectations at Qumran are not surprising when you view them within the complicated and confusing context of the Maccabean and Hasmonean period. This variation reveals and reflects the greater changing historical context beyond and at Qumran, as well as the continuing overall plasticity of Jewish messianic concepts and beliefs (Oegema 1998:63). He also adds that the great variability in messianic concepts and beliefs can also be understood as being a symptomatic expression and response of (all) the peoples’ experiences of the highly diverse and bewildering political context of the Maccabean and later Hasmonean period (Oegema 1998:63).

Oegema also notes that the eventual combination of the offices of (high) priest and king (when Simon, son of Judas Maccabeus, was the first to be named as the “High Priest, Military Commander and Ethnarch of the Jews”), indicates that in “the actual political-religious situation the idea that the kingdom and priesthood can be united in one person, had been both formulated in the messianic expectations and put into political practice” (Oegema 1998:64).

This observation allows Oegema to conclude that it would probably be correct to deduce that the “actual historical situation” and/or the “pragmatic struggle for power” could therefore be understood to be the actual source of the idea of the “many-sided Messiah concept” or the “two messiah doctrine”, as opposed to the more traditional Davidic king/messiah construct, both in Jerusalem and at Qumran (Oegema 1998:64). Oegema’s observation is an extremely pertinent observation, especially in relation to this thesis’ quest for the origins of modern-day messiah constructs, as it clearly shows how messiah constructs need not be dictated by scribal exegesis alone.

Although the scrolls47 also show a marked increase in the Qumran sect’s criticism of the Hasmonean priest-kings, the Qumran scrolls also reveal a remarkably similar development in their combination of figures in their messiah construct(s):

**The Hasmoneans:** Military Commander and Ethnarch, High Priest and Prophet;  
**The Qumranites:** Messiah from Israel and Warrior Priest, Messiah from Aaron and Teacher of Righteousness (Oegema 1998:65).

47 Scrolls 1Qs, 1QSa (1Q28a), 1QSb (1Q28b), 4QTestim (4Q175), CD (Oegema 1998:65).
Oegema points out that, although it is accepted that the origin for Qumran messianic expectations (in their scrolls) can be linked directly to the sect’s unique style of biblical exegesis, the sect’s political and religious isolation and its remote location in the desert make it, however, far more complex (1998:65). He therefore explains that one needs to move beyond location, exegesis and isolation, and place the growth and development of the Qumranite’s messiah construct(s) within the context of the overall struggle for religious and political power in Israel that was dominated by the Hasmoneans. Consequently, only the messiah concepts that evolved according to the hermeneutics of the Qumran sectarians could function as a “mirror of the existing balances of power or as a polemic against them” (Oegema 1998:66). Oegema then points out this socio-political and religious reality context explanation (offered above) may well be the real reason why messianic expectations were so remarkably fluid and why they constantly changed to suit their respective contextual (and shift in the balance of power) requirements of the time (Oegema 1998:66).

2.5.3.3 Oegema: The Roman-Herodian period including the destruction of Qumran in 68 BCE

Oegema (1998:66) explains that this period is characterised by the “renaissance of the Davidic-messianic expectations and that the messianic expectations of this period differ greatly from those in the period discussed above” (Oegema 1998:81). This is clearly seen in the scrolls known as:

- the Habakkuk Pesher48;
- Pesher on Psalm 3749;
- the War Scroll50;
- the Genesis Commentary51;
- Midrash on Eschatology52 and

---

48 Scroll 1QpHab (Oegema 1998:81).
49 Scroll 4QpPs a.b. or 4Q171 (Oegema 1998:81).
50 Scroll 1QM (Oegema 1998:81).
51 Scroll 4Q252 (Oegema 1998:81).
52 Scroll 4QFlor or 4Q174 (Oegema 1998:81).
These scrolls were written during the Roman-Herodian period and they not only reflect a messianic concept and expectation that has a distinctive royal and military character, but they also reveal the fact that in the Torah, the leader of the community, referred to as the Teacher or God, now plays an equally important part in their messianic expectations, while the priestly and royal messiah constructs, from the Maccabean and Hasmonean period, recede (Oegema 1998:81).

Oegema looks to the troubled socio-political context and the subsequent events that came into being after 40 BCE when Rome declared Herod king and 37 BCE when Herod set himself up as king up to 4 BCE (1998:81). He points out that it is therefore hardly surprising that the significance of these disconcerting events would affect the people outside Jerusalem, notably the Essenes and the Qumran sect. He explains that the troubled socio-political situation can therefore be seen to underlie the Roman-Herodian period Qumran writings’ resurgence of the sect’s longing for a “Davidic latter-day liberator” (Oegema 1998:82) and for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom (1998:82).

2.5.4 Vermes: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

Geza Vermes’ classic work of scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (1997) is connected to his proclivity for the Essene hypothesis, as stated in his work in the “Appendix: The Essenes and the Qumran Community” (1997). Vermes says that “the identification of Essenism and the Qumran sect remains in my view the likeliest of all proposed solutions” (Vermes 1997:48).

Vermes continues to explain the dynamics of the Qumran sectarians/Essenes within the context of their historical time period. He describes this time period as a “world of eschatological ferment, of intense expectations of the end foretold by the prophets” (Vermes 1997:84). He then explains how the Community’s sages and the Teacher of

---

53 Scroll 4Q246 (Oegema 1998:81).
54 Some of the key events that troubled the people at Qumran included: Herod granting the priests permission to rebuilt the Temple; the in-fighting amongst Herod’s three sons after his death in 4 BCE; the people of Judah and Galilee rising up in revolt against Rome; and the extension of Roman rule in Judea in 6 CE and its final consolidation when the remaining areas of Palestine all came under Roman rule in 44 CE (Oegema 1998:81).
55 Scroll 1Qm 11, and Psalm of Solomon (Oegema 1998:82).
Righteousness used the bible to formulate and project their specific concept of the future. In this way, they also used their Community’s story to help them envisage a specific scenario related to the fulfilment of the prophetic expectation in relation to the salvation of the righteous (1997:84).

Vermes points out that the theme of Messianism becomes more prominent in other scrolls, such as 4Q285, 4Q461, and that the Damascus Document describes not only one royal messianic figure, Davidic and triumphant (1997:86), but two and possibly even three messiahs.

The various messiahs described by the scrolls, according to Vermes, are:

- **The lay King-Messiah**, also known as the “Branch of David”, the “Messiah of Israel”, the “Prince of [all] the Congregation” and the “Scepter”. This Messiah construct would, according to the Qumran literatures’ book of Blessings, usher in “the Kingdom of his people” and “bring death to the ungodly” and defeat “[the kings of the] nations” (Vermes 1997:86);

- **The Priest-Messiah** who, in keeping with the hierarchy of a priestly-based sect, comes first. This messiah is called the “Messiah of Aaron”, the “Priest” and the “Interpreter of the Law”. The King-Messiah also had to submit to the Priest-Messiah as well as to the priestly elite on all matters, including legal matters. The Priest-Messiah/Messiah of Aaron was seen as the final Teacher at the “end of days” who would also preside over the battle liturgy as well as the eschatological banquet (Vermes 1997:86);

- **“The Prophet” Messiah** is only mentioned briefly once. The scroll informs the reader that his arrival is expected to coincide with that of the Priest-Messiah/Messiah of Aaron, and the lay King-Messiah/the Messiah of

---

56 This scenario is laid out in the following scrolls: (4QpNah=4Q169 111, 4-5); (1QSa 1,1-5 cf. also 4Q471a); (1Qm 1-11); (1QM x1x, 2-8); (11Q Melch 11, 9,13); (1Qm XV11, 1-3); (4Q246) (Vermes 1997:84-85).


58 Scrolls – (cf. 4Q161, frs. 8-10; 1QSb V, 20-29) (Vermes 1997:86).


Israel. 62 Vermes (1997:87) explains that when the Prophet is placed within the Jewish inter-Testamental context of ideas, the Prophet could be seen as a returning Elijah, or as a precursor of the Messiah, 63 or as a divine guide sent to Israel in the last days 64 who was probably akin to “the Prophet” that God promised to Moses. 65 Vermes also notes that it is possible to identify “the Prophet” with a “new Moses” based on the inclusion of the Deuteronomy passage in the Messianic Anthology or Testimonia from Cave 4. 66 This is because, as the first of the three messianic proof texts (the 2nd text is Balaam’s prophecy 67 related to the star rising out of Jacob, and the 3rd text is the blessing of Levi by Moses 68 ), they all prefigure the royal and the Priestly Messiah. Thus, Vermes concludes from the information available that, if the sect did indeed expect the prophetic Messiah/messianic Prophet, it would be to teach the truth revealed on the eve of the establishment of the Kingdom. His role was therefore similar to the role that the Qumran Essenes attributed to the Teacher of Righteousness. This has allowed Vermes to deduce that at some point in the sect’s timeline, it had abandoned the idea of the coming of the Prophet, as it believed he had already come in the guise of its Teacher of Righteousness (Vermes 1971:87).

Vermes points out that the scrolls do not reveal much about the sect’s view on precisely what would follow once the Messiahs had come. There is only an idea, expressed in the Community Rule, that the Qumran sectarians expected some type of transformation “until the determined end, and until the renewal” 69 (Vermes 1971:87).

However, Vermes is unsure whether this transformation should be seen within the context of the new creation of the Apocalypse of Ezra (vii, 75), and of Baruch (xxxii, 69 1Qs IX, II) (Vermes 1997:86).

63 Refer to: Mal. iv.5; 1 ENOCH xc, 31, 37; MATTH. Xi,13; xvi, 12 (Vermes 1997:87).
64 Refer to: Mac. iv,46; xiv,41; Jn, i, 21 (Vermes 1997:87).
65 “I will raise up for them a prophet like you … He shall convey all my commands to them” (Deut. xvii,15-18; Acts iii. 22-23; vi, 37) (Vermes 1997:87).
66 Scroll (4Q175) (Vermes 1997:87).
67 Num. xxiv, 15-17.
68 Deut. xxxiii, 11.
6). He also notes that the description of the “New Jerusalem” in various Qumran texts\(^7\) does not line up with any definition of the Holy City that descends from above, as read in 1 Enoch (xc, 28-9), or in Revelations (xxi); but that the Qumran sectarians’ “New Jerusalem” could well be an earthly city rebuilt according to architectural plans drawn up by angels (Vermes 1997:87).

2.5.5 Shanks: Messiahs, messianism and the end of days

2.5.5.1 How many messiahs at Qumran?

Shanks points out that the early belief that the community at Qumran believed in two messiahs, namely, the priestly messiah/the Messiah of Aaron and the royal Davidic messiah/the Messiah of Israel, and that these two messiahs spoken of in the scrolls were to be seen as messiahs set apart from the Christian messiah, is no longer valid (Shanks 1998:65).

Shanks point out that a scroll – 4Q521 – also known as the messianic apocalypse, has shown that

a single eschatological messiah with attributes of the single Christian messiah: [The heavens and the earth will listen to his Messiah … Over the poor His spirit will hover and renew the faithful with His power … He … liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straitens the bent. (cf. Psalm 146:7-8) … The Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been … He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor (cf. Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1)]\(^7\) (Shanks 1998:65).

Shanks (1998:66) also draws attention to the fact that Matthew and Luke virtually repeat the same passages in Isaiah and Psalms that 4Q421 (above) does:

The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them (Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:21).

Nevertheless, Shanks notes that there is a difference between the Gospel passages, the Dead Sea Scroll 4Q521 and the references to Psalms and Isaiah, in that Matthew, and Luke and 4Q521, unlike Psalms and Isaiah, speak of reviving the Dead. He observes

\(^7\text{Scrolls – (cf. 1Q32; 2Q24; 4Q554-555; 5Q15; 11Q18) (Vermes 1997:87).}\)

\(^71\text{Note that Shanks has placed the references to Psalms and Isaiah, which the Dead Sea Scrolls appear to be quoting, in brackets.}\)
that this may indicate that either the Gospels referred to 4Q521 or that both referred to an, as yet, undiscovered source (Shanks 1998:66).

The scrolls also reflect the ever-changing plasticity of the Jewish messiah concept. The scrolls reveal that by the beginning of the 1st century CE, the concept of the messiah had moved beyond that of an earthly Davidic messiah who would restore the kingdom of David, to encompass the idea of “a divinely sent figure who would return as God’s agent and usher in the world to come” (Shanks 1998:68).

This transition is reflected in a Dead Sea scroll known as 4Q175 (aka 4Florilegium), which contains biblical quotes followed by short commentaries. For example, 2 Samuel 7:14 “I will be his father and he will be my son”. However, the difference is that, in the book of Samuel, this line refers to the Israelite king who becomes the Son of God on his, that is, the king’s, enthronement, whereas in the Dead Sea Scrolls commentary on this passage, the commentary informs that this is a reference to a “future messianic son”, and states that “He is the branch of David who shall arise … [to rule] in Zion [at the end] of time” (Shanks 1998:68).

Consequently, Shanks (1998:69) points out that by the 1st century CE, around the time of Jesus, the Messiah of the scrolls and the messiah depicted in, notably, the latest book of the Hebrew Bible, namely, Book of Daniel (dated to ±150 BCE which is later than some of the Dead Sea Scrolls), had already been weighed down with eschatological content. This trend therefore reveals the popularity of this eschatological perception of the messiah of that time period (Shanks 1998:69).

2.5.5.2 The apocalyptic and eschatological idea: Intertestamental biblical literature

The discussion on Judaism in the overview above, has clearly shown that Judaism was complex and diverse to the extent that Neusner (1993:iix) has referred to Judaism, before the ascendancy of the Pharisees and the emergence of Rabbinic orthodoxy, as Judaismms (in the plural). We also know, as Shanks (1998:164) notes, and from the discussion above, that scholars have traditionally preferred to marginalise the apocalyptic element within these Judaismms. However, as noted in the paragraph

---

72 “‘Apocalyptic’, from the Greek word for revelation, is used as a noun as well as an adjective, and describes literature that discloses heavenly secrets in visions. This literature, full of veiled references, often focuses on great historic crises. The world is in the grip of warring forces, of good and evil, of God and a Satanic opponent, heading for a final judgment. The end of days or the end of time is near,
above, the intertestamental literature, especially the book of Daniel, is filled with secret visions, prophecies that are passed on to Daniel via angels. It also speaks of “the resurrection of martyrs” who will “shine like stars” (Daniel 12:3), and the conviction that history is now reaching a climax is a prime example of apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible. In the book’s best-known vision, “one like a son of man” comes “on the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:13) (Shanks 1998:165).

Shanks furthermore draws attention to the New Testament’s Revelation, also called the Apocalypse. This is an apocalyptic book, akin to Daniel, but it describes the visions received by a man called John. These visions did, however, not come not from angels (as in Daniel’s case) but from Christ. This book’s visions foretell that the persecution of faithful Christians will be followed by the “punishment of the nations and by the triumph of God and his followers. The final cosmic battle will occur at a place called Armageddon (a Greek form of Har, or Mount, Megiddo)” (Shanks 1998:165).

2.5.5.3 The apocalyptic and eschatological idea: The Dead Sea Scrolls

The final cosmic battle as described in the book of Revelation also appears (albeit with some significant differences) in the Dead Sea Scrolls’ War Scroll73, also known as the Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness. Shanks explains that “its siglum is 1Qm74,” and that it was among the original Bedouin discoveries in Cave 1. Shanks observes that this scroll “describes a war at the end of time between the forces of good, led by God, and the forces of evil, led by Belial, a Satan-like figure” (also called the Angel of Malevolence), whose rule is “in darkness” (Shanks 1998:167) which has allowed scholars to define the subject matter as apocalyptic eschatology (Shanks 1998:1166).

---

73 There are other scrolls from Qumran, besides the War Scroll that contain apocalyptic, eschatological, and/or messianic elements, for example, the Temple Scroll and a Scroll known as the Angelic liturgy (Shanks 1998:167-170).

74 The M stands for milchamah, the Hebrew for word for war (Shanks 1998:165).
2.5.6 VanderKam and Flint: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

Although VanderKam and Flint draw attention to the fact that the messianic figures are not often mentioned in the scrolls, he also notes that this reality has not deterred scholars from trying to fathom the identity of the Qumran messiah. He explores Michael Wise’s attempt, laid out in “The First Messiah as well as Israel Knohl’s ‘Suffering’ Messiah” which is utilised in this thesis (VanderKam & Flint 2002:270).

VanderKam and Flint observe that the scrolls reveal the sect at Qumran were expecting a war in the near future and that they were anticipating the arrival of the Davidic messiah who would lead the forces of Good. These forces of Good would triumph over the forces of evil and would also put their leader to death. This would seem to be the battle that was depicted at length in the War Rule, where several passages note the role of the chief priest in this particular conflict\(^75\) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:272).

The scrolls seem to indicate that the sectarians attempted to calculate the end of time and try and understand what would occur at that time. The scrolls\(^76\) reveal that they organised the past into weeks of seven year units, and the years into jubilees of forty-nine year units, and that they attempted to do this with the future as well. Their attempts are seen in their scrolls and a reasonable deduction from certain passages\(^77\) seems to indicate that they thought that a ten jubilee period would begin with the Exile (VanderKam & Flint 2002:272).

The future that lay beyond the eschatological war appears to entail bliss for the righteous\(^78\) and destruction for the wicked, as described in the Rule of Community (4.18-23) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:273)

2.5.6.1 Messiahs at Qumran

In the interpretation of 2 Sam. 7:11 by scroll 4Q174, VanderKam and Flint (2002:265) observe that:

\(^{75}\) See 10.2; 15.4; 16.13; 18.5; 19.1 as well as cols. 10-12 for his address and prayer (VanderKam & Flint 2002:272).

\(^{76}\) Scrolls such as (4Q387) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:272).

\(^{77}\) Scroll (4Q390 1.7-12) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:272).

\(^{78}\) Scroll (4Q521 ll. 5-13) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:273).
This passage refers to the shoot of David, who shall arise with the interpreter of the Law, and who will [arise] in Zi[on in the La]st Days, as it is written, “And I shall raise up the booth of David that is fallen” (Amos 9:11). This passage describes the fallen **booth** of David, [w]hom He shall raise up to deliver Israel.\(^79\) (4Q174. 11-13 [WAC, 228]).

This points to two figures who are perceived as messiahs in other different sections of the scrolls. He explains that these titles are: the shoot (or branch) of David, and the title, the interpreter of the Law, both seen in scroll excerpt above. The messiah of Israel is also called the branch of David in another scroll fragment\(^80\) that comments on Gen. 49:10, which reads as follows:

> A ruler shall [no]t depart from the tribe of Judah when Israel has dominion. [And] the one who sits on the throne of David [shall never] be cut off, because the “ruler’s staff” is the covenant of the kingdom, [and the th]ous[ands of Israel are at “the feet,” until the Righteous Messiah, the Branch of David, has come. For to him and his seed the covenant of his kingdom of his people has been given for the eternal generations, because he has kept […] the Law with the men of the Yahad (9WAC, 277) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:266).

Another title for the messiah is also given in another scroll\(^81\) known as the Commentary on Isaiah, which is the “Leader of the Congregation” (VanderKam & Flint 2002:266).

They also point out that the community’s expectation of two messiahs was already common knowledge when the Dead Sea Scrolls were first published, and they note that the Rule of Community also states: “They shall govern themselves using the original precepts by which the men of the Yahad began to be instructed, doing so until there come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel” \(^82\) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).

VanderKam and Flint explain that “the plural messiahs, followed by the explanatory names Aaron and Israel, points not only to two individuals, but indicates that one, possibly named first for a reason, will be a priest and the other a non-priest” (2002:265). They point out that in this passage, the arrival of the prophet and the two

\(^79\) Scroll (4Q174. 11-13 [WAC, 228]) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).

\(^80\) Scroll fragment 4Q252 (VanderKam & Flint 2002:266).

\(^81\) Scroll 4Q161 (VanderKam & Flint 2002:266).

\(^82\) Scroll (9.10-11 [WAC,139]) – see also VanderKam and Flint’s endnote no 7 for Chapter 11 of this publication on page 450, in relation to this footnote (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).
messiahs would indicate the end of an age, namely the end of time when they would all live according to certain precepts (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).

The appearance of two messiahs in the Rule of Community was a particularly interesting find for scholars who were already aware of this idea, as it had appeared four times in the Damascus Document, expressed in a similar manner, except that the term “messiah” was used in the singular so it read: “the messiah of Aaron and (of) Israel”.\(^83\) He notes that scholars had initially argued over the idea of one or two messiahs, but that the Rule of Community from Qumran has now directed them to accepting two messiahs (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).

Beyond ending an era by their appearance, the exact role of the messiahs and their specific task(s) are unclear. VanderKam and Flint note that one scroll\(^84\) mentions atonement, however it is not clear whether it is the Messiah(s) who will atone or humanity.

### 2.5.6.2 The End of Days

VanderKam and Flint (2002:264) explain that these sectarians thought that they were living in an evil period and that they subsequently ordered their lives in exact accordance to the will of God, as they understood it. The *pesharim* of the Qumranites reveal how they searched and interpreted the prophetic Scriptures for signs on what was happening in the natural world, what would happen to the world and humanity in the future, and on how they should conduct themselves to become part of God’s overall scheme.

These Qumranites believed that their reading of the prophecies enabled them to predict future events, as God had preordained the future. They used the Book of Daniel to support this view and believed that the future could be split into clearly defined periods, just as the past was split up into periods in Daniel 7-12. This idea is seen in their Commentary on Habakkuk\(^85\) which reads: “all the times fixed by God will come about in due course as he has ordained that they should be by his inscrutable

---


\(^84\) Scroll (CD 19.11) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:266).

\(^85\) Scroll (1QpHab) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:264).
insight". Consequently, they foresaw a future that consisted of more than one defined period (VanderKam & Flint 2002:264).

These sectarians also believed that they were living in the period called the “end of days”/“last of days”, which was a key period that preceded the period known as the decisive end or visitation. The decisive end/visitation period was when the forces of good and evil would continue their on-going struggle for control, while they, the small designated group at Qumran, would contribute their key part in this clash, both for humanity and for themselves. This understanding was based on these Qumranites’ belief that they had assumed the ability to carry out the tasks and roles that were normally associated with the Temple in Jerusalem (VanderKam & Flint 2002:264).

The “end of days”/“last days” is mentioned often in the scrolls and refers to a particular time period that occurs before “the decisive end to history” when some people will be saved, while others will be judged. This time period has both positive and negative aspects. The negative side of this period is due to the efforts of the forces of Belial who “redouble their efforts to defeat the ranks of the righteous” (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).

VanderKam and Flint (2002:265) explain that there is a scroll that envisions a period of persecution in the last days, when all the nations will all move to conspire against Israel. However, some extracts from some scrolls also reveal that this period of persecution will also be a time for purification and/or deliverance for the chosen. The scroll known as Commentary on Habakkuk also refers to the same idea of persecution and deliverance combined, but it extends the length of this period.

---

86 Scroll (1QpHab 7.13-14 [WAC,119]) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:264).
87 This is seen in the extract from Scroll (1QpHab 8.4-10 [WC, 137-38]): “When such men as these come to be in Israel, then shall the society of the Yahad truly be established, an ‘eternal planting’ (Jubilees 16:26), a temple for Israel. And – mystery! – a Holy of Holies for Aaron; true witnesses to justice, chosen by God’s will to atone for the land and to recompense the wicked their due. They will be ‘the tested wall, the precious cornerstone’ (Isa. 28:16) whose foundations shall neither be shaken nor swayed, a fortress, a Holy of Holies for Aaron, all of them knowing the Covenant of Justice and thereby offering a sweet savor. They shall be an acceptable sacrifice, atoning for the land and ringing in the verdict against evil, so that perversity ceases to exist” (VanderKam & Flint 2002:264).
89 An example is Scroll (4Q174 4.1-4) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).
90 Commentary on Habakkuk (7.7-14 [WAC, 119]) (VanderKam & Flint 2002:265).
2.5.7 Schiffman: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

Of all the scholars’ views on the Dead Sea Scrolls noted in this overview (see above), Schiffman’s views on the Dead Sea Scrolls stand out as unique, as they have been specifically and deliberately read and interpreted within their complete Jewish context. His understanding is therefore more pertinent and valuable to this thesis’ search for the origins and inspirations that underlie both current Jewish orthodoxy’s view on messiahs and messianism, as well as the messianic end of day beliefs of the present-day Jewish messianists, the Chabad/Lubavitchers. Schiffman’s approach, which attempts to “reconstruct the past of the Jewish people and their religious tradition, coming from a new understanding of the unique approach to God and humanity that the Jews have bequeathed to the world”, therefore makes his work especially suitable in relation to the understanding of Jewish messiah(s), messianism and end of day beliefs (Schiffman 1994:xxiv).

2.5.7.1 The Essene hypothesis versus the Sadducean origins of Qumran

Schiffman is one of the few scholars who posits a different theory to the Essene hypothesis. He points out that scholars who subscribe to the Essene hypothesis “tend to gloss over points of disagreement, pointing only to the similarities between the two groups. Yet, important differences do exist between descriptions of the Essenes and Qumran sectarian teachings, regarding details of the initiation process and of Jewish law” (Schiffman 1994:81). Schiffman subscribes to a different theory that he bases on the content of a scroll known as the Halakhic Letter.91

Schiffman’s theory, in essence, does not claim that the Dead Sea Sect, as they are known today, was Sadducean, only that the sect’s origins and the root of its halakhic tradition arose from the Sadducean Zadokite priesthood (1994:89). The basis for this claim is provided by the views of the letter’s opponents, which are identical to those of the Pharisees. Consequently, Schiffman concludes that the only possible explanation for this is that the writers of the letter were Sadduceans who were unwilling to accept the situation that arose after the Maccabean revolt (1994:87).

---

91 Scroll 4QMMT. For an in-depth examination of the Halakhic Letter and Schiffman’s Sadducean origin theory, see Schiffman (1994:83-95).
He explains that when Temple worship was entrusted to a Hasmonean who acted according to existing Pharasaic beliefs, as opposed to the beliefs and praxis of the Zadokites, the pious Sadduceans broke away and formed a sect. Initially, this sect attempted to reconcile with the new Temple hierarchy (their remaining Zadokite-Sadducean brethren) and the Hasmoneans, but failed (1994:88). Schiffman sees this failed reconciliation as the main catalyst for the Qumran sectarians’ development of their perception as “the despised, rejected, and abandoned outcast” which, in turn, enabled them to “look upon themselves as the true Israel, condemning and despising all other” (Schiffman 1994:88-89).

Schiffman explains that a leader, namely, the Teacher of Righteousness, soon arose amongst these pious disgruntled Sadducees after their failed reconciliation. This teacher was the leader who directed these Sadducees’ beliefs towards “its intensely apocalyptic, sectarian mentality and towards the many beliefs that differentiated the sect from the Sadducees” (Schiffman 1994:95). This view supports Talmon’s observation that the Dead Sea scrolls clearly reveal that the Qumran sect were a group of people who promoted what he describes as an “extreme messianism” (1993:113). Schiffman also believes that it was during the early years of this teacher’s leadership (approximately one generation after the sect arose), that the sect set up the sectarian centre and library at Qumran (1994:95).

He therefore maintains that the contents of the Halakhic Letter are such that it is now imperative for scholars to reassess their previous theories that identify the sect with other Second Temple groups or sects (Schiffman 1994:89). This would mean that theories that connect the sect to Hassidim or the Pharisees need to be put aside, and that the Essene hypothesis needs to be seriously re-evaluated in the light of the Halakhic Letter’s contents to the extent that “[t]hose holding this theory must now argue that the term ‘Essene’ came to designate the originally Sadducean sectorians who had gone through a process of radicalization until they became a distinct sect. Alternatively, they must broaden their understanding of the term to include a wide variety of similar groups, of which the Dead Sea sect might be one” (Schiffman 1994:89).

---

92 Schiffman is referring, in this quote, to the Sadducees who chose remain behind at the Temple and co-operate with the Hasmoneans.
2.5.7.2 Messianic figures in the Qumran texts

Schiffman notes that some texts in the scrolls speak of two messianic figures while others speak of one, and that those that speak of the priestly messiah (the Messiah of Aaron), appear to assume that the priestly messiah will control the rebuilt and reorganised Temple, while a lay messiah will rule as king over Israel (Schiffman 1994:323). There are, however, other scrolls that anticipate the arrival of a Davidic messiah (that is, a descendant of David) who will primarily direct the worldly affairs of Israel (Schiffman 1994:323).

There are also other eschatological figures in the scrolls besides these messiahs (mentioned above). They include:

- the Teacher of Righteousness who is expected to interpret the law at the end of days;
- the Prince\(^93\) of the Congregation who will act as the sect’s military leader at the end of days;
- an eschatological prophet who will announce the coming of the messiah and who is akin to the figure of Elijah in rabbinic tradition (Schiffman 1994:323).

Schiffman notes the discussion related to the sectarian concept of the messiah, which began in earnest after the discovery of the Zadokite Fragments (1994:323) and the idea that there were two competing messianic ideas (1994:326). However, the subject of this debate has already been noted and neatly clarified by Oegema (above in 2.5.3), and examined in its broader Ancient Near East context by Thompson (above in 2.4.1.1). Nevertheless, Schiffman rightly notes that the texts that contained opposing messiah ideas, probably did coexist and that these texts, along with other texts that contain no messianism at all, bear testimony to the diversity and pluralism of the Dead Sea sect (1994:326).

Schiffman also draws attention to the fact that there is a distinct merging of the restorative and utopian messianic ideals at Qumran, to the extent that the reader

---

\(^93\) Schiffman explains that the term “prince” in this instance may simply be another title used in the scroll’s text instead of the title “king” (as it is used in the book of Ezekiel) to refer to the person who will rule in the messianic era (1994:323).
occasionally comes across both the restorative and utopian alongside each other in the same text\(^94\) (1994:326). He points out, however, that the restorative texts, which speak of the Davidic messiah, do not anticipate an earth-shattering destruction of all evil and that these restorative texts highlight prophecies of prosperity and peace.

Conversely, the utopian ideal texts, with their more cataclysmic and/or apocalyptic styled content, usually exclude the Davidic messiah and place power in the hands of “the priestly, religious leader and a temporal prince who will be subservient to the priestly figure. They give no evidence of Davidic allegiance. Instead, they transpose the prominent role of the priesthood in sectarian life on to the end of days” (Schiffman 1994:327). Yet, some of the utopian texts did, albeit intermittently, attempt to confine the leadership role to one messianic figure (Schiffman 1994:327).

2.5.7.3 The End of Days

In essence, the scrolls reveal that the sect believed that the approaching End of Days would, Schiffman explains, usher in

an era of perfection and engender the fulfillment of the rituals and regulations the sect was currently practicing. The resulting eschatological community would reflect the perfection of the present community at Qumran. Men, women, and children who had attained the highest standards of ritual purity would participate in the new community’s holy convocations. Assemblies of these deserving persons would conduct the affairs of the sect, pass judgment, and declare war. As in the period of the Israelites’ desert wandering, the Levites would assume defined leadership roles in the sect’s future life. The Zadokite priesthood would emerge as its dominant force (Schiffman 1994:329).

The scroll called the “Rule of Congregation” contains the functions of the Assembly at the End of Days which include:

- dealing with issues of ritual purity;
- overseeing the observance of law according to the sect’s codifications and decisions;
- making decisions in relation to the sect’s organisation, structure and members’ respective status;

\(^94\) Schiffman points out that the appearance of the restorative and utopian ideals, side by side in the scroll texts, reveal that these two ideals were already beginning to comingle in a manner that would eventually lead to the combined utopian and restorative messianic ideal of rabbinic Judaism (1994:327)
deciding, after receiving certain signs that the End of Days had begun, to “initiate the series of events announced in the War Scroll”, deciding when to declare war, and directing the sect’s role in these final battles (Schiffman 1994:330).

The text of the War Scroll identifies “the traditional enemies of the Jewish people and marks them for destruction” (Schiffman 1994:331). Schiffman explains that the names of the nations, which originally referred to biblical enemies, now referred, in their texts, to the nations that surrounded the Qumran sect in this time period. Hence,

- the Sons of Darkness have become all those who stand for evil and oppose the sect;
- Belial now represents the archangel of evil, who is the heavenly leader of the above group.

The texts reveal that the sect believed that they would be victorious and that the righteous of Israel, who survived the battles, would turn to God and follow the sectarians’ way of life and become part of their community (Schiffman 1994:331).

The sect also appears to believe that both the earthly world/domain and the angels’ world/domain were divided into the two distinct spheres of influence, that of good and that of evil. Consequently, the clash between good and evil on earth, represented by the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest, would be mirrored in the angels’ domain, by the clash between the angels’ Prince of Light (the angel Michael) and his opposing adversary, Belial. Thus, the great eschatological battle would be fought in both domains, where “men would fight alongside angelic comrades in arms” (Schiffman 1994:333). This mental picture spoken of in the texts reveals that the sect believed that the angels would be present in the military camp described in the War

---

95 The War Scroll 1:1-2, 5-7:

And this is the book of the disposition of war. The first engagement of the Sons of light shall be to attack the lot of the Sons of Darkness, the army of Belial, the troops of Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon and the army [of the inhabitants of] Philistia and the troops of the Kittim of Assyria, and in league with them the violators of the covenant … [That shall be] a time of deliverance for the people of God, an appointed time of dominion for all men of his lot, and eternal annihilation for all the lot of Belial. There shall be [great] panic [among] the sons of Japheth, Assyria shall fall, and no one will help him. And the dominion of the Kittim shall depart, so that wickedness will be subdued without a remnant, and none shall escape of [all the Sons of Darkness] (Schiffman 1994:330-331).
"Scroll," and that the sect’s eschatological council would include both earthly and heavenly Sons of Light (Schiffman 1994:333).

Schiffman also points out how the sect, in their anticipation of the coming messianic era,

borrowed from the terminology of the biblical Exodus and the desert wandering period in Israelite history. This period served as a prototype of ultimate redemption, for it represented the closest possible relationship to God, involving direct intervention in history and revelation of God’s law. Also at the time, Israel had been faithful to the Torah’s correct teachings. Because the sectarian expected this ancient grandeur to be renewed in the messianic era, it is not surprising to find such biblical terminology and, specifically, allusions to the military encampment and organization of the desert period, everywhere evident in the Rule of Congregation (Schiffman 1994:339).

This would be why the author of the “Rule of Congregation” looked forward at the End of Days, for both a restorative and a utopian messianic era. The restorative aspect would be characterised by:

- the restoration of Israel’s ancient glories such as the monarchy;
- the legitimate high priesthood;
- the restoration of tribal organisation.

The utopian aspect would be exemplified by a coming catastrophe (a utopian element) that would usher in both a return to the past (a restorative element) and a brand new previously unattainable future that would be set apart by complete observance of the law, ritual purity, and perfection (Schiffman 1994:339). Schiffman explains that it was the combination of these two aspects that was responsible for producing the typical intense Dead Sea messianic zeal and anticipation (1994:339).

Schiffman concludes his discussion on the sect’s end of day beliefs by stating that

[for sectarians, the redemption from Egypt and the period of desert wandering crowned by the revelation at Sinai, served as a paradigm for the future. They themselves would soon experience the great battle and tribulations at the End of Days. Until that day came, they would strive to live in perfect holiness. And as a result, they would eventually merit the revelation of God’s glory in the End of Days, a promise they felt certain would be fulfilled in their lifetime (Schiffman 1994:339).}
2.5.8 Talmon: Messiahs, messianism and the End of Days

Talon points out that the Qumran scrolls that date from near the end of the Second Temple period show that the Qumranites were moving towards a type of extreme messianism. Their messianic beliefs also reveal that they were espousing views which stood in opposition to proto-Pharasaic Judaism and that they stood firmly apart from the Christians (Talmon 1993:113).

Talon deals with a particular category of writing that is specific to the Qumran sectarians (whom he calls Covenanters), namely, the *pesharim*, which he describes (1993:114) as

actualizing extrapolations of biblical books, especially of prophetic literature and the Psalms. By this method of interpretation, scripture is shown to foreshadow the history of the Covenanters, which is presented as the fulfillment of preordained processes and divine promises.

He then proceeds to refer to these Covenanters as the “*Yahad*”, which is a term he has lifted from the descriptions, “*Yahad Bene El*” (The Commune of Divine Ones) or “*Yahad Bene Sadok*” (The Followers of Sadok). These people are then described by him as “a group of Jews possessed by an ardent messianic vision. Viewed from the angle of typology, they represent the most decidedly millenarian or chiliastic movement of Second temple Judaism and possibly in antiquity altogether, Christianity included” (Talmon 1993:115).

He points out that they had used biblical texts to calculate the exact arrival of the ideal “Age to Come”, and were fully prepared to welcome its “harbingers, the Anointed”, who would usher it in (Talmon 1993:115). Unfortunately, they did not live to see their hopes and aspirations come to fruition and were left suspended in a stage of history, caught up between the real and the visionary. Their dilemma therefore allows us to study them as the perfect example of bewildering messianism.

2.5.8.1 Talmon’s understanding of the Qumran messiahs

Talon acknowledges that most scholars now tend to agree that the sect expected two anointed figures, and that the scrolls\(^{96}\) themselves provide the evidence for this

---

He finds that the duality of the Davidic messiah and the Priestly messiah reflect the sect’s dependence on biblical patterns that arose during the postexilic period, and that this trend enabled and underlay the Qumran writers’ “self-identification with biblical, especially postexilic, Israel and its conceptual universe” (Talmon 1993:123-124). It was from this source, back to the ideas of the returnees from Babylon, that the authors drew their “religiopolitical concept of Two Anointed who in the New Age would govern their community, and ultimately the reconstituted polity of the people of Israel” (Talmon 1993:123-124).

2.5.8.2 The New Age and the Messianic Age

Talmon explains that the members of the Yahad expected that the “New Age” would be a “shining creation, healed from all religious blemishes and societal evils which had marred the historical Israel also in the days of that other Return, the days of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah” (Talmon 1993:125). He also adds that the Age to Come would be mainly restorative and that it would take place within the geographical limits of the land of Israel to which the Yahad will return in victory (Talmon 1993:125). The Yahad also expected the Jerusalem Temple to be rebuilt and that Jerusalem itself would be an improved city (Talmon 1993:125).

The members of Yahad also expected that the messianic age would be experienced by all the Covenanters as “a structural ethnic-national entity – as a renewed People of Israel – not as inspired individuals. This notion again reflects the conceptual universe of biblical, especially early, postexilic Israel” (Talmon 1993:125). Nevertheless, he points out that the Yahad had loaded the ascriptive title, People of Israel, with the belief of what he describes as “elective association” (Talmon 1993:126). This was done to the extent that they believed that they (alone) were the chosen remnants of biblical Israel,97 “to whom alone out of all Israel God had granted a new lease on life, the right to reconstitute Israel’s sovereignty, epitomized in the twin-Anointed Of Israel and Aaron” (Talmon 1993:126).

Talmon notes that it can therefore be said that the Covenanters perception of the “Messianic Age” (aharit hayamim) was that it would be a predetermined period during which the “Two Anointed” (that is, the Davidic and the Priestly messiahs), would

97 As described in Mal. 3:13-21 [Heb.], Ezra 9:2 with Isa. 6:11-13 (Talmon 1993:126).
direct in the *New Aeon/Age*,\(^{98}\) which would be “as one further link in the chain of historical epochs” (Talmon 1993:128).

He also points out that The Anointed will not come at the *end of time*, but instead after a *turn of time*, which would follow after an overwhelming crisis in history. This crisis would be characterised by “tribulations of cosmic dimensions”.\(^{99}\) However, once these tribulations are overcome, then the world “shall settle down to experience, ‘a time of salvation for the people of God’ – which would be – ‘an age of [world] dominion’ for all the members of his fellowship” (the term “his fellowship”, refers here to the *Yahad*)\(^{100}\) (Talmon 1993:128).

Talmon concludes by pointing out that it can therefore be said that the scrolls reveal that the Covenanters expected their New Age/Aeon would play out in a period in which

\[
\text{[t]errestrial-historical experiences coalesce with celestial-spiritual utopia. Salvation is viewed as transcendent and imminent at the same time. The New Order to be established by The Anointed is not otherworldly but rather the realization of a divine plan on earth, the consummation of history in history. Qumran Messianism reflects the political ideas of the postexilic returnees’ community. It is the politeia of the New Commonwealth of Israel and the New Universe (Talmon 1993:131).}
\]

2.5.9 **Qumran messianism: final observations**

Charlesworth and the above overview of Qumran, its messiahs and end of days, both note and reveal that not all the sectarians believed in two messiahs and that not all the sectarians were messianic (Charlesworth 1998a:122). Charlesworth explains that Messianism does not appear to have been part of the early Qumran sect’s beliefs and his view is granted credence by the absence of messianism in the oldest sections of a certain scroll,\(^{101}\) as well as by the absence of the concept of messianism in Jewish thinking from 198-100 BCE.

---

\(^{98}\) Scroll 1Qs IV:25 (Talmon 1993:128).


\(^{100}\) Refer to scroll 1QM 1:5 (Talmon 1993:128).

\(^{101}\) 1QS,36 in More Precepts of the Torah (4Q394-399) (Charlesworth 1998a:131).
2.6 THE MESSIANIC AND APOCALYPTIC IDEA: FROM THE RABBIS TO THE PRESENT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

2.6.1 Post-biblical Judaism and the messianic idea

Schiffman (1994:317) explains that messianism has always been one of the essential ideas underlying the development of all types of postbiblical Judaism. The messianic idea can be said, in its most simple form, to visualise the eventual coming of a redeemer, who will be

a descendant of David, who will bring about major changes in the world, leading to world peace, prosperity, and the end of evil and misfortune. Essential to the messianic idea in Judaism is the expectation that when the time comes, the ancient glories of the Davidic kingdom will be reestablished in the Land of Israel. Unquestionably this-worldly, Jewish messianism expresses its ideas in concrete terms. It looks forward to the messianic era, when the spiritual level of humanity will rise, resulting in and from the ingathering of Israel and the universal recognition of Israel’s God (Schiffman 1994:317).

Schiffman also points out that this definition is merely a simple generalisation, as the messianic idea in Judaism has an intricate history, which is also compounded by the concurrent existence of a variety of diverse messianic idea concepts, often within the same group of Judaism (Schiffman 1994:317). Hence we can conclude that the Jewish concept of the Messiah is not uniform throughout.

2.6.2 The Rabbis and the messianic and apocalyptic idea

Scholem (1971:8) points out that, contrary to past scholarly opinion, the messiah and the apocalyptic tradition continued in rabbinic Judaism. However, he also notes that the great Jewish scholars of the 19th and 20th century are equally guilty of their attempt “to eliminate or liquidate apocalypticism from the realm of Judaism”, which inadvertently left the claim of apocalyptic continuity to Christianity. He explains that this trend has been especially prevalent since the Middle Ages, and is clearly seen in the most influential work of its most ardent proponent, Maimonides. But, there is a price for all this – a distortion of historical truth on both sides, and neither can therefore claim to be “a truthful representation of the historical reality of Judaism” (Scholem 1971:9).

Scholem explains that this denial of apocalypticism basically aims to repress very important and dynamic historical elements that are essential to Judaism; albeit that
these elements combine destructive and constructive forces (1971:9). Consequently, “the idea that all apocalyptic currents flowed into Christianity and there found their real place cannot be maintained against more careful historical examination” (1971:9). Thus Scholem describes how the apocalyptic idea is clearly seen in the Talmudic and *aggadic* literature of the Jewish rabbinic tradition in both Aramaic and Hebrew (Scholem 1971:9).

Messianic belief has therefore been an essential aspect of Judaism since the fall of the Second Temple and the conquest of Judea. It was the Jews’ continuing belief in a messiah that ultimately helped them to make “the transition from a condition of national sovereignty to a condition of political powerlessness in the Diaspora. Throughout periods of persecution, the messianic hope helped sustain the spirit of the Jewish people and ensured that the dream of a return to the land of Israel would one day be realized” (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

### 2.6.2.1 The Rabbinic perception of the Messiah

The rabbinic perception of the messiah was that the Messiah is the King, who will redeem and rule Israel at the end of human history and who would assist in the establishment of the kingdom of God (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’). The sources reveal that the rabbis were not obsessed with Messianism. Nevertheless, they did argue about the relationship of past redemptions to future one(s) and there were disagreements over the exact location of the prophetically envisioned later days as well as the role of the messianic period in the overall design of the future.

Scholem points out that the actual figure of the Messiah “in whom the fulfillment of redemption is concentrated” remained oddly vague in rabbinic Judaism. Whether this was deliberate so that all hopes and ideals could co-exist, or whether it is due to the fact there are no memories of a real person (such as the Jesus figure in Christianity and or the Hidden Imam in Shiite Messianism) remains open to discussion (Scholem 1971:17). However, there are historical developments in relation to the Messiah that are important, most notably the doubling of the figure of the Messiah, its split into one from the house of David and the other from the house of Joseph:

- The Messiah ben Joseph is the dying Messiah. He is a fighter who literally dies fighting in the messianic upheaval and whose death coincides with
the destruction of history. Consequently, he redeems nothing and Scholem notes that Isaiah’s suffering servant construct does not apply to him (Scholem 1971:18);

- The Messiah ben David is the figure in whom all utopian focus is concentrated. He ushers in the new and defeats the antichrist (Scholem 1971:18).

This dualism occurs in the Talmud, where the doubling of the messiah is increased when their separate roles are emphasised and where it decreases when this dualism recedes, rendering the figure of ben Joseph as meaningless and redundant (Scholem 1971:18).

2.6.2.2 The Rabbis and the messianic age

The messianic age is therefore paradoxical in the sense that the redemption that it brings is not the result of any previous history. Scholem points out that it is this exact absence of any link between past events and redemption that is always emphasised by the prophets and the apocalyptists, and that “the Bible and apocalyptic writers knew of no progress in history leading to redemption” (Scholem 1971:10). Consequently, redemption is more akin to “transcendence breaking in upon history, an intrusion in which history itself perishes, transformed in its ruin it is struck by a beam of light shining into it from an outside source”, hence the apocalyptists harbour a pessimistic view of the world, and their hope (and/or optimism) is channelled, not to what history will bring humanity, but to what will emerge from the ruins, finally free and fully revealed (Scholem 1971:10).

The rabbis held varied ideas about the messianic age. These range from the ideas expressed by Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Simeon who believed that the messianic age would not come suddenly, but would arrive instead in stages that were completely unrelated to historical events that precede its coming, and then suddenly burst forth in all its splendour (Scholem 1971:10-11). Other rabbinic sages were adamant that the coming could never be calculated and this idea is best expressed in the words of a 3rd

---

102 Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabba, VI, 10. (Scholem 1971:341).
century rabbi who said: “Three things come unawares: the Messiah, a found article, and a scorpion”\(^\text{103}\) (Scholem 1971:11).

### 2.6.2.3 The restorative, utopian and conservative elements of rabbinic Judaism

Although it is generally accepted that messianism/the messianic idea contains both restorative and utopian elements, rabbinic thinking on the messianic idea must however, be viewed within the social and religious context of rabbinic Judaism and the three most vital key factors that drive its thinking. They are: the utopian, restorative and conservative factors/elements (Scholem 1971:3). Scholem explains that the conservative factor is aimed at

the preservation of that which exists and which, in the historical environment of Judaism, was always in danger. They are the most easily visible and immediately obvious forces that operate in this type of Judaism. They have established themselves most effectively in the world of Halakhah, in the construction and continuing preservation and development, of religious law. This law determined the nature of the Jew’s life in exile, the only frame in which a life in the life of a Sinaitic revelation seemed possible, and it is not surprising that it drew to itself, above all, the conservative forces (Scholem 1971:3).

The conservative element is noted here, as it is a key element of the present-day messianic model of the Chabad/Lubavitchers.

Neusner (1993:281) expands on Scholem (above), when he explains that there is also a version of the Messiah-myth that became part of the rabbinic system via the Talmud, which states that

Israel’s sanctification is what governs. So if Israel will keep a single Sabbath (or two in succession), the Messiah will come. If Israel stops violating the Torah, the Messiah will come. If Israel acts with arrogance in rejecting its divinely assigned condition, the Messiah will not come. Everything depends, then, upon the here-and-now of everyday life. The operative category is not salvation through what Israel does, but sanctification of what Israel is (1993:282).

In this way, these rabbinic sages created exactly what they required, “a rabbi-messiah, who will save an Israel sanctified through Torah. Salvation then depends upon sanctification, so it is subordinated to it” (Neusner 1993:282).

\(^{103}\) Sanhedrin 97a (Scholem 1971:341).
There are other rabbinic views on the coming of the messianic age that are relevant to this thesis’ examination of the Chabad/Lubavitchers messianic beliefs. They include a view that deals with the messianic age idea, which places emphasis on “the always possible End” and “the immediacy of God to each day” (Scholem 1971:14). Scholem points out that we find this view expressed in the following way: “If Israel would repent even for a single day, they would be instantly redeemed and the son of David would instantly come, for it say (Ps. 95:7): Today if you will listen to his voice.”

This view is also linked to the non-apocalyptic idea, expressed in Talmudic literature that moral behaviour and the execution of good deeds will all serve to hasten and/or assist the coming of the messianic age (Scholem 1971:11), which is also an idea to which the modern-day Chabad/Lubavitchers subscribe.

Nevertheless, despite this urge to “press for the End” through human endeavour and by whatever means (be it moral behaviour or the execution of simple mitzvot/halakha, such as lighting the Shabbath candles, which is one of the many mitzvot actively encouraged by the modern-day Chabad/Lubavitchers), Scholem notes that this idea has no basis in the biblical texts where the messianic ideal operates entirely without any human support or intervention (Scholem 1971:14). However he also explains that this idea is not a matter of real causality, only of an already established frame for pointed, sententious, formulations which are directed less at the messianic redemption than at the moral value of the suggested conduct .... They present a moralism which must have been welcomed by later reinterpretations of Messianism in the sense of a rational and sensible utopianism. But in fact there can be no preparation for the messiah. He comes suddenly, unannounced, and precisely when he is least expected or when hope has long been abandoned (Scholem 1971:11).

Although the biblical apocalyptists attribute all messianic ideals to God alone, human endeavours to force the end through their own actions do not lack legitimacy in Judaism. This desire to rise up and call for action to hasten redemption or “press for the End” has occurred (and still does occur), despite the apocalyptists’ belief that man cannot be the master of his own destiny, and is clearly seen in the actions of men like Bar Kochba and Sabbatai Sevi (Scholem 1971:15).

---

104 Exodus Rabba, XXV, 16 (Scholem 1971:341).
Bokser (1992:256) draws attention to the fact that, although there were certain rabbinic authorities who saw in messianism the hopes for political improvement and a utopian transformation, albeit in the distant future, there were also those who used the same traditions to reiterate and remind the people that it was still possible for any person to encounter the divine in the present.

2.6.2.4 The messianic age and the final redemption

The rabbis also discuss the final redemption, which is brought about by the coming of the messianic age. In their texts, including the Mishna and the Talmud tractate Sanhedrin, they all visualise redemption being accompanied by cataclysmic events, the collapse of morality, apostasy and the desecration of God’s name. This view seems to engender the belief that the messiah will only come in a time frame when all is either totally pure or totally corrupt. This extreme view had certain rabbinic teachers of the 3rd and 4th century stating: “May he come, but I do not want to see him” (Scholem 1971:13-14). Yet, despite the cataclysmic events and gloom and doom of redemption, its positive and optimistic pay-back is provided by its utopian-driven hopes of the re-establishment of Israel, and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom as a kingdom of God on earth as well as the re-establishment of the conditions of Paradise (as described in the Midrashim and the Jewish mystics).

Scholem notes that this utopian-based hope is not far removed from the messianic utopianism that we find in Isaiah, where the last days are perceived as infinitely richer than the beginning, therefore Isaiah 11:6 does not speak of anything that has been before, but offers something new instead (1971:13). Thus Scholem notes that the images of a the apocalypticists’ New Jerusalem always has more than the old and, likewise, the renewal of the world is far more than a simple restoration of its ideal past, which is utopian in vision (Scholem 1971:14).

---

105 “In the footsteps of the Messiah {i.e. in the period of his arrival} presumption will increase and respect will disappear. The empire will turn to heresy and there will be no moral reproof. The house of assembly will become a brothel, Galilee will be laid waste. And the people of the frontiers will wander from city to city and none will pity them. The wisdom of the scribes will become odious and those who shun sin will be despised; truth will nowhere be found. Boys will shame old men and old men will show deference to boys. ‘The son reviles the father, the daughter rises up against the mother … a man’s enemies are the men of his own house’ (Micah 7:6). The face of the generation is like a dog {i.e. brazenness will reign}. On whom shall we then rely? On our Father in Heaven”. Excerpt from the end of the Mishna tractate Sota (Scholem 1971:342).

106 End of the Mishna tractate Sota (Scholem 1971:342).
2.6.3 Medieval rationalism, Maimonides and the messianic ideal

The Encyclopaedia Judaica explains that during the Middle Ages, and right up to early modern times, messianic speculation and varied attempts to calculate dates for the coming redemption was an integral feature of Jewish culture. Unsurprisingly, the dates that were (often) proposed for redemption would frequently coincide with major upheavals and the persecution of the Jews. For example,

- the persecutions of the crusaders (1066);
- the period of the Black Death in Europe (1347-1350);
- the expulsion from Spain (1492);
- the pogroms in Poland and the Ukraine (1648).

The refutation of each proposed date did not diminish the Jewish populous’ messianic expectations and the explanation that was usually put forward was that the Jews were not “sufficiently righteous to accept the messiah and a new date was set” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.6.3.1 The move to medieval rationalism

Despite the tumultuous events of the Middle Ages and the constantly growing corpus of the Middle Age’s messianic-focused literature, there was also a marked move towards rationalism (albeit medieval rationalism) in Jewish philosophy in this period. This move began with Saadia Gaon (who died in 942), and is clearly seen in the work of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), as well as in the writing of Hasadai Crescas (who died in 1410). These works all reveal the Jewish medieval move to rational inquiry, which included previously, unchartered aspects of Judaism, such as messianism (Scholem 1971:24).

The most important trait of the rationalists thinking on messianism, especially the work of Maimonides, was that they all emphasised the restorative aspect of messianism. This meant that the utopian facet moved far into the background where it was retained\(^\text{\textsuperscript{107}}\), but was seldom, if ever, mentioned. Scholem explains that this meant

---

\(^{107}\) The retention of the utopian aspect of messianism was due to its link to the prophetic promise and the universal knowledge of God that is directly related to supreme good of all philosophical doctrine (Scholem 1971:25).
that “Utopianism is preserved in the boundless expansion and increase of the contemplative element. Restorative elements determine everything” (Scholem 1971: 25-26).

Scholem explains that this change in the rationalists’ attitude to messianism crystallised due to their (especially Maimonides’) deep seated suspicion of the anarchic elements of apocalypticism and because of their fear of the breakout of antinomian thinking that apocalypticism tended to produce (1971:26). Scholem notes that these concerns were well founded in the instance of Maimonides, who had experienced these issues himself (1971:26).

It would therefore be correct to say that the medieval rationalists’ thinking, whether it was based on philosophical principles or Jewish law, was driven by their anti-messianic opinion that understood the dangers and complications contained in utopian messianism (Scholem 1971:27). Scholem also notes that although messianism was such a central part of Jewish culture and belief, that it was only officially formulated, at a relatively late date, into what he describes as “a positive dogma or principle of Judaism” (1971:27), and he draws attention to Maimonides work in this regard. Scholem explains that Maimonides’ work is clearly the most significant of all his predecessors, especially in the manner in which he accommodated the Messianic ideal (accepting it only together with its anti-apocalyptic restrictions), amongst his highly regarded thirteen principles of Jewish faith.

2.6.3.2 Maimonides ‘work and the messianic ideal

Maimonides was a man of exceptional intellect and courage, who was intent on imposing a “firm authority” on what he perceived as a relatively “anarchically organized medieval Jewry” (Scholem 1971:27). His intellectual prowess and his singularity of purpose were so focused and immense that it enabled him to include “his own metaphysical convictions as binding norms of religious conduct for the Jews in general, i.e., as Halakhot, although crucial parts of these have no legitimate basis whatever in the biblical and Talmudic sources and are rather indebted to the philosophical traditions of Greece” (Scholem 1971:27-28).

108 Besides Maimonides work that codifies the Messianic ideal, the other most important codifications of the Messianic idea include the writings of Isaac Abravanel (ca. 1500), “The Victory of Israel” by the “high Rabbi Loew”, Judah Loew ben Bezalel of Prague (1599) (Scholem 1971:33).
Consequently, Scholem notes that Maimonides acts just as subjectively when he deals with his drastic acceptance of the anti-apocalyptic aspects of the Talmud’s messianic tradition and his chosen amplification of them at the end of his work in the code of laws (Scholem 1971:28). In the last two sections of his code of laws, in the 11th and 12th paragraph of the “Laws Concerning the Installation of Kings” one finds a description of Maimonides’ concept of the Messianic idea, which is quoted here in full as it relates directly to the main proposal of the thesis discussed in Chapter 3:

The messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former might. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All the laws will be reinstated in his days as of old. Sacrifices will be offered and the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will be observed exactly in accordance with the commandments of the Torah. But whoever does not believe in him or does not await his coming denies not only the rest of the prophets, but also the Torah and our teacher Moses.

Do not think that the Messiah needs to perform signs and miracles, bring about a new state of things in the world, revive the dead, and the like. It is not so … Rather it is the case in these matters that the statutes of our Torah are valid forever and eternally. Nothing can be added to them or taken away from them. And if there arise a king from the house of David who mediates on the Torah and practices its commandments like his ancestor David in accordance with the Written and Oral Law, prevails upon all Israel to walk in the ways of the Torah and to repair its breeches {i.e., to eliminate the bad state of affairs resulting from the incomplete observance of the law}, and fights the battles of the Lord, then one may properly assume that he is the Messiah. He will then arrange the whole world to serve God only, as it is said; “For then shall I create a pure language for the peoples that they may all call upon the name of God and serve him with one accord” (Zeph. 3:9).

Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah anything of the natural course of the world will cease or that any innovation will be introduced into creation. Rather, the world will continue in its accustomed course. The words of Isaiah: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the panther shall lie down with the kid” (Isaiah 11:6) are a parable and an allegory which must be understood to mean that Israel will dwell securely even among the wicked of the heathen nations who are compared to a wolf and a panther. For they will all accept the true faith and will no longer rob or destroy. Likewise, all similar scriptural passages dealing with the Messiah must be regarded as figurative. Only in the Days of the Messiah will everyone know what these metaphors mean and to what they refer. The sages said: “The only difference between this world and the Days of the Messiah is the subjection of Israel to the nations.”

From the simple meaning of the words of the prophets it appears that at the beginning of the Days of the Messiah the war between Gog and Magog will take place … {With regard to these Messianic wars and the coming of the prophet Elijah before the End, Maimonides then continues:} Concerning all these things and others like them, no one knows how they will come about until they actually happen, since the words of the prophets on these matters are not clear. Even the sages have no tradition regarding them but allow themselves to be guided by texts. Hence there are differences of opinion on the subject. In any case, the order and details of these events are not religious dogmas. Therefore a person should never occupy himself a great deal with the
legendary accounts nor spend much time on the Midrashim dealing with these
and similar matters. He should not regard them as of prime importance, since
devoting himself to them leads neither to the fear nor to the love of God …

The sages and the prophets longed for the days of the Messiah not in order to
rule over the world and not to bring the heathens under control, not to be
exalted by the nations, or even to eat, drink and rejoice. All they wanted was
to have time for the Torah and its wisdom with no one to oppress or disturb
them.

In that age there will be neither famine nor war, nor envy, nor strife, for there
will be an abundance of worldly goods. The whole world will be occupied
solely with the knowledge of God. Therefore the Children of Israel will be
great sages; they will know hidden things and attain the understanding of their
Creator to the extent of human capability, as it is said: “For the earth shall be
full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9)
(Scholem 1971:28-29).

Scholem draws attention to the way Maimonides manages to load each sentence in his
codification of the Messianic ideal with a polemical purpose and how he cautiously
proceeds to codify any protest against apocalyptism, as well as the wild imaginings of
the Aggadists and the authors of the Midrashim (Scholem 1971:29).

Maimonides deliberately moved to distance himself from Messianic miracles and
signs as well. He addresses what the Messianic age will bring instead, such as

- the freedom from enslavement for Israel – which he sees as negative;
- the freedom for the knowledge of God – which he sees as a positive
(Scholem 1971:29-30).

For Maimonides the Messianic age does not

- change creation;
- affect revelation;
- halt the observance of the law;
- permit the lawful order of nature to yield to miracles (Scholem 1971:30).

Maimonides required only one condition for the authenticity of the Messiah, namely
that the Messiah proves his legitimacy by succeeding in all his undertakings. This
could not be done in a supernatural manner, hence no “cosmic signs and miracles, but
by historical success” (Scholem 1971:30). This is the uncensored version of what
Maimonides expected from the Messiah:
If a king arises from the House of David who studies the Torah and pursues the commandments like his ancestor David in accordance with the Written and Oral Law, and he compels all Israel to follow and strengthen it and fights the wars of the Lord – this man enjoys the presumption of being the Messiah. If he proceeds successfully, defeats all the nations surrounding him, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, then he is surely the Messiah. But if he does not succeed to this extent, or is killed, it is evident that he is not the one whom the Torah promised; he is, rather, like all the complete and righteous kings of Israel who have died … (Mishneh Torah: Law of Kings 11:4) (Berger 2008:152).

Maimonides did not deny the traditions and prophecies about the calamitous End of Days, but chose to do without them and put them to the side instead, as “sealed enigmas which will be disclosed only in the events themselves and which allow of no anticipation” (Scholem 1971:32). This meant that for Maimonides, the messianic age’s important features were all restorative features, while he rejected all the features that leant towards the utopian (Scholem 1971:30). Consequently, Maimonides perceived the messianic age as “restorative and as a public event realized in the community. It is not to be confused with the conception of salvation of each individual soul, which has nothing to do with the Messianic and can be achieved without its assistance” (Scholem 1971:31).

It would therefore be correct to say that Maimonides (and his followers)

- were extremely conscious of the inherent dangers that messianic movements contained and that these dangers posed a real threat to traditional religion;
- saw the coming of the Messiah as “a political deliverance of the Jews from the rule of the gentiles, without any upheaval in the order of the world and without any apocalyptic elements” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’);
- opposed all messianic speculation;
- opposed the idea of the apocalyptic tradition, to the extent that Maimonides succeeded in completely suppressing any idea related to the apocalyptic in his work (Scholem 1973:13-14).

There were, however, other medieval philosophers who held different views, such as the 12th century rationalist Abraham bar Hiyya, whose work the “Scroll of the Revealer” displays neo-platonic traits, and who endeavoured to use astrology to calculate the date of the Messiah’s coming (Scholem 1971:32; EJ 1971, s.v.
‘Messiah’). There is also the work of two great classical writers on the topic of messianism, whose views on the apocalyptic do not agree with Maimonides. They are Don Isaac Abravnel, who wrote soon after the Jews’ expulsion from Spain at the end of the 15th century, and Rabbi Lowe of Prague, who wrote at the end of the 16th century. Scholem explains that their personal experience of persecution and anguish made it very difficult for them to skirt the “apocalyptic tradition and its message of catastrophe” (1973:14). The writings of these two men are noted here as they not only influenced later Jewish thinking, but their work had a direct influence on the thinking of Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian movement.

2.6.3.3 The concept of the Few Righteous Men and the Messianic secret

It was also during the Middle Ages that the idea that there are a few righteous people in each generation who know the date of the Messiah’s arrival, but that they have to keep it secret, arose. This idea originated amongst the Askenazi Hassidim of the 12th and 13th century (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’). It is said that one of their teachers, Judah he-Hassid knew when the Messiah would come, but that he died before he could tell his followers. Tradition maintains that Judah was the source of this idea, which he wrote down in his (highly esoteric) work, and that he had included himself as one of the few who knew when the Messiah would come (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.6.3.4 The shift from medieval rationalism to the Zohar and kabbalistic beliefs

During the 13th century, after the publication of the Zohar, messianic beliefs and conjecture began to move away from the domain of the medieval Jewish philosophers and teachers and turn instead towards kabbalistic ideas and teachings, such as those contained in the Zohar. This development saw the rise of the most important

---

109 Kabbalism can be described as “a way of mystical knowledge dedicated to understanding and harnessing the awesome forces unleashed at the time of creation” (Silberman 1998:1). Scholem explains that the early kabbalists ‘drew on old gnostic traditions and on philosophical ideas that lent themselves to a mystical and symbolic view of the world. These ideas, together with the inner experiences of contemplative mystics for whom “adhesion” or “cleaving” to God (debequth) was the final goal on the ladder of spiritual ascent, shaped contemplative kabbalism with its twofold aim of grasping the mysteries of the Godhead and of the Torah, on the one hand, and of teaching elect souls the way of total debequth, on the other. The kabbalists were conservative and shared the hopes and views of traditional religion (Scholem 1973:15).

110 The Zohar, also known as the “Book of Splendor”, is recognised as a collection of many earlier sources that were finally combined and extended by Castilian kabbalists in Spain in the 13th century, during the reign of King Alfonso X. Silberman notes that Scholem has recognised Rabbi Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon as the possible author of the Zohar that we have today (Silberman 1998:86,88,90).
kabbalistic messianic movement in Judaism, namely Sabbatianism, and the rise of its Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.6.4 Modern Jewish Thinking: Messiahs, messianism and the end of days

*I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may tarry I await him each day, hoping that he will come (Maimonides).

2.6.4.1 The Cornerstone of Jewish faith

Maimonides’ 13 Principles of Faith (aka as the 13 Principles of Judaism) provide an accurate and concise summary of the core beliefs of Orthodox Judaism:

1. I believe with perfect faith that God is the creator and ruler of all things. He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.

2. I believe with perfect faith that God is One. There is no unity that is in any way like he is. He alone is our God. He was, He is, and He will be.

3. I believe with perfect faith that God does not have a body. Physical concepts do not apply to him.

4. I believe with perfect faith that God is first and last.

5. I believe with perfect faith that it is only proper to pray to God. One may not pray to anyone or anything else.

6. I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.

7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses is absolutely true.

8. I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that we now have is that which was given to Moses.

9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be another given by God.

10. I believe with perfect faith that God knows all of man’s deeds and thoughts. It is thus written (Psalm 33.15), “He has molded every heart together, He understands what each one does.”

11. I believe with perfect faith that God rewards those who keep his commandments, and punishes those who transgress him.

12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. How long it takes, I will await his coming every day.

13. I believe with perfect faith that the dead will be brought back to life when God wills it to happen.\[111\]

Berger notes how this 12th principle of Judaism by Maimonides, has been both a cornerstone of faith and a source of consolation for Jews, as well as serving, in Christian countries, as the central affirmation of resistance to a belief in the

\[111\] Accessed online on the 10th Feb 2009, at http://judaism.about.com/od/orthodoxjudaism/a/orthodox.htm?nl=1)
messiahship of Jesus (2008:18). It would also be correct to say, as Berger points out, that the Jews through the ages have continued to believe in the Messiah, but that “the precise contours of that faith have remained exceptionally fluid” (2008:19). Nevertheless, there has been unanimous consent that the true Jewish messiah has not come as

- the Messiah will be known, as he will fulfil all the prophecies of the end of the day, in the sense that there will be, what Berger defines as, a visible global redemption;
- most importantly, the Messiah does not die (Berger 2008:151).

2.6.4.2 Modern Orthodox Jewish tradition and the messianic ideal

Within the modern Orthodox Jewish tradition, the messianic era is primarily perceived as a period in which all the Jews are finally brought together in Israel, through a process known as the “Ingathering of Exiles”. Once in Israel, they will all be able to fulfil the religious obligations by observing all the mitzvot (613 in total), especially those that are linked to the land of Israel (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

The Orthodox belief essentially adheres to traditional messianic beliefs and ideas. For them, the Messiah

- will be a descendant from the House of David;
- will reign in Jerusalem;
- will rebuild the Temple;
- will reinstitute the sacrificial system (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.6.4.3 Orthodoxy, Zionism and the messianic ideal

Berger (2008:22) describes Zionism as a form of atypical messianism, in that religious Zionism’s affirmation of a soon-to-be messianic era still does not possess an identifiable Messiah. Nevertheless, he does concede that when Zionism is viewed in its “more extreme manifestations”, then it can certainly be regarded as a “genuine messianic movement” (2008:22).
Berger’s understanding of Zionism as a form of messianism would also serve to explain why most Orthodox rabbis initially opposed Zionism as it seemed “to substitute a purely human redemption for the redeemer sent by God” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’). However, with the establishment of the State of Israel, the mainline Orthodox view shifted and stated instead that the events that led to the state of Israel are to be seen as athalta-geulla, i.e., the beginning of redemption in the sense that “the foundations laid by humans, under God’s guidance, [are] ready to receive the building to be erected by God’s direct act” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

There is also a large amount of speculation on the exact meaning of current day events within the framework of messianic hope. This has prompted scholars like M. Kasher to take the lines from Isaiah 24:23: “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun shamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His elders shall be his glory” and interpret them as a prophetic vision in which the moon landings coincide with the establishment of the State of Israel. It has also enabled Rabbi A. I. Kook to put forward his argument that the Jewish people have to be “spiritual” for this world, hence the way to prepare for the coming of the Messiah was to establish the State of Israel, based on the fundamental Jewish principles of justice and compassion. Kook also accepted the theory of evolution within a moral context, in the sense that it bore testimony of the “movement of the whole of creation towards its ultimate fulfilment, as in the messianic hope” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

Hertzberg explains that not only did Rabbi Kook see the entire Zionist endeavour, including the atheist kibbutzniks who resettled the biblical land, as a sign that the Messiah was ready to come, but he even went as far as setting up a school in Jerusalem to train priests and other officials to work in the soon-to-be rebuilt Third Temple (1999:10). Sadly, the more secular ideologies and democratic principles of Rabbi Kook’s messianic hopes are not part of the messianic hopes and expectations of militant Zionist Rabbi Zvi Yehudah, the son of Rabbi Kook. Zvi Yehudah believed that he had witnessed a miracle when Israel captured Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria in six days, and to prevent the return of any of this land to Arab rule, he encouraged the establishment of the settler movement, Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful). The members of Gush Emunim believe that any Israeli government official “who makes a move towards a compromise on the territories is transgressing a divine commandment”. In their view, the Messiah’s coming requires Jewish possession of all
biblical lands promised to our ancestors which Hertzberg points out was the theological justification invoked in 1995 by Yigal Amir as his religious defence and justification for the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin (Hertzberg 1999:10).

2.6.4.4 Reform (Progressive) Judaism and the messianic ideal

The Reform movement reinterpreted the principles of the Jewish messianic ideal twice, once in 1885 and again in 1937. The Reform movement’s current messianic ideals are based on the Reform rabbis’ statement put forward at the 1937 Pittsburgh Platform, in Columbus Ohio. It stated that

[i]n all lands where our people live, they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven or refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life. Throughout the ages it has been Israel’s mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to co-operate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our messianic goal (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

In this way, the movement transformed its messianic ideal to basically encompass the aiding and building of the Jewish homeland, namely the State of Israel, and to work together with all men in the establishment of the Kingdom of God (here on earth), the attainment of universal brotherhood, truth, justice and peace on earth (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.6.4.5 The Conservative (Masorti) Movement and the messianic ideal

The conservative movement has also transformed the traditional belief in a messiah into a belief in a messianic period instead. This period will be set apart by a state of universal peace, social justice, the end of illness and disease and as well as all types of evil. This redemption of the world will not be the result of any supernatural force, as it will be redeemed by the effort of all good men and women. Seen within a socio-historical context, it has remained the constant age-old task of the Jews, to always strive to bring about the coming of the messianic age. This idea is expressed in Isaiah 2:2-4, in Micah 4:1-6, and in the Alenu prayer. This emphasis on the Jews’ constant responsibility to work towards the messianic age, in both the Reform and Conservative
movements, is also perceived as highlighting the social relevance of their messianic idea within the framework of modern Judaism (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.6.4.6 The Reconstructionists and the messianic ideal

This movement rejected the concept of a personal Messiah and deleted all references to the messiah from their prayer books.

2.6.4.7 Modern Jewish thinkers and the messianic ideal

There are still many modern Jewish thinkers who keep returning to the traditional messianic idea and add their interpretation to the concept. For example, in 1956 Mordechai Kaplan observed that “We can no longer believe that any person or semi-divine being, [who] is divinely destined to rule as the Messiah and usher in the millennium. Nevertheless, the idea of the Messiah can still figure symbolically to express the valid belief in the coming of a higher type of man than this world has yet known” (EJ 1971, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

It is also interesting to note that Martin Buber attributes the Jews extensive involvement in modern revolutionary movements to the strong force of messianism in Jewish belief and culture (Wigdor 1989, s.v. ‘Messiah’).

2.7 SUMMARY

The above examination of Jewish messiahs, messianism and apocalyptism indicates that the Jewish rabbis, sages and scholars across the centuries agree that if the Messiah does not meet and fulfil the criteria and descriptions of the Messiah in the Bible, then he has not come. “In adversity and joy, through holocaust and statehood, Jews faithful to the Torah and the prophets can only repeat the words of their forefathers: ‘I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may tarry I shall wait for him every day, hoping that he will come’” (Berger 2008:158).

Many Jews believed this until the mid 1980s, when Rebbe Schneerson of the Chabad/Lubavitchers began to say otherwise.
CHAPTER 3: JEWISH MESSIAHS AND MESSIANIC MOVEMENTS THAT SURVIVED THE DEATH OF THEIR MESSIAHS: PAST AND PRESENT

The Messiah will come and the world will be redeemed. This vision of glorious “end of days” is the most inspiring – and the most dangerous – of all Jewish doctrines (Hertzberg 1999:10).

While Cohen (1965:206) rightly notes that messiahs are a Jewish statistic, Berger points out that many Jewish messiahs did indeed come and go, that most were not recorded and that they were soon forgotten, primarily because they all failed, including the militant Bar Kochba in the 2nd century BCE, whose messiahship was endorsed by Rabbi Akiva himself. The exceptions are, of course, the Jewish messiahs whose messianic movements continued to survive once their messiahs had died. They are: Jesus Christ from the 1st century CE who gave rise to Christianity, Sabbatai Sevi, from the 17th century whose followers, the Sabbatians, still live in modern-day Turkey, and the recently deceased Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson from present-day Chabad whose movement continues to flourish in the wake of its messiah’s death (Berger 2008:20-21).

The overview looks at the highly successful, charismatic, Jewish messiah Sabbatai Sevi, his devoted prophet Nathan, who formulated the majority of the Sabbatians’ theology, and at Sabbatai’s enormous number of followers from Israel, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, who were known as the Sabbatians. It draws attention to the Sabbatians’ messianic beliefs, particularly the Sabbatians’ emphasis on “Faith” as the supreme religious value, as opposed to “The Law” to obtain salvation and eternal life. This belief resembles Christianity as does the manner in which Sabbatai’s followers deified him before his death. This overview notes the extremely rapid spread and significant wide embrace of Sabbatianism prior to Sabbatai’s apostasy, after his apostasy and immediately after his death. It also looks at the belief and conduct of the Sabbatians (which often bordered on the outrageous and bizarre), during Sabbatai’s lifetime, which is difficult to comprehend, let alone believe, if it were not for the fact that the belief and conduct of Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian movement were well documented by numerous and reliable sources both during Sabbatai’s lifetime and after his death.
The overview of Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian movement is done to see whether there are similarities between the beliefs and conduct of Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson, and that of their followers, especially during their respective messiahs’ lifetimes and the period immediately afterwards, that can be used to support the first proposal of the thesis, namely that we could be witnessing the emergence of a new messianic-based religious belief system from within the fold of Judaism, which is akin, but not identical, to Christianity. The thesis will examine this information to see what it can reveal about Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson’s messiah templates that can be linked to, and used to support, Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis.

This chapter then proceeds to look at the third and most recent successful Jewish messiah, Rebbe Schneerson, and at his pro-messianic followers from Chabad who continue to flourish and increase on a daily basis, while they publicly affirm their belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship, despite his death in 1994 (Berger 2008:21). The overview of the Rebbe’s messianic beliefs and his often problematical conduct, as well as that of his followers who followed him during his lifetime, and the belief and seemingly unorthodox conduct of his followers in the past fifteen years since his death, is done to ascertain whether there is enough evidence to support the thesis’ first key proposal, namely that

- we could be witnessing the emergence of a new messianic-based religious belief system from within the fold of Judaism, which is akin, but not identical, to Christianity;
- this new messianic-based religious system is (in the process of) arising from the Jewish Hassidic sect of the Chabad/Lubavitchers;
- the Chabad/Lubavitchers messianic ideas and beliefs not only resemble Sabbatianism, but practically mirror those of Christianity, which is why Chabad is steadily moving further away from the fundamental beliefs of Traditional Rabbinic Judaism.

This chapter also notes the manner in which the Rebbe and Chabad’s messianic legacy and current messianic beliefs shaped Chabad’s indifferent response to the plight of fellow Ethiopian Jewry. The chapter also compares Chabad’s benevolent belief and attitude towards Christians and all gentiles and their fate at the “End of Days” to the
harsh and uncompromising Christian Evangelicals’ belief about, and attitude towards, the Jews’ fate as described in the evangelical rapture and tribulation apocalypse.

3.1 SABBATAI SEVI AND THE SABBATIAN MOVEMENT

The Sabbatian messianic movement began in Gaza in Palestine in 1665, and spread rapidly throughout the Diaspora. By 1666, scores of Jews were caught up in the messianic surge and many were convinced that the Jewish messiah had finally arrived in the form of a young man called Sabbatai Sevi (Sharot 1982:86). In his seminal work, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (1973.ix, xi), Gershom Scholem points out that the Sabbatian movement was the most important messianic movement in Judaism since the period of intense messianic fervour that preceded the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE. He adds that the catastrophic Sabbatian messianic episode “revealed the deep, dangerous, and destructive dialectics inherent in the messianic idea” and that the Jewish community (both within Palestine and in the Diaspora), paid dearly for their misguided messianic belief in the charismatic Sabbatai Sevi (Scholem 1973:xii). Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow and Max Dimont concur with Scholem. Graetz describes Sabbatai as one who became “the idol of the Jewish race” (1945:118). Dubnow describes the Sabbatian messianic movement as “the mightiest movement since the time of Bar Kokhba” and notes that it not only shook the entire Jewish world, but that it “left deep traces in the history of the people” (1971:51). Dimont describes the movement as a “collective messiah mania that swept the Diaspora” (1971:227).

Scholem draws attention to the rabbis’ attempt to suppress all knowledge of Sabbatai Sevi and his extensive messianic debacle. He concedes that the rabbis’ need to suppress the Sabbatian incident can be understood as their desire to stifle any further messianic pretensions and subsequent schisms and disruption within Judaism. It is, however, the manner in which the majority of historians and scholars have also chosen, and continue to choose, to marginalise and down-play the full impact of the Sabbatian messianic movement and to misrepresent its meaning, which Scholem finds most perplexing (1973:xi). The thesis agrees with Scholem and would like to note that

---

112 See Scholem (1973:763) for the description of the Egyptian and Italian rabbis who were in the forefront of the large-scale move to suppress all records and documents relating to Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian movement.
it would therefore be correct to argue that both the rabbis’, the scholars’ and historians’ attitude towards Sabbatai Sevi are responsible for the fact that Sabbatai Sevi and the Sabbatian messianic episode has remained fairly unknown, both within and outside of Jewish circles.

3.1.1 The Sabbatian Movement

3.1.1.1 The Sabbatian movement stands apart

Prior to the Sabbatian movement, reports of failed Jewish messiahs had circulated but these messiahs had come and gone and very little was written down or recalled soon thereafter. The Sabbatian messianic movement was, however, unlike previous messianic incidents in that

- the Sabbatian movement was not confined to a certain geographical area with a small following, as this movement had managed to capture the attention and imagination of the more than a third of all the Jews in the world in this period (Scholem 1973:2; Dimont 1971:227);

- Sabbatianism originally rose to prominence in Palestine\(^{113}\), prior to 1648, and spread to Poland and the rest of the Jewish Diaspora, before the disaster of the Chmielnicki massacre of 1648\(^{114}\) that befell the Jews in Poland\(^{115}\) (and subsequent events and massacres that continued until 1655) which contradicts the prevailing belief that messianic movements are primarily the result of terrible consequences alone (Scholem 1973:2-3);

- the movement continued to survive for many generations, firstly after Sabbatai’s apostasy and betrayal of the movement (Sevi converted to Islam),

---

\(^{113}\) Scholem notes that the beginning of the Sabbatian movement can be formally dated to May 31, 1665, in Palestine (1973:222).

\(^{114}\) The Chmielnicki incident led by the fearsome Ukrainian hero Bogdan Chmielnicki began as a Cossack rebellion in the Ukraine and spilt over into Poland (Cantor 1994:184).

\(^{115}\) Cantor notes that the Jews’ oppressive treatment and the subsequent degradation of the Ukrainian peasants was the key catalyst of the Chmielnicki uprising and pogroms, which lead to the deaths of thousands of Jews (in Poland and the Ukraine), the mass destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues and the demise of many of their communities (1994:184-185). These pogroms broke the back of Polish Jewry who never regained their security, their self-confidence and their prosperity again. This incident was responsible for the cessation of Poland’s agricultural expansion and triggered the subsequent demise and implosion of the state. “The Jews,” Cantor points out “would sink with their Polish masters” (1994:185).
and then after his death till the present day (Scholem 1973:2-3). The small, present-day group of Sabbatians (also known as the Dönmes, a derogatory term meaning Crypto-Jews), prefer to refer to themselves as Salonikans and live mainly in Turkey, and they are the last living descendants of Sabbatai Sevi’s followers who “converted” to Islam when Sabbatai did;

- the Sabbatian movement was embraced by Jews from all classes from both prosperous and poverty-stricken areas, by the elite and the non-elite, by the free as well as the oppressed and the persecuted, and by rabbis and sages. This widespread embrace of Sabbatianism clearly indicates that the movement’s messianic roots and popular appeal went far deeper than mere economic and social contextual-based factors (Scholem 1973:3-5; Dimont 1971:227).

3.1.1.2 Sabbatianism and Lurianic Kabbalism

Although Scholem identifies a religious factor, messianic-centred, Lurianic Kabbalism, as the Sabbatians’ main source and inspiration, he does concede that

116 “The Dönme are the descendants of a small group of people who emulating Sabatay Sevi, converted to Islam. Some will argue, amongst them members of modern-day Dönme communities in Turkey, that they had been forced to convert to Islam like their leader had and the theological conviction in support of conviction only developed only afterwards. The term ‘Dönme’ is Turkish for an insincere conversion to Islam – apostate. The Dönme community combined many Jewish practices in private while demonstrating Islamic practices in public” (M. Avrum Ehrlich. Quote from ‘Sabbatean Messianism as Proto-Secularism’. Article accessed online on the 14th March 2009 at http://www.avrumehrlich.net/pdfarticles/sabbateanisasprotosecularism.pdf.

“Donme (convert; also apostate, a pejorative term) was the common appellation used by Muslim Turks to designate the Jewish adherents of Sabbatai Tsevi who embraced Islam in the last third of the seventeenth century, imitating their prophet’s conversion in Istanbul in 1666, and their descendants. The Dönmes themselves preferred to be called ma’amím (‘believers’ in Hebrew), indicating the conviction that they had inaugurated a new sect within Judaism that reinterpreted messianic Judaism, at the same time insisting on strictly Muslim behavior in public.” (Jacob Landau March 2007. Quote from ‘The Dönmes: Crypto-Jews under Turkish Rule’ in The Jewish Political Studies Review. 19:1-2 (Spring 2007). Jerusalem Center Projects and On-Line Publications. Accessed online 10 Feb 2009 at: http://www.jcpa.org/ICPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DBID=1&TMDID=111&LNGID=1&FID=388&PID=0&IID=1669

117 Kabbala is primarily a body of mystical teachings of rabbinic origin, mainly based on an esoteric interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures. Lurianic kabbalism is a specific form of kabbalism that arose and developed in Safed, in the Galilee, in the 16th century and dominated Jewish religiosity in the 17th century (Scholem 1973:7). Lurianic kabbalism takes its name from the esteemed rabbi and Jewish mystic, Isaac Luria and his school of disciples who helped to compile his oral teachings into writings. Lurianic thought replaced the medieval Jewish philosophy “Hakira” and it has superseded the more
religious factors are not “isolated entities” that operate in a vacuum as they are directly related to social issues (1973:7). Nevertheless, the messianic-focused nature of Lurianic Kabbalism, and its popularity amongst the Jewish populous in the mid-1600s was such that it is responsible for establishing a specific spiritual framework within the political and social context of that period. This spiritual framework enabled the rise of Sabbatian messianism, and allowed Sabbatianism to flourish and become a driving historical force in Israel, and in the rest of the Jewish Diaspora (Scholem 1973:7).

Graetz elucidates further by explaining that Sabbatai Sevi was, as a very young man, already an avid student of Lurianic Kabbalah (also known as Later Kabbalah), which he mastered at a very early age. Later Lurianic Kabbalah is primarily based on the interpretations and teachings of Isaac Luria (1534-1572), and Chaim Vital (1543-1640). The central point of Luria and Vital’s work is its focus on the belief that the arrival of the Messiah is imminent. It is this belief that spurred Luria and Vital’s disciples and followers to publicly declare that “The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand” (Graetz 1945:120). Later Lurianic Kabbalah is filled with dazzling mysticism and magic and Graetz notes that Sabbatai Sevi’s deep immersion in kabbalah, and his belief in the power of the kabbalah’s magic mysticism, would appear to underlay Sabbatai’s misplaced belief that he was truly the Messiah who would usher in the age of redemption in 1648, as stated in the Zohar (also known as the “Book of Splendour” which is a large series of books that are regarded as the most authoritative kabbalistic work) (Graetz 1895:121).

Ehrlich (2001:18) also draws attention to the power of Lurianic Kabbalah, which he too, along with Scholem, posits as the key factor that underlay the success of the Sabbatian movement (even after Sabbatai’s death). He, however, links the Sabbatian movement’s success to the fact that Lurianic Kabbalah was basically a new and vibrant religious system that was literally waiting for its own personal messiah, which was precisely the role that Sabbatai portrayed so well. Ehrlich explains that the appeal of Lurianic Kabbalah was that it presented to the Jewish world the image of Jewish suffering and redemption in a different light to what was previously taught by the strict worldview of the rabbis and halakhism. Kabbalistic interpretation allowed for great scope, rational Cordoveran kabbalah of Moshe Cordovero of Safed, to become the mystical dimension of most Orthodox Jewish theology up to the present day.
its commentary on religious texts was entirely re-interpretive, it presumed an active role in the dynamics of God which made human activity holy in itself. It recognized an essential unity of all things in the infinity of God that enabled a tolerance for superficial differences in the material world (Ehrlich 2001:18-19).

3.1.1.3 Events, social protest and the Sabbatian movement

The 1648 Massacres and the kabbalah

Sharot draws attention to social aspects of the period by noting the link between the 1648 massacres in Poland, and the Jews’ passionate belief in Lurianic Kabbalah and the Polish Jews’ extensive embrace of the Sabbatian movement. Sharot points to Weinryb’s calculations (drawn from Weinryb’s work, The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800 (1972)) of the 1648 massacres to clarify this connection. Weinryb’s statistics reveal that approximately forty to fifty thousand Jewish people in Poland (± 20-25% of the total Polish Jewish populace) died in the 1648 massacres (Sharot 1982:93). Yet, despite the catastrophic effect of the massacres, Sharot notes that the survivors of the massacres chose to view these massacres as “part of the birth pains of the messiah”. The survivors’ belief that these massacres were the birth pains of the coming messiah and their subsequent and enthusiastic embrace of Sabbatianism was therefore the result of the Polish Jews’ belief in Lurianic Kabbalism. This belief was compounded by a kabbalist prediction (taken from Zohar118) which stated that the Jewish messiah would come in 1648 (Sharot 1982:93). Sharot does, however, concede that Scholem is correct when he observes that the massacres in Poland cannot explain the appeal and success of the Sabbatian movement in Jewish communities in North African countries such as Morocco (Sharot 1982:93). But Graetz draws attention to, and notes, the harsh oppression of the Jews in North Africa, especially in Morocco, during Sabbatai’s lifetime which is recognised as a classic catalyst for kindling belief in a messiah such as Sabbatai Sevi (1945:168).

Social and political protest

118 The Zohar is the major book of the Kabbala and its authorship is traditionally attributed to a second century scholar, Shimon Bar Yohai. Modern academics tend to disagree, and argue that the Zohar was written by Moshe Deleon of 13th century Spain (Ehrlich 2000).
Sharot also notes that the eager and widespread embrace of Sabbatianism by poor Jews formed a significant aspect of the poor and disenfranchised Jewry’s social protest against the more elite and prosperous upper stratum of Jewish society. Yet Sharot concedes that the movement did have many well-to-do supporters from affluent cities such as Amsterdam and Leghorn as well. Cantor explains that the supporters from the affluent group can be divided into two groups, those who lacked status despite their newly acquired wealth, and those who were wealthy but who lacked the essential prerequisites of education and literacy to gain entrée into elite Jewish circles, especially those connected to politics and power (Cantor 1994:210). Consequently, even if the Sabbatian movement was not the sole expression of an oppressed class within Jewish community at large, it can still be viewed as the pre-political response of the politically powerless against the political oppression of the entire Jewish community (Sharot 1982:94-95).

Sharot notes that Scholem appears to be aware of this possibility as he wrote:

In the peculiar conditions of Jewish existence, messianism was the expression not so much of internal Jewish struggles – class or otherwise – as of the abnormal situation of a pariah nation. The sense of insecurity and permanent danger to life and property, affected the upper classes no less than the lower; in fact the former often had more to fear” (Sharot 1982:95).

Scholem’s observation would therefore indicate that the Sabbatian movement did contain elements of a political nature, most notably amongst Sabbatai’s poor and powerless followers, who placed great value on the coming of the End of Days with its promise of a calamitous period during which the gentile persecutors of the Jews would be suitably punished (Sharot 1982:95).

The broad appeal and rapid rise of Lurianic Kabbalah, with its longing and need for a Jewish messiah, and the majority of Jews’ (both in Israel and the Diaspora) subsequent embrace of both Lurianic Kabbalah, and Sabbatai Sevi as the Jewish messiah, can therefore be understood, once more, as the Jews’ conventional (as well as what they perceived as their most feasible), religious based, messiah response to the traumatic social and political changes, and oppression, outright persecution and disenfranchisement that was experienced by Diaspora Jews in the mid 1600s, particularly in Eastern Europe (Cantor 1994:212). Cantor elucidates further when he explains that any act of rebellion requires moral legitimation and that the pious Jewish community, which was imbued in messianic-centred Lurainic Kabbalah, found that
sense of legitimation for their rebellion from the messianic, apocalyptic and millennial claims and promises made by Sabbatai. This is also the reason why so many respectable Jewish rabbis and leaders of Jewish society, throughout the Diaspora and Israel, were drawn to and became part of, the Sabbatian messianic episode (Cantor 1994:212). The thesis would therefore like to note that:

- the widespread popularity and belief in messianic-focused Lurianic Kabbalah amongst the Jews of the Diaspora and Israel in the mid 1600s, strongly resembles the expectation of messianic redemption that existed amongst the oppressed and marginalised Jews under Rome, during the time of Jesus (Shermer 2000:211; Mack 2001: 111);

- the social and political conditions that underlie the Jews’ response (i.e., their religious-derived messiah (myth) based response) to Sabbatai, in the mid 1600s, are similar to those that were experienced by the Jews under Rome in the first century CE as described by Mack (2001: 104-109). The thesis would, however, like to clarify that the term “similar” used in this context, that is, to compare the social and political contexts of two seemingly different, albeit troubled, periods in history, separated by many centuries, is to be understood as “similar” in the manner described by Shermer below:

  History is an exquisite blend of the specific and general, the unique and the universal. The past is neither one damn thing after another (Heraclitus river), nor is it the same damn thing over and over (Spengler’s life cycles). Rather, it is a series of generally repeating patterns, each one of which retains a unique structure and set of circumstances. History is uniquely cyclical. Wars and battles, witch crazes and social movements, holocausts and genocides, all recycle through history with remarkable periodicity. The reason is that while there are an infinite number of combinations of specific details, there are a limited number of general rules that channel those details into similar grooves. Every historical event is unique, but not randomly so. They are all restricted by the parameters of the system. Such events recycle because the conditions of these parameters periodically come together in parallel fashion. [Hence,] when social conditions include oppression of people, there is a good chance that the response will be the belief in a rescuing messiah delivering redemption (Shermer 2000:190).

When the term “similar” is thus used, it is therefore to be understood within Shermer’s perceptual framework. This allows the thesis to state that the social conditions and catalysts noted and discussed by Mack (2001:104-109), are akin and therefore similar (but not identical) to those listed by Scholem, Sharot, Dubnow and Ehrlich. And, that these “similar” factors would therefore trigger the same type of response, namely, the
belief in a rescuing messiah who delivers salvation and redemption. The same understanding of the term “similar” (as defined by Shermer) also applies when speaking of how “similar” the present day social conditions and catalysts are for the emergence of Chabad’s messiah, Rebbe Schneerson and his pro-messianist followers, as the conditions and catalysts were for the other two Jewish messiahs, Sabbatai Sevi and Jesus and their early followers.

3.2 SABBATAI SEVI

3.2.1 Sabbatai’s early youth and education

Sabbatai Sevi was born in Smyrna, on the Sabbath (hence his name), in August 1625. He was a dashingly handsome and charismatic young man whose commanding personality, endearing manner, clever oratory and beautiful singing voice helped him to garner many followers and captivate many people (Dubnow 1971:52; Graetz 1945:118; Dimont 1971:227; Cantor 1994:212). Sabbatai had a traditional Jewish education and was recognised as a child prodigy. His exceptional knowledge of Talmud was publicly acknowledged, and he was given the honorific title of hakham (the Sephardi title for rabbi), at the very early age of eighteen (Schölem 1973:110-111). Sabbatai was an extremely well-educated man, but he was not an exceptional scholar and he never produced any original work (Schölem 1973:158).

Sabbatai began to study kabbalah by himself at about the age of eighteen. He only studied the Zohar and Qanah, and is one of the very few and exceptional people who formulated his own special mystical doctrine of the Mystery of the Godhead (Schölem 1973:114-115). Sabbatai was drawn to, and fascinated by, the magical mysticism of kabbalah, especially the magical messianic-focussed teachings of the Safed Kabbalists.

---

119 The term Sephardi refers to the descendents of the Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal during the Middle Ages until persecution culminating in expulsion in 1492 forced them to leave the Iberian Peninsula.

120 The Sephardic Jews, the group to which Sabbatai belonged, never recognised the late rabbinic “prohibition” against the study of kabbalah before the age of forty. The great kabbalist, Rabbi Moses Cordovero (b. 1522), was already on record during Sevi’s lifetime, for saying that the suitable age for starting the study of the Zohar was “when a man reached half the years of understanding.” Given that the Mishna Aboth (v. 240) states that forty is the age of understanding, then “half the years of understanding” would be the age of twenty (Schölem 1973:114). Consequently, the great ban on the study of kabbalah before the age of forty, in 1757, was the direct result of the Sabbatian movement (Schölem 1973:114).
such as Isaac Luria and Chaim Vital, and would occasionally fall into states of ecstasy, when he would see himself as the Messiah (Dubnow 19971:52; Dimont 1971:227).

3.2.2 Sabbatai’s marriages and the onset of his bipolar disorder

Sabbatai married twice within two years (his first wife at twenty), and was divorced by both wives after three days for not consummating his marriages (Graetz 1895:119; Dimont 1971:227; Dubnow 1971:52,53). The community blamed Sabbatai’s preference for an ascetic lifestyle, which included an obsession with ritual purity (he bathed in the sea on a daily basis regardless of the time of day, the season or the climate), a tendency to indulge in long uninterrupted periods of prayer, and his inclination to mortify his body, for Sabbatai’s inability to consummate his marriages (Scholem 1973:124; Graetz 1895:119; Dubnow 1971:52).

Sabbatai eventually married for the third time. His third wife, Sarah, was a promiscuous and unconventional woman, and he likened his marriage to her to that of Hosea to the harlot, claiming that the Lord had also directed him to marry Sarah, and that the marriage was a “Messianic dispensation” (Graetz 1895:129; Dubnow 1971:56). Sabbatai married Sarah in Egypt, on the 31st March, 1664, at the private home of one of his most influential and affluent supporters and followers, Raphael Joseph Chelebi (Graetz 1895:129; Scholem 1973:193). His third marriage was symbolic and lasted longer than his previous marriages (Dimont 1971:227). Sabbatai’s marriage to Sarah marked the beginning of Sabbatai’s public career as messiah and it brought Sabbatai many new followers, although Graetz notes that Sarah’s beauty and unconventional lifestyle drew many men who had more interest in Sarah than in Sabbatai (Graetz 1945:130).

Scholem notes that Sabbatai’s behaviour, after his first two marriages, reveals the first symptoms of his mental illness, a form of maniac-depressive psychosis, or what today would be diagnosed as a bipolar disorder121 (Scholem 1973:124-124). This illness develops with puberty, usually between the ages of 15 and 25 and then grows progressively worse over time. The initial manifestation is followed by unpredictable and radical mood swing episodes that consist of a manically “up”/high phase, which is

---

121 The current medical consensus is that bipolar disorder has multiple causes that include genetics, the environment and the human brain. Refer to ‘Everyday Health, Bipolar Disorder Centre’ at: http://www.everydayhealth.com/bipolar-disorder/causes-of-bipolar-disorder.aspx
then followed by a “down”/sad/irritable/hopeless or depressed phase (Scholem 1973:126).

Sabbatai’s first manic “up” episode occurred before his 20th birthday. Sabbatai would often quote Isaiah 14:14: “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most high”, and believed that he could literally “fly” or levitate himself during his manic “up” episodes (Scholem 1973:127). After a few manic “up” episodes, Sabbatai told his followers at Smyrna, that great things were expected from him, and that he was indeed the awaited Messiah, son of David (Scholem 1973:127). Sabbatai’s followers referred to the two phases of his disorder as “divine dispensations”, and described his “up” phase as a period of “illumination,” and his depressed phase as the “hiding of the face” (Scholem 1973:130). Sabbatai’s main proponent, Nathan, drew parallels between

- Sabbatai’s suffering (particularly during his “down” phase) and that of the Jewish nation, in the sense that Sabbatai is described as suffering on behalf of the entire Jewish nation;
- Sabbatai’s suffering and Job’s122 suffering (Nathan saw Job as the prototype of the messianic king), linking Sabbatai’s anguish123 with descriptions that he found in the text of the kabbalah (Scholem 1973:130).

Sabbatai does not appear to have known that he was suffering from a mental illness, as he perceived his condition as being the equivalent of a religious revelation. Although Sabbatai never exhibited any strange conduct between his manic episodes, his behaviour during his “up” phases became so outrageous and contentious that certain

---

122 For Nathan’s typological allegory of Job as a symbol of the messiah, see Scholem (1973:309).
123 The text (written by Nathan) that links Sabbatai’s anguish to Job, reads as follows:

We have described all these matters in order to proclaim the Greatness of our Lord (note that this designation was a standard Sabbatian designation for the messiah Sabbatai Sevi (Scholem 1973: 131)), may his majesty be exalted, how he annihilated the power of the serpent, whose roots are deep and mighty, and who always tempted him. And as he labored to extract great holiness from among the qeliphoth, they would attach themselves to him whenever his illumination (note that the term “illumination” (ha’arah) was not invented by Nathan. The term occurs in early kabbala texts such as the “Seder Na’eh” of the 17th century (Scholem 1973:131)), was taken away, and then they would show him that they too had dominion … But when the illumination came over him, he again conquered him [the great dragon] … For I have already explained that Scripture calls him [the messiah] Job, because he had sunk deep into the qeliphoth in the days of darkness which are the days of his anguish. But when the illumination came over him, in the days of calm and rejoicing … then he was in a state of which it is said [of Job] “and eschewed evil”; for then he emerged from the realm of the qeliphoth where he had sunk in the days of darkness (Scholem 1973:131).
people called him a “fool” (Scholem 1973:137). This did not upset Sabbatai, who retaliated by turning this term into a title of honour (Scholem 1973:138). Yet, despite the outlandish nature of Sabbatai’s conduct during his “up” phase, his manic “up” phases were still perceived by his followers as being “indicative of some special exalted condition of the soul” (Scholem 1973:147).

3.2.3 Sabbatai’s followers see him as a Suffering Messiah

Sabbatai’s first attempt (in 1650) to reveal himself as the messiah to family and friends, was an unsuccessful non-event that upset the rabbis and triggered shocked gossip in the community (Scholem 1973:140,143). This response did not distress Sabbatai whose conduct continued to grow more bizarre during his “up” phases, while his conduct between his manic phases was exemplary, as he would then live piously, take regular ritual baths, fast often and study the Law (Scholem 1973:147). Sabbatai rationalised his strange and antinomian conduct (during his manic phases) and perceived his “up” phase as holy “mystical improvisations”, which he could neither fully understand or explain (Scholem 1973:147). Sabbatai’s followers also perceived and understood the anguish and suffering that Sabbatai experienced during his “down” phase, as “a mysterious passion in which the suffering messiah atoned for his own sins or for those of Israel” (Scholem 1973:148).

3.3 THE PROPHET, NATHAN OF GAZA, AND SABBATAI

3.3.1 Nathan of Gaza, Sabbatai’s main proponent

Nathan ben Elisha Hayyim Askenazi, also known as Nathan, the prophet of Gaza, or Nathan of Gaza, was born in Jerusalem in 1664, the son of European Jewish parents. He was a brilliant young man, whose work revealed a remarkable blend of “intellectual power and a capacity for profound thinking with imagination and strong emotional sensitivity” (Scholem 1973: 199-201).

Nathan began to study kabbalah at the age of twenty (Scholem 1973: 203), and the written account of Nathan’s prophetic awakening, triggered by kabbalah, is a document124 that functions as an introduction to an extensive mystical essay on the

---

124 The document reads as follows:
subject of the messiah and the mystical necessity for his apostasy, and is regarded by Scholem as “a precious document humain” (1973:203,204). Although Nathan, unlike Sabbatai, was mentally stable, he also experienced many ecstatic visions that finally culminated in a vision that recognised Sabbatai as a messiah. This occurred between February and March in 1665 and in this vision Nathan suddenly saw

the image of Sabbatai Sevi engraved on the merkabah, even as the image of the patriarch Jacob was engraved, according to a well-known rabbinic legend, on the Throne of Glory, and his mouth uttered the prophecy: “Thus saith the Lord, behold your saviour cometh, Sabbatai Sevi is his name. He shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies (Scholem 1973:206).

3.3.2 Nathan persuades Sabbatai that he is the messiah

In 1665, Sabbatai heard that Nathan had the ability to prescribe the appropriate tiqqun (i.e., to heal, repair or cure) for a person’s troubled soul, and decided to consult Nathan to heal his soul. To Sabbatai’s surprise, Nathan told him that his soul did not need tiqqun as Sabbatai’s soul was already of a high order due to the fact that Sabbatai was the messiah! (Scholem 1973:213,214,215) Nathan made this announcement in front of

These things [I write] to make known unto you in faithfulness the certainty of the words of truth, the great cause and reason of the tidings which I have announced to the assembly of the congregation of Israel concerning our deliverance and the redemption of our souls. Whosoever knoweth me can testify that from my childhood unto this day not the slightest fault [of sin] could be found within me. I have observed the Law in poverty, and meditated on it day and night. I never followed after the lusts of flesh, but always added new mortifications and forms of penance with all my strength, nor did I ever derive any worldly benefits from my message. Praise be to God that there are many faithful witnesses to testify to this and to much more. I studied the Torah in purity until I was twenty years of age, and I performed the great tiqqun which Isaac Luria prescribes for everyone who has committed great sins. Although, praise be to God, I have not advertently committed any sins, nevertheless I performed it in case my soul be sullied from an earlier transmigration. When I attained the age of twenty, I began to study the book Zohar and some of the Lurianic writings. [According to the Talmud] he who wants to purify himself receives the aid of heaven; and thus He sent me some of His holy angels and blessed spirits who revealed to me many of the mysteries of the Torah. In that same year, my force having been stimulated by the visions of the angels and the blessed souls, I was undergoing a prolonged fast in the week before Purim. Having locked myself in a separate room in holiness and purity, and reciting the penitential prayers of the morning service with many tears, the spirit came over me, my hair stood on end and my knees shook and I beheld the merkabah (i.e. the sphere of the divine sefirot) and I saw visions of God all day long and all night, and I was vouchsafed true prophecy like any other prophet, as the voice spoke to me and began with the words: “Thus speaks the Lord.” And with the utmost clarity my heart perceived towards whom my prophecy was directed [that is toward Sabbatai Sevi] even as Maimonides has stated that the prophets perceived in their hearts the correct interpretation of their prophecy so that they could not doubt its meaning. Until this day I have never yet had so great a vision, but it remained hidden in my heart until the redeemer revealed himself in Gaza and proclaimed himself the messiah; only then did the angel permit me to proclaim what I had seen. I recognized that he was [the] true [messiah] by the signs which Isaac Luria had taught, for he [Luria] has revealed profound mysteries in the Torah and not one thing faileth of all that he has taught. And also the angel that revealed himself to me in a waking vision was a truthful one, and he revealed to me awesome mysteries (Scholem 1973 204-205). [the bold is mine]
Sabbatai and two witnesses, but Sabbatai who was not in a manic phase at this time, was amused and protested saying “I had [the messianic vocation], but have sent it away” (Scholem 1973:215). Sabbatai’s response did not deter Nathan who eventually succeeded in persuading Sabbatai (just prior to Sabbatai entering a manic “up” phase (Scholem 1973:233)) that he was the Jewish messiah (Cantor 1994:212), and then proceeded to convince Sabbatai to declare himself to be the Messiah in public during a prayer meeting on May 31, 1665 (Scholem 1973:220).

3.3.3 Nathan’s messianic doctrine reveals Christian characteristics

Nathan’s belief in Sabbatai’s messiahship, which he claimed to have received in a vision from an angel, reveals strong Christian characteristics which are clear in Nathan’s use of the term “faith” (Scholem 1973:211). Nathan’s concept of faith was already evident at the start of the Sabbatian movement when he proclaimed that pure faith, independent of the observance of the Law, was the supreme religious value that secures salvation and eternal life for the believer. Nathan’s proclamation strongly resembles the declaration made by Jesus who also demanded no observance of law, merely belief in salvation through faith (Scholem 1973:283; Dimont 1971:227).

Scholem draws attention to the fact that association between faith and redemption is also confirmed in genuine Jewish traditions125 that are uncontaminated by foreign influences (Scholem 1973:212). Nathan’s Christian concept of faith did therefore not evoke any serious reaction or rabbinic outcry, and there were rabbis who both rejected and embraced Nathan’s proclamation. This twofold response indicates that it is extremely difficult to gauge what beliefs are permissible and which are forbidden within a Jewish framework of any period, and that caution should be exercised before anyone attempts to make any pronouncements about the supposedly “un-Jewish” character of this spiritual phenomenon (i.e., faith) in Jewish history (Scholem 1973:283,284).

---

125 The sources include an old Tannaitic midrash, the Mekhilta, which asserts that “the dispersed will be redeemed for the sake of faith only” though, of course, faith never means, in the old rabbinic sources, faith in the redeemer. The connection was elaborated in homiletical style in the twenty-ninth chapter of R. Loewe of Prague’s Ne’nah Yisra’el, probably the most authoritative book on summing up the rabbinic doctrine of redemption as it had developed by the sixteenth century (Scholem 1973:212).
Nevertheless, the marked similarities between Nathan’s doctrine and Christian concepts soon began to move beyond mere “spontaneous analogous development” with Nathan’s increasingly evident Christian religious terminology, which includes

- the statement: “Blessed is he that believeth in the faith which giveth life to its adherents in the world and the world to come” (written by Nathan in a letter in March 1667);

- Nathan’s exegesis of Habakkuk 2:4, which he wrote between 1673 and 1674: “He whose soul is justified [sic] by faith shall live”. This clearly reflects the Christian terminology (per fident justificata) (Scholem 1973:284).

Nathan also stated that the messiah had authority “to do with the Israelite nation as he pleases, by virtue of his unspeakable sufferings on their behalf. He may justify the greatest sinner” (Scholem 1973:284). In this unusual doctrinal statement about the Jewish Messiah, Nathan combines two distinctly different concepts. Firstly the messiah in Nathan’s statement is the messiah who “justifies the believers through their faith in him, even though they have no good works”. This is a concept that is the equivalent to the Christian doctrine of the messiah as saviour of the soul. And, secondly, that this messiah (as understood and depicted by Nathan) could also “save sinners of past generations, even Jesus himself,” which is a statement and idea that becomes even more significant when it is understood, as Scholem explains, that the use of the adverb “even” in this context, is the equivalent of saying “especially” Jesus (Scholem 1973:284).

Both Nathan and Sabbatai were also interested in previous messiahs and attempted to clarify Sabbatai’s relationship (as the current Messiah) to the messianic figures that preceded him, such as Jesus and Bar Kochba, to the extent that Nathan proclaimed that Bar Kochba’s soul was reincarnated in Sabbatai Sevi. The relationship between Sabbatai and Jesus was more complex due to the fact Jesus was a symbol of a religion

126 “Through faith (Luther), or by arbitrary election (Calvin)” (Scholem 1973:284).

127 Nathan did this by equating the outer “shell” (gelippah) (understood as demonic power) of the messianic soul, with Jesus. Hence, for Nathan, just as the shell appears before the core of the fruit (the fruit being the real messiah, Sabbatai), so Jesus, appeared as the “shell” (gelippah) of the messianic soul, “to entice Israel and lead it astray”. However, paradoxically absolute “good grows from the absolutely evil, disengaging and liberating itself from the matrix in the process of its emergence. And finally he [that is the messiah] will restore [to holiness] his gelippah which is Jesus Christ.” Thus, Nathan was certain that Jesus would ultimately be saved by the messiah Sabbatai (Scholem 1973:285).
that had caused great hardship and suffering to the Jewish people, so Nathan used his messiology kabbalah to connect Sabbatai to Jesus (Scholem 1973:284,285).

3.4 THE SABBATIAN MOVEMENT

3.4.1 The movement begins in Palestine in 1665, and spreads throughout Western Europe

Sabbatai’s public declaration of his messiahship was met with great excitement and enthusiasm by his many followers in Gaza and Palestine (Scholem 1973:238,239). The majority of the rabbis in Jerusalem were not swayed (Scholem 1973:241), and his declaration of messiahship, plus the accounts of Sabbatai’s bizarre conduct en route to Jerusalem, led the rabbis to promptly excommunicate Sabbatai and banish him from their city (Scholem 1973:251). Despite the Jerusalem rabbis’ excommunication of Sabbatai and their letters to the Jewish communities in Constantinople and Smyrna, informing them of Sabbatai’s excommunication, Sabbatai’s popularity did not abate and the news of his messiahship continued to circulate swiftly throughout the Diaspora. The news of Sabbatai’s messiahship spread immediately to the Sephardic Jewish communities of Egypt, North Africa and Yemen (Scholem 1973:327-331) and by September 1665, reports of Sabbatai had reached Europe (Scholem 1973:333), and by late summer 1665, a pamphlet about the Sabbatian messianic episode had finally reached London.

By the summer of 1666, most European communities, as well as Jews from Persia and Turkey had embraced the messianic tidings of Sabbatai’s messiahship and had either sent embassies and/or letters of homage to Sabbatai Sevi (Scholem 1973:540; Dubnow 1971:68-69). Scholem (1973:464-467) lists the reasons that underlay the Jewish communities’ enthusiastic acceptance of Sabbatai as messiah and of his messianic message in 1665 and 1666 (Scholem 1973: 466.477). They include:

- the general perception that the Sabbatian messianic message was legitimate and sincere because it originally came from the Holy Land;
- Nathan’s role as Sabbatai’s prophet, which gave the messianic message a sense of credibility and integrity;
- Nathan’s role as Sabbatai’s front man, which meant that his followers were
shielded from the more questionable aspects of Sabbatai’s personality and his conduct during his manic phases;

- the Sabbatian message’s particular combination of traditional apocalyptic and strands of Lurianic Kabbalah, which meant that there were aspects of the Sabbatian message that caught everyone’s attention. The traditional apocalyptic content appealed to the masses, while the kabbalistic content captured the attention of scholars, especially the kabbalistic scholars “to whom it presented a system of ambiguous symbols, interpreting the Sabbatian gospel in terms of Zoharic and Lurianic esotericism.”;

- Nathan’s call to repentance, that not only shaped the public’s response to the Sabbatian messianic message, but which also initiated an extensive and ardent surge of repentance and penitential enthusiasm, that the rabbis were reluctant to curb;

- the fact that the majority of people, particularly prior to Sabbatai’s apostasy, tended to accept the idea of the messiah and its accompanying traditional eschatological scenario without really questioning and examining it and certainly without grasping the more hazardous aspects of the messianic awakening (Scholem 1973:464-467).

### 3.4.2 Sabbatai and the Polish Jews

The thesis notes the Polish Jews’ response to Sabbatai during his lifetime, as the Polish Jews intense sense of religiosity and grinding poverty of the non-elite Jews, not only made them key players in the Sabbatian messianic episode, but the backwater of Podolia in Poland is also the birthplace of Hassidic Judaism, which in turn gave the world Chabad and Rebbe Schneerson. The Polish Jews were the largest percentage of Jews in Christian Europe and are known for their particularly intense response to Sabbatai and the Sabbatian movement\(^\text{128}\). The Polish Jews’ passionate response to Sabbatai can be directly connected to their belief in Lurianic Kabbalah which was amplified by the Polish Jewry’s recent experience of brutal anti-Semitism, which included the many Jewish

\(^{128}\) It is also worth noting that the Chabad/Lubavisters, who also base their teachings on Lurainic kabbala, are originally from Poland.

The Sabbatian movement’s popularity in Poland was not initially linked to Sabbatai per se, as very little was known about Sabbatai Sevi in Poland before 1665. Poland’s pre-Sabbatian, Lurianic Kabbalah-induced messianic fervour was, however, constantly fuelled by an endless stream of miracle stories, legends and propaganda about Sabbatai that reached a high point when the news of Sabbatai’s messiahship reached them (Scholem 1973:592,592). Although accounts of Sabbatai’s messiahship were mainly spread by word of mouth (throughout Poland and the rest of the Diaspora), there were also pamphlets and broadsheet newspapers in circulation that were read along with two specific editions of a popular printed penitential manual in Yiddish129 (Scholem 1973:593).

It was also during this period that the populous’ belief that Jews would be transported back to Jerusalem on clouds, to worship at the Temple, began to take root in Poland. This implausible belief was derived from a midrash based on Isaiah 60:8 “Who are these that fly as a cloud?” The midrash (i.e., a rabbinic commentary on a text from Hebrew Scripture) used this text to explain how people in the Diaspora would return to Jerusalem, and to support the idea and subsequent widespread belief that God would send miraculous clouds130 to carry all the men women and children back to Jerusalem. The majority of the Jews accepted this “cloud transportation” idea as the literal truth (Scholem 1973:594,595).

Cantor explains that this widespread, mass, messianic-induced hysteria was the result of the Diaspora Jews’ (particularly the Polish Jews’) combination of their beliefs: firstly, the Polish Jews’ literal belief in cloud transportation, and, secondly, their belief in Sabbatai’s messiahship and his messianic message. He explains that this combination of messianic beliefs was so intoxicating and intense that it drove

---

129 These particular penitential manuals were so popular that they were literally used until they began to fall apart and there are no surviving copies of the first edition. There is still one existing copy of the second edition in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. This surviving second edition copy is a beautifully printed booklet, with the title “Tiqqueny Teshubah/Eres Sevi” (English title is “Penances practiced in the Land of Sevi”). The word “Sevi” stands on a line on its own and is accentuated by a special type format and it clearly refers to the messiah (Scholem 1973:593).

130 The Sabbatians were not the first to believe in “cloud transportation” as this belief had been popular prior to the Sabbatian messianic episode, amongst messianic-focused Jews in Baghdad in the first half of the 12th century (Scholem 1973:595).
thousands of Jewish families to prepare for their triumphant “cloud transportation” return to Zion, along with the exhumed bodies of their deceased relatives who they believed would be resurrected in Zion. These people’s messianic beliefs were so extreme that they all proceeded to pack their bags and wait patiently, with their exhumed relatives, on their rooftops for days on end, for angels and/or clouds to carry them to Jerusalem, until their messianic dreams finally came to a grinding halt with the news of Sabbatai’s arrest by the Turkish authorities in February 1666 (Cantor 1994:212).

The Sabbatian movement also inspired a sense of confidence and defiance amongst the Polish Jews who started to carry pictures of Sabbatai and Nathan with them and who began to warn their Christian neighbours that the day of retribution was approaching. The Jews’ defiant behaviour sparked anti-Jewish demonstrations and riots in places such as Pinsk (March 21, 1666), Vilna (March 28, 1666) and Lublin (April 27, 1666). On May 5, of the same year, King John Cassimir forbade the Jews to carry Sabbatai’s pictures and ordered all printed pictures of Sabbatai, as well as related pamphlets and broadsheets, to be destroyed (Scholem 1973:597; Dubnow 1971:64-65).

The Polish Jews were obsessed with Sabbatai during the spring and summer of 1666 (Scholem 1973:598,599), and many Polish Jews, including two emissaries, went to visit Sabbatai while he was a prisoner in Gallipoli, but before his apostasy (Scholem 1973:600). These emissaries’ reports of their visit to Sabbatai, and a letter they brought from Sabbatai, were important to the Sabbatian movement as they served to strengthen the people’s faith in Sabbatai, including the faith of many leading Polish rabbis who firmly believed that Sabbatai was indeed the long-awaited messiah (Scholem 1973:601).

3.4.3 The Sabbatian Movement in the East

By the spring of 1666, Sabbatian messianic fervour reached the Jewish communities in Asia, in cities such as Salonika. It was in Salonika, with its large Jewish population (approximately sixty thousand, thought to be the largest Jewish community in the world at that time), that Sabbatai Sevi had the most followers. The Salonikans’ ardent
messianic belief and zealous behaviour was particularly intense, occasionally bizarre\textsuperscript{131} and at times highly disruptive.

The community’s passionate belief in Sabbatai’s messiahship was shared by all Jews in Salonika, including their rabbis, together with the many Marranos (a derogatory term, from the Spanish word for pig, referring to the Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity in the 14th century, to escape persecution but who continued to practice Judaism secretly), who remained believers in Sabbatai and his messiahship after Sabbatai’s apostasy, and even after his death (Scholem 1973:635,666).

3.4.4 The deification of Sabbatai

The Sabbatian movement (when understood as one of the religious reform movements that formed part of the Jewish Reformation that began in the 10th century BCE with the Karaites, and ended with the Hassidim of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the wellspring of the modern-day Chabad/Lubavitchers), and their deification of Sabbatai were, in essence, a serious attempt to challenge the stifling authority of rabbinic Judaism with its all-encompassing Talmudic halakhot (laws), as well as the ruling religious Jewish elite’s power (as represented by its kehillot (Jewish community councils), beit-dinim (rabbinic courts), and its countless rabbis), and an attempt to make Judaism a faith “more accommodating to personal sensibility” (Cantor 1994:218, Graetz 1945:142).

\textsuperscript{131} Their zealous behaviour included:

- a rite of penance that required burial in sand up to their necks, where they remained to pray for a period of three hours;
- the symbolic play-acting of the four kinds of capital punishment recognised by rabbinic law (stoning, beheading, burning and strangling);
- the organised and speedy marriage of all their young children (approximately 700 to 800 marriages were performed) in order to remove the last obstacle to the messiah’s imminent coming. This was done in keeping with a rabbinic injunction that stated the son of David would not come until all souls had entered the bodies destined for them;
- the closing of their businesses, which led to 400 people living off public charity in 1666;
- the practice of relentless mortification of the body and the daily invention of new ways of mortification;
- their proclivity for practicing excessive fasting, that often lasted for 6 weekdays and is on record for leading to the death of a number of people (Scholem 1973:634).
Graetz explains that the Sabbatians deification of Sabbatai was a natural progression for the kabbalist-inspired Sabbatians who followed the teachings of the Zohar, which stated that in the messianic age (which the Sabbatians believed Sabbatai had ushered in as the Jewish Messiah), all Jewish halakhah/law would become irrelevant (Graetz 1945:142). Consequently, the Sabbatians who wished to unshackle themselves from the oppressive constraints of rabbinic law and who believed they were in the messianic era, chose to set up a new god, substituting a (hu)man god for the God of Israel. Through the Sabbatians’ concentrated focus on their Messiah Sabbatai, the Sabbatians managed to magnify and exalt Sabbatai to such an extent that he become, for them, a deity close to God (i.e., Yahweh) (Graetz 1945:142). To this end, Sabbatai’s secretary, Samuel Primo explained the deification of Sabbatai:

From the Divine bosom (the Ancient of Days) ... a new divine personage had sprung, capable of restoring order in the world intended in the original plan of divine perfection. This new person was the Holy King (Malka Kadisha), the Messiah, the Primal Man (Adam Kadmon), who would destroy evil, sin, and corruption and cause the dried up streams of grace to flow again. He the holy king, the Messiah, is the true God, the redeemer and saviour of the world, the God of Israel; to him alone should prayers be addressed. The Holy King, or Messiah, combines two natures – one male, and the other female; he can do more on account of his higher wisdom than the Creator of the world (Graetz 1945:143).

Primo’s belief in Sabbatai as a deity is also seen in the circulars and declarations he sent out for Sabbatai and which he signed on Sabbatai’s behalf in the following manner: “I, the Lord, your God, Sabbatai Zevi” (Graetz 1945:143). The affect of the deification of Sabbatai and the Sabbatians’ belief that they were living in the messianic age, was also seen in Sabbatai and his followers abrogation of fast days. They include the Seventeenth of Tammuz (a minor fast day commemorating the breach of the walls of Jerusalem before the destruction of the Second Temple), the ninth of Av (a 25 hour fast day commemorating the fall of both the first and second Temples of Jerusalem), as well as the tenth of Tevet (a minor fast day that commemorated the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon), which the Sabbatians transformed into a feast day (Graetz 1945:144; Scholem 1973:615).

Graetz draws attention to the irony of the Sabbatians’ use of the Zohar and its teachings to justify their attempts to alter the liturgical calendar, and to abrogate fast days, especially the transformation of the tenth of Tevet, a fast day, to a feast day, noting that in all probability, the rabbis had probably read and repeated to themselves,
at least “a thousand times” that “in the time of the Messiah the days of mourning would be changed to days of feasting, and the law in general would not be binding” (Graetz 1945:144). Nevertheless, when the Sabbatians deified Sabbatai and openly abrogated fast days, such as the tenth of Tevet, the Rabbis, who had tolerated the Sabbatians before this event, primarily due to their excessive displays of repentance and penitence, were finally galvanised into action and spoke out against Sabbatai. It was however too late to curb the Sabbatians, and certain rabbis who spoke out against Sabbatai’s deification and his abrogation of fast days in Smryna, were nearly stoned to death by the Sabbatians, and were forced to leave the city in a hurry (Graetz 1945:144).

3.4.5 The Turks arrest and imprison Sabbatai on February 8, 1666

On December 30, 1665, Sabbatai, his followers, and a few rabbis, left Smyrna by sea for Constantinople (Scholem 1973:432). Sabbatai’s eagerly awaited arrival had inspired a messianic frenzy and produced a marked increase in open conflict between believers and non-believers in Constantinople (Scholem 1973:444). Turkish authorities were alarmed by the messianic talk and discord of Constantinople’s Jewish community, as the Jews’ messianic fervour was already responsible for

- the constant disruption of normal daily life in the city;
- the closing of many Jewish businesses, that controlled the majority of Turkey’s local commerce, which had a direct adverse affect on local Turkish commerce;
- the departure of a great number of Jews for the Holy Land, which had a seriously negative impact on the non-Jewish environment, as the Jews controlled the bulk of Turkey’s foreign trade, especially with Europe (Scholem 1973:449).

The Jews departure from Constantinople also created social issues, as they left behind destitute family members whose situation was compounded by the fact that the city’s Jewish almsbox was unable to meet the sharp increase of the impoverished Jewish community’s needs (Scholem 1973:449).

These socio-political based factors (listed above), as well as reports received from Jewish leaders and rabbis from Smyrna and elsewhere, including reports from
Sabbatai’s Jewish opponents and groups of nonbelievers, underlay the Turkish government’s eventual decision to arrest Sabbatai Sevi (Scholem 1973:444,445). Sabbatai was arrested on February 8, 1666, imprisoned in Constantinople for two months, after which he was moved to the fortress of Gallipoli, on April 19, 1666 (Scholem 1973:448, 459). The majority of Jews in Europe, Asia and Africa, were not disheartened by Sabbatai’s arrest and continued to believe that Sabbatai was the Messiah. After Sabbatai’s arrest, the Jews wrote Sabbatai’s initials (S.Z.) in almost every synagogue, as well inserting the following prayer into their liturgy: “Bless our Lord and King, the holy and righteous Sabbatai Sevi, the Messiah of the God of Jacob” (Graetz 1945:150).

Sabbatai’s imprisonment did not deter his followers in the Diaspora who continued to visit him in their thousands, first in Constantinople and then later at Gallipoli (Graetz 1945:149; Dubnow 1971:67,68; Scholem 1973:603). Reports of erotic perversity and antinomianism, from within the inner Sabbatian circle, and from amongst Sabbatai’s followers, began to circulate, but their authenticity is open to debate (Scholem 1973:670-6710). Nevertheless, formal complaints in this regard were lodged with the authorities in Adrianople, which led to the forced dispersal of all Sabbatai’s followers and to Sabbatai’s transferral to Adrianople to the sultan’s court on September 16, 1666 (Scholem 1973:671,672,673).

### 3.4.6 Sabbatai’s apostasy: September 16, 1666

Sabbatai was interrogated in Adrianople by a group of people who proceeded to offer him a fateful choice, death or apostasy, and Sabbatai chose apostasy (Graetz 1945:153-154; Dubnow 1971:73; Scholem 1973:678,679). His choice was accepted by the sultan who allowed Sabbatai to take a new name, that of Mehm Ed Effendi (or Aziz Mehmed Effendi), granted Sabbatai the honorary appointment of kapici bashi (keeper of the palace gates), and gave Sabbatai a royal pension as well (Graetz 1945:153,154; Dubnow 1971:73; Scholem 1973:681). Sabbatai’s wife, Sarah, also converted to Islam, and was given the name of Fatima Cadin (Lady Fatima) (Scholem 1973:684,685).
3.4.7 Nathan and Sabbatai’s apostasy

Nathan’s intellectual response to Sabbatai’s apostasy are laid out in a letter Nathan wrote to a Sabbatian follower on the island of Zante, near Corfu, where he sets out the Sabbatian doctrine that explains the necessity of the messiah’s (i.e., Sabbatai’s) apostasy (Scholem 1973:741).

The rabbis were eager to destroy Nathan’s reputation after Sabbatai’s apostasy and they excommunicated him, and tried to prevent Nathan from joining Sabbatai (Graetz 1945:157; Scholem 1973:735). Nathan ignored the rabbis and visited Sabbatai in Adrianople, where Sabbatai continued to meet with his followers, who were careful to conceal the fact that they believed that Sabbatai was (still) their messiah, and that Sabbatai’s apostasy was merely a short interlude prior to the final demise of the Turkish Empire (Scholem 1973:728,735).

Nathan continued to travel as Sabbatai’s active apostle/prophet in 1667 and 1668, and did so up to his death in 1680, despite the rabbinic authorities’ rigorous efforts to curb his influence (Graetz 1945:160; Scholem 1973:719). He also formulated and spread his gradually developing heretical, Sabbatian theology, and Nathan’s writings not only had a profound influence on Jewish communities while he was alive, but this influence also increased substantially after his death (Scholem 1973:719). Nathan’s influence can also be seen in another extreme, but much smaller heretical messianic movement, known as Frankism, (or the Franks) which arose in Poland soon after Sabbatai’s death. The Franks were led by another self-proclaimed messiah, Jacob Frank (1726 -1791), whose outrageous beliefs and conduct led the rabbinate to promptly excommunicate him as well (Dimont 1971:228; Cantor 1994:212; Graetz 1945:272-273).

3.4.8 The Sabbatian movement after the apostasy 1667-1668

Although news of Sabbatai’s apostasy initially sent out shock waves of disbelief and disappointment throughout the entire Jewish community, the Sabbatian movement did not collapse and fade away like previous Jewish messianic episodes that came after Jesus. The unparalleled scale of the Sabbatian movement, and the sheer intensity of the Jews’ deeply ingrained and widespread longing for messianic salvation and redemption, coupled with the unprecedented number of followers who firmly believed in Sabbatai Sevi’s messiahship was, in this instance, simply too powerful to stifle this
particular messianic movement (Dubnow 1971:74; Scholem 1973:688). The social and political context and the Jews’ religious beliefs (most notably their proclivity for Lurianic Kabbalah) during this period, in and outside Palestine, were also such that Sabbatai’s apostasy merely served to fuel his movement and to intensify the belief of his followers (Graetz 1945:156; Dubnow 1971:74; Scholem 1973:688,689). Sabbatai’s apostasy did not deter the many new followers who persisted in joining the Sabbatians after his apostasy, and the Sabbatian movement continued to grow and draw new followers from the Jewish population who, Scholem notes, clearly preferred “the reality of their heart’s vision above that of the disenchanting outer reality” (Scholem 1973:793). Even one year after Sabbatai’s apostasy, Sabbatai’s followers’ belief in his messiahship had remained so passionate and ardent that Sabbatai’s followers still represented the majority of the total Jewish populous of that time (Dubnow 1971:75).

There were also open clashes between those who had always opposed Sabbatai and those who continued to follow him, and it is also at this stage when the rabbis’ choice to remain silent and gloss over the Sabbatian event, first began (Scholem 1973:697). The rabbis believed that it would be wiser and safer to simply ignore the Sabbatian debacle, due to the vast size of the Sabbatian movement and the feverish pitch of the Sabbatians’ post apostasy messianic propaganda which they considered to be too strong and too dangerous, and let the messianic movement slowly run its course and peter out. Hence the sources reveal that the rabbis often repeated the quote of “neither curse it or bless it” taken from Balak’s advise to Balaam: “Neither shall you curse them at all, nor shall you bless them at all” (Num. 23:25), when the rabbis had to deal with the post apostasy Sabbatian movement and its beliefs (Scholem 1973:698,699).

Sabbatai’s followers and key supporters were, however, soon offering rational explanations for Sabbatai’s apostasy to shore up their spirits and belief and to reassure those Sabbatians who expressed doubt (Graetz 1945:157; Dubnow 1971:74; Scholem 1973:687). Graetz draws attention to one of the more popular and successful rationales that were offered for Sabbatai’s apostasy, that of his devoted secretary and follower, Samuel Primo. According to Graetz, Primo argued that

All had been ordained as it had come to pass. Precisely by his going over to Islam had Sabbatai proved himself the Messiah. It was a Kabbalistic mystery which some writings had announced beforehand. As the first redeemer Moses was obliged to reside for some time at Pharaoh’s court, not as an Israelite, but to all appearances as an Egyptian, even so must the last redeemer live some
time at a heathen court, apparently as a heathen, “outwardly sinful, but inwardly pure.” It was Sabbatai’s task to free the lost emanations of the soul, which pervades even Mahometans, and by identifying them with himself, as it were, bringing them back to the fountain-head. By redeeming souls in all circles, he was most effectually furthering the kingdom of the Messiah (Graetz 1945:158).

Both Dubnow and Graetz note that these various Sabbatian rationales (like the one posited by Primo, above), as well as the popular but more simplistic kabbalistic-derived belief that Sabbatai had not converted to Islam since “a phantom had played that part, while he himself had retired to heaven or to the Ten Tribes, and would soon appear again to accomplish the work of redemption” (Graetz 1945:156), were responsible for the Sabbatians maintaining their faith after Sabbatai’s apostasy (Graetz 1945:156: Dubnow 1971:75).

Cantor draws attention to the manner in which Sabbatai’s followers in Salonika (Greece) and in the Balkans resolved the cognitive dissonance of Sabbatai’s apostasy. He explains that they managed to do this by viewing Sabbatai’s apostasy through a (another) kabbalistic doctrinal framework, hence, “just as the light is temporarily joined to the evil kellipot (the shells of darkness)” in the kabbalah, so too “in the process of tikkun (cosmic healing) … the Messiah has to undergo an evil phase of humiliation to emerge as the purified redeemer” (Cantor 1994:213).

Scholem provides a more detailed and intellectual-based kabbalistic reason for the Sabbatian movement’s ability to survive Sabbatai’s apostasy (and ultimately his death). He explains that the Sabbatian movement was not, despite its outward appearance, a traditional messianic movement. This was primarily due to the manner in which kabbalistic doctrine, especially Lurianic Kabbalistic doctrine as promoted by the Sabbatians, had enabled the followers of Sabbatai to confuse imminent redemption with realised redemption. This meant that for the Sabbatians “[s]alvation was not merely at hand; it had already begun to be established and to make inroads upon the old order” (Scholem 1973:688), hence the Sabbatians’ belief that the messianic age had already begun, and that they were in fact living in the messianic age.

The Sabbatians’ establishment and theoretical proof for their “realized redemption” perceptual framework, was based on the kabbalist understandings of the word, Shekinah, which in this instance means “the messianic age” (the other kabbalist interpretation of Shekinah is ‘the consort of God’, which the kabbalists preferred to
the two more customary understandings of Shekinah, namely, “the dwelling place of God” and “the presence of God”), and on the Sabbatians’ Lurianic-based kabbalah teachings that allowed them to proclaim that “the Shekinah ‘had risen from the dust’” (Scholem 1973:688,689). The Sabbatians’ realised redemption perceptual framework and their ability to place themselves directly within their realised redemption framework, was further strengthened by the Sabbatians’ emphasis on “pure faith in the messiah as a supreme religious value”, regardless of what may (or does) occur, or what Sabbatai, their Messiah, may say or do. In this way, the Sabbatians used a combination of Lurianic Kabbalah-derived teachings and Nathan’s interpretation of the concept of “pure faith” to preserve their movement and its belief, in both Sabbatai as their Messiah, and their realised redemption, even when everything that was happening around them said otherwise (Scholem 1973:689).

The Sabbatians’ ability to rationalise their situation in this manner, when all their hopes for the realisation of messianic promises in the political sphere evaporated, also illustrates how the Sabbatians’ believed that the messianic age, which was now established within them, could not die, or could only die in the midst of an acute struggle. Consequently, Scholem draws a comparison between Renan’s observations of the early Christians and the post-apostasy Sabbatians, noting that Renan’s observation of the early Christians’ “[e]nthusiasm and love know of no hopeless situations. They play with the impossible, and rather than despair, they violate reality” is equally applicable to the post-apostasy Sabbatians (Scholem 1973:689).

Sabbatians who did not subscribe to any of the kabbalistic-derived rationales chose to perceive Sabbatai’s apostasy instead as an incomprehensible mystery, which was nonetheless, for all intents and purposes, a positive event (Scholem 1973:793). For these followers of Sabbatai, the continuation of the movement would therefore require

- the formulation of a new theology that would enable their believers to “live amid the tensions between inner and outer realities” (Scholem 1973:793,794);
- the creation of new concepts that would “express the fullness of the paradox” (Scholem 1973:793);
- the need to downplay the visible “outer” reality, and focus instead on the hidden, inner dimension of faith – which the Sabbatians managed to do –
to the extent that for many, the historical reality became an illusion and their inner reality the only truth (Scholem 1973:793-794).

These attempts were also linked to the Sabbatians’ effort to redefine their Judaism as a new Judaism, namely one that is based on “realized eschatology”/realised redemption (Scholem 1973:794).

### 3.4.9 The Sabbatian movement and Christianity

The Sabbatians’ attempt to transform their disappointment (in both Sabbatai’s apostasy and his death) into positive affirmations of faith, reveals many marked similarities between Sabbatianism and early Christianity (Scholem 1973:795). These similarities are linked to this thesis’ attempt to seek the commonalities that exist within each of these successful Jewish messiah’s templates, their beliefs and conduct as well as the belief and conduct of their followers. These similarities between Sabbatianism and Christianity include:

- their followers’ endeavours to reconcile and rationalise faith and historical reality;
- their followers need to construct and provide an ideology that accounted for their initial disappointment at the death of their respective master/messiah;
- the manner in which both groups utilised the Jewish paradox of the “suffering servant”, which they subsequently radically redesigned to suit their groups’ respective needs;
- the manner in which both movements became mystical-based faiths that were built on a specific historical event;
- the manner in which both groups drew their strength from the paradoxical nature\(^\text{132}\) of this historical event (Scholem 1973:795).

---

\(^{132}\) Although the idea of a messiah who becomes an apostate or of a savior who dies as a criminal, are equally unacceptable to the simple religious consciousness, these realities became the source of strength from which both movements drew their religious justification. Both believed in a “second manifestation in glory of him whom they had held in degradation”. Just as the early Christians believed in the return of the crucified after his ascension into Heaven, so too the Sabbatians believed that their redeemer’s absence (albeit a moral absence after his apostasy as opposed to a physical absence after death), was temporary and that he too would soon return to complete his messianic mission. The passing of time and
The similar context ("similar" used here once again in the context as defined by Shermer (2000:190)) and events that surround Christianity and Sabbatianism were therefore responsible for producing a new religious value, namely the concept of pure faith. What set the Sabbatian concept of faith apart was that

- it was unlike any concept found in traditional Judaism (which never posited a concept of pure faith, removed from specific deeds yet linked with redemptive power as a supreme religious value);
- it was not connected to specific works and required no miracles or/and signs;
- it had, instead, Paul’s doctrine of pure faith as its precursor;
- it changed the form of Traditional Jewish messianic faith and shifted it from being a faith in imminent redemption to being a faith in the paradox of the messiah’s mission instead (Scholem 1973:796).

There were also two key differences between traditional Judaism (including kabbalism) and Christianity, namely:

- the doctrine of the trinity;
- the incarnation of the Godhead in the messiah (Scholem 1973:796).

These two essential Christian ideas, as well as others, began to appear in Sabbatianism due to the influence of a group of Spanish Marranos, within the Sabbatian movement, who were familiar with Gnostic Christian ideas and doctrines (Scholem 1973:797). Nevertheless, Scholem also cautions against any exaggeration of Christian influence, Gnostic or otherwise, by pointing out that Lurianic Kabbalism was also derived from a Gnostic set of ideas (Scholem 1973:797).

Like the early Christian movement before it, the Sabbatians’ destruction of traditional values that followed their disillusionment and intense religious awakening, led to what
Scholem describes as “an outburst of antagonism toward the Law” (1973:797). Within early Christianity, this response was seen in the antinomian doctrines of people such as Paul, as well as in the writings of other more extreme sects such as the Gnostics.

Within the Sabbatian movement, Sabbatai’s personality and bizarre behaviour during the manic “up” phase of his illness, formed the basis of the antinomian legacy that he contributed to the formation of later Sabbatian doctrine. Nathan’s writings were also important as they ultimately defined Sabbatai’s contribution to Sabbatian doctrine and, in this way, Nathan’s role within the Sabbatian movement is remarkably akin to that of Paul and his letters to the subsequent development of Christian doctrine (Scholem 1973:797).

There is also an alternate view to the reason why the Sabbatians rejected the Law/halakha. Ehrlich (2001:22-23) in his study that examines Sabbatianism and the Dönme, explains that there was an attempt in Safed in 1538 to renew the semikhah and re-establish the Sanhedrin. This move to re-establish the Sanhedrin (which Ehrlich sees as political messianism) was supported by men such as Jacob Berab and the famous halakhist Joseph Karo (who displayed an interest in what Ehrlich calls political messianism and mysticism). Both men were also in favour of a political move to inspire a Jewish religious enlightenment in the Holy Land, and to set up a supreme religious authority to interpret the Law/halakha according to their needs.

Ehrlich (2001:23) notes that their attempt failed and that the failure is attributed to the objections of opponents whose main objections were based on halakhic details and the preservation of religious status quo. Consequently, what this failed renaissance clearly illustrated was that the halakhic system that the rabbis had erected to preserve Judaism

133 Professor M. Avrum Ehrlich is a theologian, social philosopher and scholar of Jewish texts. He is a full professor of Judaic studies at the Centre of Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies at Shandong University, a government-funded national centre for Inter-religious research in Jinan, Shandong Province, the People’s Republic of China, where he teaches text-based courses including: Philosophy of the Hebrew Scriptures, Talmud, Jewish law and Jewish Mysticism. His personal research interests include Jewish leadership and trans-generational transfer of authority and ideas, the governing mechanics of religions and messianism in Judaism and Christianity and comparative thought. Refer to http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/hbjs/staff/profiles/ehrlich.shtml


135 The term semikhah means to literally “lay hands”. This was done on two occasions in ancient Israel, to anoint a leader or to anoint an animal for Temple sacrifice.
and the will of God through his Law, was also responsible for blocking any attempt to 
renew the semilkah, re-establish the Sanhedrin and initiate a renaissance within the Holy Land. This was one of the main reasons why the forces that sought to renew the Sanhedrin only found expression within the abstract mythical form of the kabbalah, especially Lurianic Kabbalah. It is also the reason, according to Ehrlich, why the Sabbatians realised, and understood, that the Law/hala\textit{kha} had to be literally broken for any redemptive process to begin. This is ultimately the reason why an anti-Law/halakhic response became an integral part of Sabbatian ritual.

Although scholars are still debating the reasons for the Sabbatians’ rejection of the Law/hala\textit{kha}, the fact remains that both Christianity and Sabbatianism shared similar historical situations, as well as a particular type of inner logic within their particular doctrines which ultimately led to similar results (Scholem 1973:797). The most important similarity being that both groups viewed the appearance of their respective messiah as the beginning of a new era, which meant that they both had to alter their position in relation to their group’s existing state of values, namely the Law of Moses and the halakhic tradition of the rabbis (Scholem 1973:797-798). Sabbatai’s disciples did this by teaching their followers to deviate from, and reject, the Law/hala\textit{kha} and used mystical reasons to justify their position by explaining that the rejection of the Law/hala\textit{kha} was a key step in messianic redemption. Consequently, “disobedience to the Jewish religious law became acceptable and even encouraged in the sect while purporting to have a desire for holiness” (Ehrlich 2001:23).

Sabbatai Sevi died in Dulcigno, while still a prisoner of the sultan, on the 17\textsuperscript{th} September 1676, ten years after his apostasy on the 16\textsuperscript{th} September 1666, and just two months after his fiftieth birthday (Dimont 1971:228; Scholem 1973:917). Sabbatai’s death did not mark the end of the Sabbatian movement and his followers’ belief in him as messiah. The Sabbatians have survived the death of their messiah to the present day. Ehrlich notes that modern-day Sabbatians prefer to refer to themselves as “Salonicans” and not as Sabbatians or Dönmeh (which is seen as a derogatory term), and that it is estimated that they number between 60,000 and 100,000 in Turkey today. These latter day followers of Sabbatai Sevi are mainly prosperous, but highly assimilated people, with only a small percentage being Sabbatian in the true religious sense (Ehrlich 2001:40).
3.4.10 Summary

Documents and other sources related to the messianic beliefs and conduct of the Jewish messiah Sabbatai Sevi and his followers (particularly those who followed him during his lifetime), as well as the sources that speak of the Sabbatian messianic episode, all reveal important information that is related to this thesis and its interest in the messiah templates of the three successful Jewish messiahs. What emerges and is clearly evident from the Sabbatian episode is that Sabbatai Sevi’s very early belief in messianism (which appears to be due to his early exposure to, and fascination with, the magical and mystical aspects of Lurianic Kabbalah), and his subsequent belief in his own messiahship, were both imperative and central to the way in which the Sabbatian movement initially began to coalesce around Sabbatai, and to the manner in which Sabbatai began to attract his very first followers, starting in Smryna, well before he publicly declared his messiahship in Israel, on Nathan’s urging, on May 31, 1665.

The next important facet is related to Sabbatai’s “suffering servant” messiah template. Sabbatai’s “suffering servant” messiah template was shaped by his behaviour, during his “down” phase, and by the way in which Sabbatai’s followers perceived and understood Sabbatai’s anguish and suffering, experienced during his “down” phase, as “a mysterious passion in which the suffering messiah” (i.e., Sabbatai) according to existing sources “atoned for his own sins or/and for those of Israel” (Scholem 1973:148).

Another noteworthy factor is the extremely rapid manner in which the news about Sabbatai’s messiahship and his messianic promise spread throughout Israel and the rest of the Diaspora, and most importantly, that this dissemination was primarily accomplished by word of mouth. The astonishingly huge, and unprecedented scale of the Sabbatian messianic movement, and the fact that Sabbatai attracted more than a third of the total Jewish populous of the world at that time, is also remarkable, as is the fact that the movement continued to grow significantly after his apostasy (September 16, 1666), and that it continued to do so even after his death a decade later (September 17, 1676) and that his followers, the Sabbatians, have survived to the present day.

The deification of Sabbatai by his followers during his lifetime is also on record. Sabbatai’s deification and the Sabbatian movement as a whole, has been seen by some scholars as part of the religious reform movements that formed part of the Jewish
Reformation that began in the 10th century BCE with the Karaites, and ended with the Hassidism of the late 18th and 19th century, the wellspring of the modern-day messianic-focussed Chabad/Lubavitchers (Cantor 1994:218). This understanding views the Sabbatian movement and its deification of Sabbatai as the Sabbatians attempt to challenge and unshackle themselves from the oppressive constraints of rabbinic law and the unyielding authority of the ruling Jewish elite of the time. The influence of Lurianic Kabbalah and the teachings of the Zohar on the Sabbatians also allowed the Sabbatians to believe that they were already living in the messianic era, which in turn, led them to set up a new god, substituting a (hu)man god (i.e., Sabbatai) for the God of Israel.

There are also many marked similarities between the theology of the Sabbatians, as propounded by Sabbatai’s self-proclaimed prophet, Nathan of Gaza, and that of Jesus and the early Christians. The most important commonality is that of Nathan’s concept of faith, which was already evident at the start of the Sabbatian movement when Nathan proclaimed that pure faith, independent of the observance of the Law, was the supreme religious value that secures salvation and eternal life for the believer. Nathan’s proclamation strongly resembles the declaration made by Jesus who also demanded no observance of law, merely belief in salvation through faith (Scholem 1973:283; Dimont 1971:227).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the association between faith and redemption is also confirmed in genuine Jewish traditions that are uncontaminated by foreign influences. This may explain why Nathan’s concept of faith did not evoke any serious reaction or rabbinic outcry, and why there were certain rabbis who rejected Nathan’s proclamation, while other rabbis embraced it (Scholem 1973:212). This response would therefore indicate that it is particularly difficult to gauge what beliefs are permissible and which are forbidden within a Jewish framework of any period, and that caution should be exercised before any pronouncements are made about the supposedly “un-Jewish” character of this spiritual phenomenon (i.e., faith) in Jewish history (Scholem 1973:283, 284).
3.5 THE HASIDIC CHABAD/LUBAVITCHERS, MODERN-DAY MESSIANISTS

*Yechi adonenu morenu verabenu melech hamoshiach leolam voed.*
(May our master, teacher and rabbi, the king messiah, live forever).

‘*Yechi*’ (‘May he live’)*136*

The modern-day, American-based Hassidic Chabad/Lubavitcher’s movement is the other Jewish messianic movement, besides Christianity and Sabbatianism, that has survived the death (albeit a relatively recent death), of its messiah, namely the late Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who was also the movement’s grand rabbi and spiritual leader from 1951 until his death in 1994.

The Chabad/Lubavitcher movement is one of the sub-sects of the 18th century sect of Judaism known as the Hassidism. This movement was not the first Hassidic movement in Jewish history as there was a group of pious/Hassidic Jews, in the second century BCE who rose up in protest against the stringent measures that were implemented by Antiochus IV after he gained control of Jerusalem. The modern-day movement has about forty different sub-sects, besides the Chabad/Lubavitchers, and they include groups such as the Satmar, Ger, Bobov, Belz Klausenberg, Munkatch, Papa, Square, Tash and Vishnitz.*137*

Although the Chabad/Lubavitch movement is not significant in relation to the rest of the world’s Jewish population (it only accounts for a few hundred thousand), it plays an extraordinary large role in the context of the Jewish world community and its daily life (Mahler 2003). According to its highly sophisticated and well-designed main online internet site “Chabad Lubavitch World Headquarters”*138* the movement is described in the following manner: “Chabad-Lubavitch is a philosophy, a movement,

---

*136* The “*Yechi*” is a song that is sung by the members (young and old) of the Chabad movement as a demonstration of faith that their beloved rebbe will soon return, rising from the “other side”, as Mahler observes, in a manner that is more applicable to Jesus Christ than to the savior of the Jewish People (Mahler 2003).


and an organization. It is considered to be the most dynamic force in Jewish life today.”

The movement also has another very interesting, and ultimately revealing, site that epitomises the way that Chabad captures other Jews’ attention. The site, called “Chabad Lubavitch – Torah, Judaism and Jewish info” plays on the more emotional aspects of daily Jewish life and provides a plethora of information on Judaism in general, traditional Yiddishkiet (i.e., daily Jewish lifestyle and praxis), Jewish holidays, festivals and general Jewish news and advice. The site offers many options such as a section called “Ask the Rabbi”, that deals with very topical issues such as autism in children and the rabbi advises on catchy topics such as “How can I get my kids to pray?” The site also offers other options such as a list of classes and events throughout the USA, Canada, Australia, England, Argentina and France and blogs offering advice on marriage and childrearing. After reading the site, it becomes clear that Chabad has a strong work ethic and is extremely well organised and that its members are socially active within the Jewish community throughout the USA and the entire Diaspora.

These Jewish messianists are also recognised as being “proactive, capable administrators and economically aggressive” which, Ehrlich notes, is certainly an advantage as it “strengthens the messianic unit, the motivation to join it and the sense of accomplishment that adherents derive from membership” (Ehrlich 2001:18).

3.5.1 A brief overview of Hassidism and its key teachings

Hassidism is the only large mystical movement to appear in Jewish history (Sharot 1982:154), and is the last of the most important movements in the Jewish Reformation (Cantor 1994:213), and it followed on the heels of the Sabbatian movement. The mystical Hasidic movement, with its emphasis on spiritual piety and ecstatic devotion, arose in the early part of the 18th century in the poverty-stricken backwater of Podolia in Poland. It arose during a time period of widespread social disintegration, disorganisation, and extensive suffering due to devastating pogroms (led by the Haidamaks who were primarily rebel bands of Cossacks and peasants from the

Russian part of the Ukraine) that destroyed many Jewish communities as well as the high number of ritual murder trials (especially between the 1730s and the 1750s) (Berger 2008:4; Sharot 1982:130; Szubin 2000:216; Cantor 1994:214).

The Talmudists stranglehold on the beliefs and praxis of Judaism, along with the rabbis knack of eliminating all that was joyful from the praxis of Judaism (which was also one of the key factors that underlay the wide embrace of Sabbatianism), was also one of the primary catalysts for the rise of the Hassidic movement, its broad appeal and its rapid spread through the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe (Dimont 1971:229).

The emergence, spread and success of Hassidism also needs to be placed in the long-term Jewish historical context so that this movement can also be viewed as the last phase of the Jewish reformation (Cantor 1994:218). Cantor explains that the reformation (within the Jewish historical context) began in the tenth century with the Karaites, and that it was followed by the rise of the kabbalists, which, in turn, gave us Sabbatian messianism (1994:218). Thus Hassidism, like all previous Jewish religious movements, must be understood as another serious movement that arose to challenge the static and rigid authority of the traditional rabbinic-based ruling class and the Talmudists stranglehold on the beliefs and praxis of Judaism. This was, therefore, in an attempt by the populous to create a place within their own traditional belief system that would accommodate them with compassion and personal sensibility (Cantor 1994:218; Ehrlich 2001: 19-21; Dimont 1971:229).

Graetz also draws attention to the fact that the Hassidic movement must be seen within its religious based context. He points out that Hassidism arose in the wake of the Sabbatian debacle, at a time when kabbalistic talk of imminent messianic redemption (which had also underpinned Sabbatianism) continued to colour the religious landscape, and while many men and women still clung persistently to fantastical religious beliefs based on extraordinary and supernatural phenomena (Graetz 1945:377).
To this end Graetz is the most critical Jewish scholar of the Hassidic movement, and observed\textsuperscript{142}, in what can best be described as a very prescient way, that the Hassidic movement “hides within itself germs of a peculiar kind, which being in course of development, cannot be defined” (Graetz 1945:374). In the light of Graetz’s very early and perceptive assessment of what he predicted as a still concealed and inherent flaw within the Hassidic movement, Chabad’s embrace of extreme messianism and its talk of a Jewish Messiah, should therefore come as no surprise.

The charismatic founder of the Hassidic movement is Israel ben Eliezer (1700-60), who was also known as the Ba’al Shem Tov or Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name or literally translated, Good Master of the Name) (Berger 2008:4; Sharot 1982:138); or Besht for short (Cantor 1994:214) (referred to from now on as either the Besht or as the Baal Shem Tov). It is not known how well educated the Besht was or whether he was an ordained rabbi, but he appears to have had some rabbinic schooling and served as a sexton in a synagogue (Dubnow 1971:396; Cantor 1994:214). The Besht initially attracted attention first as a faith healer and a magician and then as a lay preacher, drawing many followers from the lower middle class Polish villages (Cantor 1994:214). Sources reveal that the Ba’al Shem Tov was a faith healer and a magician who gained his knowledge of magic from reading the secrets of Practical Kabbalah, which was in circulation at that time (Dubnow 1971:396). His knowledge and use of divine names and incantations (gleaned from the kabbalah), and his understanding of herbs, allowed people to believe that he could find cures, work miracles and exorcise demons. Consequently, people were drawn to him and began to regard him as a magical healer and a religious teacher, and a man of vision whose particular beliefs would enable his followers to draw closer to God, without the rigours of study and the emphasis on observance, in what the Besht taught was the “correct way” (Sharot 1982:138-139; Cantor 1994:214).

There is a shortage of reliable information about the Ba’al Shem Tov as so much legend and myth surrounds him, but his teachings are known from his disciples and successors. Nevertheless, what is relevant to this thesis is Graetz’s research which notes that the Besht was prone to many regular episodes of what he describes as “rapture”, which would probably be defined today as an altered state of consciousness.

\textsuperscript{142} The thesis would like to note that Graetz’ seminal study of the History of the Jews was originally written in 1895, which makes his observation of Hassidism even more interesting.
States of altered consciousness can be self induced (via repetitive body movements, chanting/prayer, drumming, and/or attained through the ingestion of hallucinogenic plants (Weil 1996:157), and even alcohol, such as vodka. All the Hassidic sects condone the consumption of alcohol and (all the men) consume extremely copious quantities of vodka at all their joyous gatherings, known as farbrerens (farbrengen, singular), held with or without the presence of the rabbi, and at shiurim (study sessions).

The exact nature and origin of the Besht’s regular states of rapture remain open to debate. Graetz himself suggests that these states of rapture may well have been self induced by the Besht’s very long periods of prayer (that included much shouting, chanting and singing), during which the Besht is on record for moving his body in a frenetic way (such as repetitive rocking, jumping, twisting and turning and clapping) that appeared to drive “blood to his head, made his eyes glitter, and wrought both body and soul into such a condition of over-excitement that he felt a deadly weakness come over him” (Graetz 1945:377,378).

The Besht also claimed that during his rapture, his soul would rise up to the “world of light” and that he would catch a glimpse of infinity and both hear and see “Divine secrets and revelations, entered into conversations with sublime spirits, and by their intervention could secure the grace of God and his prosperity, and especially avert impending calamities” (Graetz 1945:377). The leaders of the various Hassidic sects that arose over time, who are known as zaddikim143, were also perceived to be “the intermediary between man and God” and the Hassidim believe that “only through the tzadik does God grant the faithful the earthly blessings: ‘life, subsistence, and children’” (Dubnow 1971:403). The thesis would like to note that this description of the Besht’s experiences during his rapture, along with his ability to heal and intervene with God on a another person’s behalf, and his claim to be able to see the future, places the Besht, (along with the zaddikim who followed him, including Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson from Chabad) within the modern definition of a Shaman, especially as defined by Weil (1996:156-158). The concept of the Besht as a type of shaman also helps to clarify why the Besht (and his successor Dov Baer) managed to draw such widespread attention and gain such a large following for his

143 Rebbe, singular; rebbes plural; the term comes from rabbi but means more than leader/teacher in that the Hassidic rebbe/zaddik is also perceived as a saintly and righteous person as well as a spiritual leader.
superstition-laden and kabbalistic coloured context. Magic still forms a part of modern-day kabbalism and of Hassidic sects’, such as Chabad’s, belief. The Hassidic proclivity for magic ideas can still be seen in the standard advice Chabad offers when bad luck befalls a Jewish person, which is for the injured party to check that the prayers contained within their mezuzahs (small decorative cases affixed to doorframes in Jewish homes as stipulated in Jewish law that contain specific Hebrew verses from the Torah (Deut 6:4-9 and 11:13-21)), are Halakhic (Jewish religious law) compliant.

The Besht’s first successor was his oldest son, Dov Baer (1710-72), also known as the “the Great Maggid” (preacher). In contrast to his father, the Besht, Dov Baer was a scholar of Talmud and kabbalah, and was far stricter in his religious practices and observances (Sharot 1982:143; Cantor 1994:214; Hoffman 1991:20; Graetz 1945:375).

The Hassidic movement’s message drew extensively from the vulgarised version of the kabbalah and was also influenced by the shock of the Sabbatian debacle (Cantor 1994:214), and, like Sabbatianism, it too undermined the basis of Talmudic Judaism (Graetz 1945:375). But, Dubnow explains that although the Hassidic movement was also a movement of protest against the ruling Jewish elite and their kehillot (Jewish community councils) and the rabbinate and their beit dinim (rabbinic courts), it was not as unsophisticated, egotistical and unethical as Sabbatianism (Dubnow 1971:394). Dubnow describes the Hassidic movement as a more profound and mature opposition to the elite and rabbinism in that the Hassidic movement grew out of the need to bolster the inner feelings of religion, at the expense of the formal observance of the “613 Precepts” in the Pentateuch; to intensify the faith of the individual at the expense of the nationalistic clinging to traditions (Dubnow 1971:394).

The Hassidic movement did not go beyond the confines of Judaism either, and led to a new, or what the Hassidim defined as the “correct way” to observe faith and to draw closer to God. In this way, the Hassidic movement produced a new variety of believing Jew, who may not (ever) be as learned as the elite or the rabbis, hence, the Hassidic Jew gained “more light in his heart, although more darkness in his head” (Dubnow 1971:395).

Dubnow also draws attention to the conditions and overall context that gave rise to the Hassidic movement, which is relevant to this thesis. He observes that although the historical arena of the Jews in early first century CE Israel is different from that of the

145
Jews in early eighteen century Poland, the context in Poland was, nevertheless, similar (the term “similar” to be understood here, once again, as defined by Shermer), to those in Israel during the emergence of Christianity. He describes the similarity as: the recurrence of that great sense of bitterness and hostility that arises between the individual and the body (and people) that represent national religiosity (which was the Temple and the priests in Judaism in the time of Jesus, and the Jewish elite, the rabbis and rigid rabbinic Talmudic Judaism in the time of the Besht). Thus, just as the early followers of Jesus, challenged the entrenched spiritual leaders in Jerusalem in “the name of a personality symbolizing faith” so too did the Hassidic movement challenge the Jewish elite and their kehillot, the rabbis and their beit dinim and rabbinic based Talmudic Judaism, in the name of their leader, the Besht, and the Hassidic leaders/rebbes/zaddikim who followed him (Dubnow 1971:395).

Hassidic teaching can be distilled into two key concepts. They are:

- devekut, a term taken from the Zohar, that means to cleave or to adhere to God (Berger 2008:4; Sharot 1982:139; Cantor 1994:214);

- zaddik (rebbe), which is a term that best describes a person who resembles a Christian saint (Cantor 1994:215).

Devekut: The Besht taught that devekut could be attained through other means besides prayer, study, and a sober and learned attitude. Devekut could be found in mundane everyday activities such as drinking, eating, dancing, storytelling, sexual relations, working and travelling. Devekut could thus be understood as a sacring (a way to find the holy) of the mundane and profane (Cantor 1994:214). In this way, any act that was linked to earning a living or physical pleasure, became a religious act, if the intention was to cleave to God. Devekut’s principle of “worship through corporeality” (i.e., religious achievement through the material/earthly world), was a very radical concept within Judaism, but unlike the Sabbatians, the Hassidim did not derive any antinomian assumptions from this doctrine (Sharot 1982:139). The Besht’s concept of devekut is similar, but not identical, to present day African-American Pentecostal religions, as it meant that any person or child, regardless of whether they were poor, simple, marginalised and/or homeless, could gain immediate access to God, as all that was required was a kind heart and a happy countenance (Cantor 1994:215).
The *Hassidic* emphasis on joy and their opposition to asceticism marked a significant change in Judaism as the Besht taught that “joy indicated complete belief and trust in God, whereas fasting and self-affliction and sorrow expressed an ingratitude to God and were impediments to cleaving to the divine” (Sharot 1982:139). In this way, happiness and joy were combined, and synagogue prayer was seen as a way to express joy, which the *Hassidic* followers did with great enthusiasm by exaggerated shaking, rocking backwards and forwards while praying, by dancing and by turning cartwheels (Cantor 1994:215). This frenetic style of worship has allowed Dimont to compare the hymn-singing, dancing Jewish *Hassid* to a Sufi dervish (1971:229), while Graetz compares the *Hassidim*’s boisterous conduct in the synagogue to a Christian sect who arose at the same period in Wales, known as the “the Jumpers”, and to the North American Christian sect, known as “the Shakers” (Graetz 1945:378). Graetz also notes that *Hassidim*’s heady combination of mysticism and madness is contagious and that this combination drew many people to the Besht and his movement, particularly men who wished to be happy and be near God, who hoped to hasten the messianic age, but who had no desire to study the Talmud to attain piety (Graetz 1945:378).

The *Hassidim* all strive to serve God through joy and believed that God was always with them in the universe, and that the earthly realm was bathed in God’s divine light (Dubnow 1971:402). The *Hassidim* placed more value on mystical fervour than scholarship, and believed that it was more important to approach the Torah with love and enthusiasm than it was to learn its precise meanings (Sharot 1982:141).

The Besht therefore argued that all men were equal before God, with “the ignorant a little more equal than the learned” (Dimont 1971:229). The Besht, in sharp contrast to the Talmudist who demanded full observance of all 613 *mitzvot* (Jewish religious laws), also encouraged his followers to focus on gaining God’s grace through joyful singing and dancing instead. He also assured them that evil could be overcome by joyful song, which he rated higher than prayer.

The *Hassidim*’s teaching of their particular interpretation of *devekut* with its emphasis on mystical fervour, as opposed to scholarship, alarmed the orthodox rabbinate, as it dismissed scholarship and traditional discipline and challenged rabbinic authority. The main rabbinic opponents of the *Hassidim* were the Lithuanian rabbis based in Vilna, who were known as the *Mitnaggedim* (opponents) (Dubnow 1971:405; Cantor
The Mitnaggedim were led by Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (1720-1797), who was also known as the Gaon of Vilna (the title Gaon was given to a Jewish scholar noted for wisdom and knowledge of Talmud) (Dubnow 1971:405; Cantor 1994:215).

**Zaddik:** Sharot extends Cantor’s comparison (above) of the zaddik to a Christian saint, and explains that the zaddik can also be defined within Weber’s typology of religious leaders as a mystagogue. Dynasties of mystagogues usually develop on the basis of hereditary charisma, such as the Indian guru and the hierarch of Taoists in China. The differences between a mystagogue and a priest, prophet and magician are as follows: the mystagogue has personal charisma – the priest has the charisma of office; the mystagogue depends on magical powers – the prophet’s charisma depends on the reception of his divine revelations; the mystagogue has a special congregation around him – the magician has no special congregation (Sharot 1982:158).

For the Hassidim, the zaddik/rebbe fulfilled three roles, namely,

- Cosmic redeemer – in the sense that he was able to do various tasks that included rescuing divine sparks from their captivity within the evil earthly realm and hastening the coming redemption of the Jews through his devekut and tikkun;

- Redeemer of the individual soul – in the sense that he could “descend” from the heights of devekut to redeem the fallen souls of sinners, as well as raise and redeem the souls of his followers in his subsequent ascent to the divine;

- Protector of men and women – in that he was seen as one who could protect people from evil spirits and function as the agent of change in the earthly realm. This is seen in the followers’ belief in the zaddik’s ability and power to perform miracles, to provide spiritual counsel, to protect them from all the hardships, misfortunes and evils of daily life, to act as faith healer, to act as divine intercessor, to ensure progeny and guarantee livelihood, and still fulfil his role as charismatic preacher (Sharot 1982:158; Cantor 1994:215, Ehrlich 2000).

The early Hassidim not only believed that “in every generation there exists a single Jewish leader, a zaddik, who is the ‘Moses’ of his time, one whose scholarship, and devotion to others is unequalled” but, that they also believed that these men’s very
quality of being (for example, the way the tied their shoelaces), could “exalt humanity and impart subtle indications of the path to the divine” (Hoffman 1991:30-31). Each Hassidic sub-sect also believed that “their Rebbe could influence the Almighty’s decrees” and that these figureheads were also instrumental in ushering in the messianic age on earth (Hoffman 1991:31).

The zaddikim are literally the central power around which the Hassidic movement revolves, to the extent that the Hassidic community literally lives in, around, with, and for their zaddik (Cantor 1994:215, 216). Children are taught to hold their zaddik in the highest regard and the zaddik’s portrait, as well as his writings, is always found in all his followers’ homes (Sharot 1982:200). Cantor compares the zaddikim’s role in the Hassidic movement by comparing them to modern-day charismatic Methodist lay preachers and African-American Pentecostal ministers, in that “whatever your problem – health, money, marriage, or simply doubt and psychological depression – the zaddik, the carrier of God’s light in the world would resolve the problem, or at least make you go away feeling much better after you consulted him” (Cantor 1994:215).

Graetz goes one step further and compares the power that the zaddik wields and the awe in which he is held and perceived by his followers, as being similar to the way the Catholics perceive their Pope, hence, the Hassidic movement is for Graetz “a sort of Catholicism within Judaism” (Graetz 1945:382). Dimont agrees with Graetz and extends Graetz’s opinion when speaking of the zaddik/rebbe cult within Hassidism, by explaining that the Hassidic movement’s intense focus on the zaddik is akin to Christianity in that it too allows personality to take the place of doctrine (Dimont 1971:229).

Zaddik leadership is passed down through lineage, and men who became rebbes (zaddikim of their respective groups such as the Chabad/Lubavitchers were either the sons or sons-in-law of their predecessors (Hoffman 1991:21). However, Sharot notes that there have been incidents where dissatisfaction within the hereditary framework has seen followers transfer their allegiance to a different zaddik\(^{144}\). Although groups seldom continue without a zaddik, there is an unusual exception, namely the Bratslav

---

\(^{144}\) They include examples such as the shift in allegiance in 1926 by the followers of the Sighet zaddik, after his death, from the zaddik’s designated fourteen-year-old son, to the zaddik’s younger brother instead (Sharot 1982:173).
Hassidim sect. This group has continued to flourish to the present day without a zaddik, as their only zaddik, Nahman of Bratslav, died in 1810 (Sharot 1982:174).

3.6 **HASSIDISM: WAS IT A MESSIANIC MOVEMENT AT ITS INCEPTION?**

The relationship between Hassidism and messianism is an issue that is unresolved and is still being debated by scholars (Sharot 1982:149). The key source under scrutiny is a letter the Ba’al Shem Tov wrote to his brother-in-law that speaks briefly about messianism. The letter describes how the Ba’al Shem Tov dreamt that the teacher of Elijah took him up to heaven, where he saw many wonderful things, but that he was too afraid to write about them. He describes how he saw the souls of the living and the dead, in the lower reaches of heaven, who revealed their happiness at the Ba’al Shem Tov’s arrival in heaven. The Ba’al Shem Tov was then ushered into the sanctuary of the messiah, where he promptly asked the messiah when he will come to earth. The messiah provided a response, albeit an enigmatic response. The messiah said: “By this you shall know: When your teaching – which I have taught you – has been revealed and spread in the world and the waters from your well have been scattered about” (Sharot 1982:149-150).

Sharot quotes Dinur who states that the letter reveals that Hassidism was, from its inception, a messianic movement. He also points out that there were clear intimations of messianism in early Hassidic literature, and that the only reason that they were so subtle was due to the fact that the Hassidim were afraid of being associated with the Sabbatians (Sharot 1982:150).

Scholem also suggests that the Hassidic movement realised that they “had to neutralize millenarianism if it was to become a popular movement” (Sharot 1982:150). Consequently, the advantage that the Hassidic movement possessed over any millenarian movement was that, through devekut, which could be realised in any place at any time, they offered a focus on the personal level of salvation instead (Sharot 1982:150). Though many Hassidim believed that absolute spiritual perfection would only be attainable with the actual coming of the messiah, they still emphasised that it was possible to attain perfection in the unredeemed world. Sharot explains that this was seen in mystical terms in that
the action of “raising the divine sparks” which had messianic implications in the Lurianic kabbalah, which was given individualistic connotations in Hasidism. Each man could lift the sparks that belonged to his soul, and by good deeds he encountered those sparks that belonged to his soul, and by good deeds he encountered those sparks in his immediate environment – in his food, clothing, home, business. A journey for an economic or other mundane purpose had a spiritual significance if the place to be visited contained a number of the individual’s sparks which he could redeem. Hasidism took the apocalyptic tension out of the lifting of the sparks, for in contrast to the Lurianic focus on the redemption of the sparks of the Shechinah from the spheres of evil, Hasidism emphasized the redemption of sparks attached to the individual’s soul. The salvation of each individual soul had to precede the collective salvation, and this was bound to take a very long time (Sharot 1982:150-151).

The writings of Dov Baer and other Hasidic disciples also reveal that the movement focused more on “redemption in exile rather than from exile” (Sharot 1982:151). This meant that although the land of Israel remained a central focus, the Hassidim increased the mystical tendency to view the land of Israel not simply as the future site of the messianic kingdom, but more as a sacred, eternal space, a spiritual centre, where devout Jews should go to live a religious life and eventually be laid to eternal rest in the sacred soul of the land (Sharot 1982:151).

Messianism was not the focal point of the teachings of Hassidic zaddikim. Besides the Chabad and Bratslav Hassidim who are on record for expecting the messiah in many different time periods, messianism amongst the Hassidim was mainly confined to the period of the Napoleonic wars and to the years 1839-40. The years 1839-40 were significant within the Jewish context as they marked the beginning of a new century on the Jewish calendar and it was a date that the Zohar spoke of as a possible date for the coming of the messiah. However, the question of the possible coming of the messiah seems to have had a very limited impact on the Hassidim, and there is no record of any widespread preparation for the coming of the messiah in 1839-40, or of any religious consequences of the failure of the Zohar prophecy (Sharot 1982:185).

There are nevertheless some uncanny similarities between the lives of Jesus and the Besht/Baal Shem Tov that point toward the underlying substrata of messianism in the movement. They include:

- The angel – in the same manner in which an angel is said to have appeared to Joseph to inform him that Mary would have a son whom he was to call Jesus in
fulfilment of prophecy (Matthew 1:20-23), so too an angel appeared before the Besht’s father, Eliezer, to inform him that his wife would have a son whom he was to call Israel, in fulfilment of prophecy (“Thou art my servant Israel in whom I shall be glorified” (Isaiah XLIX));

- performing miracles – like Jesus the Besht could cross water, albeit that in the Besht’s instance, he crossed over by stepping onto his cloak which sailed across the water;
- exorcising evil spirits – the Besht simply had to touch people to expel their demons and heal them;
- saving a fallen woman;
- the fact that both men’s messages came in parables (Dimont 1971:229).

3.7 THE SPREAD OF HASSIDISM AND THE OPPOSITION OF THE ORTHODOX RABBIS

3.7.1 Hassidism and the Mitnaggedim

Hassidism spread rapidly throughout Eastern Europe in the latter part of the eighteenth century and in the first part of the nineteenth century, and severely undermined the authority and social influence of the orthodox rabbis. The Hassidim’s opposition, the orthodox rabbis who were known as Mitnaggedim (i.e., the Opponents), and their leader, the Gaon of Vilna, criticised the Hassidim for their ideas, especially their rejection of Talmudic study as the only path to holiness, and for their concept of devekut (i.e., their “cleaving” to God, in all areas of life) and for their notions of equality. The Gaon also excommunicated Hassidic followers numerous times, declared their leaders to be heretics and burnt their writings, which he and the Mitnaggedim deemed heretical. This was all to no avail as the movement simply continued to grow and flourish throughout the Jewish Pale of Settlement, and throughout Eastern Europe, until it gradually became the dominant form of Judaism.

145 Cantor points out that although the Hassidim had concepts of equality, or as he couches it, “leveling ideas” (1994:217), he proceeds to explain that Hassidism was “not a class revolution because it had no class ideology. Indeed, like contemporary English Methodism, it softened the edges of class conflict by teaching personal satisfaction is the very modest pleasure of diurnal underclass life” (1994:221-222).

The result was that the Mitnaggedim’s opposition began to wane as it became more difficult to

- criticise a movement that had ceased some of its most objectionable practices such as their custom of embarrassingly wild behaviour during prayer, and ignoring the Talmud’s set times for prayer;
- oppose a movement that was changing itself from one that initially rebelled against the established Jewish status quo, into one that was becoming part of the Jewish communal establishment;
- delegitimate a movement that commanded the loyalty of so many observant Jews (Berger 2008:5).

The Hassidim’s widespread success and eventual triumph over the Mitnaggedim, has also, and still is, seen in a far harsher, more realistic and critical perspective by many Jewish secularists, socialists and Zionists from the nineteenth century to the present. They view Hassidism as “a disaster in Jewish life” (as does Cantor himself). These critics of the Hassidism agree that the movement brought a desperately needed sense of joy to the marginalised, ignorant and poverty-stricken Jewry of Eastern Europe, but they believe that it came at a high cost to the already damaged psyches of these people. The critics argue that what the movement’s principle of sacring all aspects of daily life and seeking joy in everyday trivia did, was that it functioned as a narcotic, inducing a form of religious-based altered state of consciousness. This state of religious intoxication prevented the people from attaining a level of rational consciousness and thought, which was what they required to truly empower themselves so that they could address their situation in a lucid and realistic manner. This meant that the Jews of Eastern Europe failed to address their economic slump, in that they did not organise immigration or engage in any form of effective political protest either (Cantor 1994:222).

Cantor also draws attention to another serious charge against the Hassidism that even he concedes is far more difficult to dismiss in the light of what is known about life during this period in Eastern Europe. The charge is that Hassidism
debased Jewish culture, that it glamorized ignorance and superstition, that it allowed the mass of the Jewish population to wallow without pity in the cultural and physical slime of an unpromising and backward existence, while the zaddik dynasties joined the orthodox rabbinate and a handful of wealthy merchants in an affluent and selfish existence (1994:222).

This charge gains credence in light of the fact that scholars now know that

- the Jewish masses did, indeed, live in dire poverty in their filthy, disease-ridden shtetls/small hamlets/villages and that they were hidebound by superstition and ignorance;

- the poor Jewish masses had to endure the tyranny of both the rabbis and the zaddikim, who strove to maintain this rigid and divisive culture;

- the rabbis and zaddikim operated it in their own interests and for the comfort of their families, living selfish and insular lives (Cantor 1994:222).

It would therefore be correct to say that the rapid spread of Hassidism in eastern Europe was linked to “the severe economic deterioration of Polish Jewry in the eighteenth century, following the catastrophic pogroms and wars of the later seventeenth century, and culminating in the widespread pauperization in Eastern European Jewish villages and towns during the nineteenth century” (Cantor 1994:219).

Within the broader, general, historical context of Jewish life, Hassidism and its popularity and extent in Eastern Europe and the Pale, also needs to be viewed and understood as a part of the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This is the time when the overall cultural focus moved away from the ideas of the Enlightenment and began to focus on “feeling, personal experience, and environmental sensitivity, as demographic and economic transformation established the foundations of modern democratic society” (Cantor 1994:218).

In the final years of the 18th century, the Hassidic movement continued to spread swiftly throughout the densely populated Jewish areas of the Ukraine and Galacia and into Lithuania, the previous stronghold of the Mitnaggedim, and into White Russia. Soon there were Hassidic circles and Hassidic houses of prayer in these areas, where the new followers practiced the Besht’s particular type of ecstatic, rowdy and physically taxing form of worship, while they also strove to be cheerful and to fulfil the Besht’s orders to worship and serve God through joy (Dubnow 1971:402).
Despite their fierce battles, the Hassidim and the Mitnaggedim were however united in their attitude towards the Jewish Enlightenment, which they both perceived as a rival and a threat to their power base and status quo and as a challenge to their “spiritual monopoly over Jewish life” (Dubnow 1971:407; Berger 2008:5). The Mitnaggedim and Hassidim also viewed the Haskalah’s rationalism, scepticism, secularism and acculturation as an open attack against the fundamental beliefs and very foundation of traditional Jewish society. This perceived common threat was responsible for the eventual cessation of the Mitnaggedim’s opposition to the Hassidim as they put their differences aside to stand together as allies to prevent the spread of the Jewish Enlightenment into Eastern Europe and the Russian Pale (Berger 2008:5).

3.7.2 The Hassidim Today

Although only a small percentage of the Hassidim survived the Holocaust, the Hassidic rebbes who escaped have been remarkably successful in maintaining their particular Hassidic sect’s beliefs and way of life in the new countries and cities where they settled, such as Israel, New York in the USA, London, Antwerp and in Canada (Sharot 1982:190,191). The Hassidim have no formalised procedures for the acceptance and expulsion of its members and they seldom leave their communities, which along with their high birth-rate, and in some sects, their active proselytising (such as Chabad), ensure that their numbers continue to steadily increase (Sharot 1982:191).

3.8 THE CHABAD/LUBAVITCHERS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW FROM THEIR INCEPTION TO THE PRESENT

3.8.1 Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Lyadia, the founder of Chabad

After the death of Dov Baer, in 1797, the Hassidim were left without a designated leader and the movement broke up into different sub-sects, also known as courts, which were led by different disciples of Dov Baer. These disciples were political as well as spiritual leaders and were known and referred to as Rebbe(s)/zaddik(s), which is a more reverential form of the title “rabbi” which is used in Hassidic circles (Szubin 2000:216).
The *Hassidic* sub-sect/court, known initially as the Chabad *Hassidic*, was founded and led by Rabbi Schneur Zalman, originally from Lionza, later from Lyadi. This sub-sect immediately set itself apart from the other *Hassidic* sects by focusing on spiritual meditation and intellectual study. Rabbi Zalman also wrote the well known Chabad treatise, the Tanya (1768), drawing extensively from Maimonide’s *Guide for the Perplexed*, which is still taught and studied by Lubavitchers today (Dubnow 1971:404; Hoffman 1991:19). Rabbi Zalman also viewed the process of spiritual growth as a lifelong process that required tireless self-discipline and the correct use of intellect and emotion (Hoffman 1991:19).

Rabbi Zalman is also credited with setting up a new and unique system of *Hassidism*, which can best be defined as “rational Hassidism” and in doing so, he supplanted the Besht’s principle of blind belief, which does not rationalise, with a new concept that combined faith and knowledge, based on the biblical expression “Know thou the God of thy father” (Hoffman 1991:19; Dubnow 1971:404). This approach has been refined to three words, Wisdom (*Hochmah*), Understanding (*Bina*), and Cognition/Understanding (*Dea/De’at*) that encapsulated Zalman’s teaching. They are abbreviated to KhBD (Hoffman 1991:19; Dubnow 1971:404).

The name Chabad is thus derived from the acronym, KhBD, composed of the Hebrew words, *hochmah* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *de’at* (knowledge) (as used in Jewish mysticism), and may also be written with an H as in Habad (Dubnow 1971:404; Berger 2008:4,5; Szubin 2000:216). The second part of the sect’s name, Lubavitcher, is derived from the Russian town of Lubavitch, where the movement was founded. The town became its communal base from 1813-1915, until the movement moved to Poland during the First World War (Berger 2008:5; Hoffman 1991:19, 21; Shaffir 1993: 115).

The early Lubavitchers refused to embrace any type of liberal thinking or practice and remained insulated communities. They rejected all the czar’s attempts to integrate them, such as the introduction of secular subjects into religious schools, as they continued to hold “strictly to the Bible as their timeless and literal word of God” (Hoffman 1991:22). These Lubavitch communities chose to deliberately isolate themselves and to interact as seldom as possible with outsiders, until German troops
invaded White Russia in 1915 and forced them to move to Latvia and eventually to Warsaw in Poland (Hoffman 1991:23, 24).

3.8.2 Rebbe Yosef Schneerson

In 1928, the sixth Lubavitch Rebbe, Yosef Schneerson, arranged a marriage between one of his daughters, Chaya Moussia and Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in Warsaw. Menachem Mendel Schneerson was the great-great-great grandson of the third Lubavitch Rebbe, after whom he was named (Shaffir 1993:115; Hoffman 1991). After the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Rebbe managed to move some of his family and a few supporters to New York in 1940, where he set up Chabad’s headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn (Shaffir 1993:115; Hoffman 1991:25).

The Rebbe chose his son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson to organise and run the newly established educational, publishing, outreach and social services departments of Chabad in the USA (Shaffir 1993:116; Hoffman 1991:26). Chabad soon founded Yeshivot across North America, placed new Hasidic prayer books, periodicals, and rabbinic texts in circulation, and promoted rabbinic conferences. Rebbe M. M. Schneerson’s initiatives were the key catalysts that enabled Chabad to gradually transform the movement from a very narrow, inward-looking Eastern European Hasidic dynasty into the present day, visible, pro-active, outward-looking movement, whose ideas and work would soon influence the entire Jewish Diaspora, as well as Israel (Hoffman 1991:26).

Rebbe Yosef Schneerson died in January 1950 and was unanimously replaced by his 48-year-old son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (Hoffman 1991:27). On the first anniversary of the Rebbe’s death, in January 1951, Chabad “crowned” Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson and made him Chabad’s seventh Rebbe and most dynamic leader to date (Hoffman 1991:27).

3.9 REBBE MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON: THE CHABAD/LUBAVITCH MESSIAH

The religion most similar to Judaism is Chabad

---

146 This comment is generally attributed to Rabbi Schach of Israel (Berger 2008:7).
The Russian born Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) was son of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, a kabbalist and Talmudic scholar (Hoffman 1991:36). Unlike most other Hassidic zaddikim/rebbes, Rebbe Schneerson received a traditional religious education as well as a secular education. He studied Talmud in his twenties, after which, it is claimed, he studied at the University of Berlin, and at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he is said to have studied science and mathematics and where he is said to have trained as an electrical engineer (Hoffman 1991:31; Shaffir 1993:116; Sharot 1992:195). In 1928, he and his wife moved to Berlin until 1933, then on to Paris in France until 1941, when they finally moved to New York (Hoffman 1991:38, 39).

Schneerson’s main ambition once he became the Rebbe and spiritual leader of Chabad in 1951, was “to bring disaffected Jews ‘back into the fold’ of observant Judaism, a task known in Habad as kiruv (literally, ‘bringing near’ and is akin to proselytising)” (Szubin 2000:217). Chabad’s focus on kiruv is discussed here as it not only explains the rapid spread of Chabad and its continued growth, despite the death of its Rebbe and messiah in 1994, but also because it has distinct parallels with the way that Christianity was spread by Paul and the way that Nathan of Gaza spread the ideas of Sabbatianism.

3.9.1 Chabad’s kiruv/proselytising campaign

The Chabad/Lubavitch kiruv (i.e., outreach/proselytising) campaign is the biggest, most well organised and prominent proselytising campaigns undertaken by modern-day Jews (Szubin 2000:218; Sharot 1992:202). Chabad’s kiruv campaigns are extremely well run and are managed by a large and complex organisation within

---


148 The Rebbe’s claim to academic qualifications from the Sorbonne and the University of Berlin have been queried and are open to dispute after an article was published over three days in Ha’aretz in April 20, 21, 22 1998. The article “Messiah Flesh and Blood” by Avirama Golan, is based on an interview with Prof. M. Friedman on the early years in Berlin and Paris of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe. The article describes how Prof. Freidman’s attempts to track down and verify the Rebbe’s more obscure biographical data revealed that Rebbe’s claims about his education were unverifiable. The records reveal that he obtained no degrees from the University of Berlin, where he was only registered for one and a half semesters, nor did he obtain any engineering degree, or any other type of degree, from the Sorbonne. According to Prof. Friedman’s research, the Rebbe took a two-year vocational course in electrical engineering at Montparnasse Vocational College (Sadka 2007).
Chabad, whose key intent is not only to increase the membership of the Chabad/Lubavitch, but who also aims to draw Jews back into the orthodox fold by spreading and teaching traditional Judaism, and by setting up Chabad centres (Sharot 1982:202; Szubin 2000:215). Rebbe Schneerson’s kiruv campaigns have gone as far afield as Morocco, Tunisia, India and recently Japan (Hoffman 1991:43; Szubin 2000:217). The “Chabad Lubavitch World Headquarters” official website, states that there are currently 4,000 Chabad centres in more than 50 countries worldwide.¹⁴⁹

Although the majority of the Hassidim do not proselytise because of the dangers involved in contact with the non-Hassidic world, there are other Hassidic sects who have recently done so. They include the Bratslav, and the “Bostoner Rebbe” Levi Yitzak Horowitz (from Boston) whose main aim is to attract Jewish students from MIT, Harvard, and other college campuses on the New England coast (Sharot 1982:202). Nevertheless, it is the sheer scope and size of the proselytising missionary work done by Chabad that sets it apart from all other Hassidic sects (Szubin 2000:217).

All Chabad/Lubavitch members are persuaded to be involved in their Kiruv (proselytising and outreach) campaigns, which are based on the Lubavitch teachings, “on the need to love all fellow Jews regardless of their degree, or lack, of religious observance, and the need to prepare as many Jews as possible for the coming of the messiah” (Sharot 1982:202, 203). Hence, “Kiruv is viewed by Habad not only as a critical social initiative but as a divine commandment as well”, and as the late Rebbe is on record as saying, “the goal of kiruv is far more than saving individual souls” as:

> [t]he obligation of kiruv is incumbent on everyone – men, women, and children – even to the point where it is the commandment of our generation. Every person is obliged to be a messenger devoted to spreading the word of God … and thereby will the messiah be brought, and the true and complete redemption, imminently (Szubin 2000:218).

The Chabad/Lubavitchers, unlike other Hassidic groups, are therefore prepared from an early age to participate and function in the “outside world”, and are sent to busy commercial areas, including Israeli army bases where they see clothing they are not allowed to wear and where they hear language they are forbidden to use such as profanity or slang (Szubin 2000:217).

Those who proselytise on Chabad’s behalf are known as shluchim (i.e., the emissaries). The Chabad Lubavitch “Online Shlichus Centre”\(^\text{150}\) describes its shluchim as the “front-liners” in the Rebbe’s army, while the site defines the Shluchim back-up website’s staff that assist the shluchim, as the “back there guys”, and compare themselves to “the radiomen, the vehicle drivers and logistical personnel” in the Rebbe’s army. The “Online Shlichus Centre” is also the official portal for the “Shluchim of the worldwide Chabad/Lubavitch movement” and functions primarily as the “Shluchim Office”, the Shluchim Placement Bureau.\(^\text{151}\)

Many Chabad husband and wife shluchim teams, are Chabad’s main emissaries who are sent on kiruv (outreach and proselytising) assignments to isolated areas and foreign countries, often without any Jewish communal life or support network, such as synagogues or Jewish day schools, to set up Chabad centres (Szubin 2000:217). Chabad’s outreach/proselytising programs are not confined to their shluchim as Chabad House and the late Rebbe also began what is known as mitzvoim (i.e., operations, campaigns) campaigns that were designed to remind and encourage Jews to perform certain mitzvot (halakhic commandments). They include lighting the Sabbath candles, reading the megilla (the Purim scroll), and blessing the lulav and etrog on Succoth. (Szubin 2000:217).

The movement also uses older Yeshiva (Talmudic study centre or school) students, who are responsible for the majority of tasks, such as the mitzvoim campaigns that revolve around Jewish observance, that include the task of persuading and teaching Jewish men how to lay teffillin (i.e., how to put on phylacteries) in special booths set up in busy shopping malls and high streets for this purpose (Sharot 1982:203). These young men can be seen in cities like Johannesburg in South Africa, on days preceding High Holy days and festivals or during the festival period itself. They usually approach Jews at shopping malls and in supermarkets, asking them whether they would like to fulfil a specific mitzvah (i.e., a religious duty or commandment) that is related to the holiday or festival in question, such as Succoth, where they then offer


you the *lulav* and *etrog*\(^{152}\) to hold, while you recite the blessing over the *lulav*, after them.

### 3.9.2 The *tefillin* campaign

One of Chabad’s earliest, largest and best known *mitzvoim* campaigns was their *tefillin* campaign that dealt with reminding and teaching men how to put on their phylacteries, (also known as laying *tefillin*), which very observant men are meant to wear each weekday morning during prayers (Sharot 1982:202). The *tefillin* campaign began just prior to the Six Day War in 1967, and was one of the most widespread and well-known proselytising campaigns of the Rebbe (Sharot 1982:202). The official reason for this campaign was that the laying of *tefillin* was not only a divine commandment but that the practice had a “protective quality” as well. Consequently, the laying of *tefillin* would therefore help “to vanquish the enemy in the course of battle” (Sharot 1982:202).

### 3.9.3 The Moshiach campaign

In the mid-1980s, Rabbi Schneerson launched what is now known as his *Moshiach* (messiah in Yiddish) campaign to spread Chabad’s belief that the arrival of the Jewish Messiah was at hand (Shaffir 1993:115). During this campaign, Schneerson told his followers (just over a 100,000 members worldwide in the mid 1980s) to focus on their messiah’s coming redemption and to pray for it, and to proclaim it publicly so that they may encourage other Jews (note the similarity to the Jesus depicted in Matthew, who also tells his followers to confine their mission to the Jews (Mt 10:5-7)), to join them in hastening the messiah’s arrival (Shaffir 1993:116; Szubin 2000:218).

Their messiah campaign initially started off with messianic prayers that expressed their ardent wish for the messiah, which was expressed in their slogan: “We want *Moshiach* now!” (often seen on bumper stickers, even in Johannesburg today). This messianic fervour soon escalated and led to their prophetic prediction of “Presently, presently, *Moshiach* is coming!” as their expectations became more and more intense,

\(^{152}\) *A lulav* set is made from the branches of the myrtle tree (*hadas*), the willow tree (*aravah*) as well as palm tree frond (*lulav*) which are bound together in a case made of palm strips or by two rings made of palm strips, as well as a lemon with the stalk (*pittum*) attached. The *lulav* set is held in the right hand while the lemon (*etrog*) is held in the left hand, in an upright position, as the benediction is recited over them (Bloch 1980:197).
By the early 1990s, Chabad took its campaign into the public media and advertising arena, utilising ideas generally associated with Madison Avenue’s publicity and advertising campaigns. Chabad’s effort to promote and publicise its messiah campaign was soon seen across the USA, in major daily newspapers and on large billboards, on expressways and along freeways. The campaign also ran in Israel where it appeared in daily and religious newspapers, on mounted posters, on signs on buildings and on rented billboards. Many believers in Israel and the Diaspora also put signs such as stickers and posters, including fluorescent signs, on the top of their motor vehicles announcing the imminent arrival of the messiah (Shaffir 1993:116,117).

Chabad’s messiah campaign also used various media messages. The most outstanding and well-known example of Chabad’s media messages is their eye-catching, print media messiah advertising campaign that utilised the “join-the-dot” concept. The Chabad Messiah advertising campaign’s “join-the-dot” concept was described by a Chabad member in the following way: “It is like the game kids play when you connect the dots and gradually the whole picture is revealed. Events examined individually don’t look like much, but when you connect the dots, you see the meaning” (Shaffir 1993:116).

These “join-the-dot” advertisements printed the word, Moshiach, in large bold print on the top of the page, which began in clear type and then finished in dots; then below that they printed “Draw Your Own Conclusions” with the following copy beneath it:

These are amazing times. The Iron Curtain tumbled … Iraq is humbled … The people of Israel emerge from under a rainstorm of murderous missiles … An entire beleaguered population is airlifted to safety overnight … A tidal wave of Russian Jews reaches Israel … Nations around the world turn to democracy … Plus countless other amazing developments that are taking place in front of our eyes. Any of these phenomena by itself is enough to boggle the mind. Connect them all together, and a pattern emerges that cannot be ignored … The Lubavitcher rebbe … emphasizes that these remarkable events are merely a prelude to the final Redemption … The era of Moshiach is upon us. Learn about it. Be part of it. All you have to do is open your eyes. Inevitably, you will draw your own conclusions.

Besides these “join-the-dot” advertisements, Chabad also took a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, in June 1991, which stated “The Time for Your
Redemption Has Arrived”, and below that they wrote that Chabad’s representatives were presently going across North America to spread this news (Shafir 1993:116).

During the same period, Chabad also began to print and distribute posters and stickers with Schneerson’s face, which welcomed the “King Messiah.” They also continued their intense publicity drive through the use of more posters, bumper stickers and print media advertisements, with bold statements such as “Moshiach – Be A Part of It” which could be seen wherever Chabad followers resided (Shaffir 1993:117).

3.9.4 Chabad followers begin to believe that Rebbe Schneerson is the Messiah

As the movement gained momentum in the early 1990s, it soon became clear that certain faithful members of Chabad, who believed in the imminence of the Messiah’s arrival, had also begun to believe that they knew the name of the Messiah: the Messiah was their leader, Rebbe Schneerson. Although not all his followers believed that he was the long awaited Jewish Messiah, there were, however, a large group of impassioned believers who began to beg Schneerson to “reveal” himself as their literal “Savior-King of the Jews”, so that he may begin their redemption (Shaffir 1993:117; Szubin 2000:219). A petition was even sent to Rebbe Schneerson, from distinguished pro-Rebbe Schneerson rabbis and well-known Jews, from within and without Chabad, begging the Rabbi to publicly reveal himself as the messiah, so that he (that is, Schneerson) may usher in the redemption (Szubin 2000:218-219).

Although it is not known at this stage whether Schneerson publicly acknowledged the fact that he was indeed the messiah (Szubin 2000:219), the Lubavitch women’s newsletter published an article in June 1993, printed entirely in English, which stated that

> the Rebbe no longer gives instructions that his followers must not affirm that their leader is the Messiah. On the contrary, when public statements are made by the hassidim that the Rebbe is the Messiah, “the Rebbe responds with consent and blessing” (Shaffir 1993:117).

In addition to this statement above, the Rebbe himself, prior to his stroke in 1992, began to speak, not only about the collective longing for the coming of the Messiah, but about the impending arrival of the Messiah. He publicly stated that the “Moshiach’s coming is no longer a dream of a distant future, but an imminent reality which will very shortly become fully manifest” (Shaffir 1993:119).
Mahler’s (2003:2) discussion with Chabad member, Chaim Meyer Lieberman, reveals why most Chabad followers were confident that Rebbe Schneerson was the messiah while the Rebbe was still alive. Mahler explains that, because all Lubavitchers consider the messianic era to be imminent, it would make sense that each generation would believe that its particular rebbe might be the messiah. He explains how this belief became more intense with Schneerson due to the fact that,

- Rebbe Schneerson was childless;
- Schneerson had become the movement’s Rebbe at the same moment in history when the Jews had survived the worst misfortune in their 3,000 year history. This was seen as an exceptionally auspicious moment for them to be delivered from their exile (Mahler 2003:2).

Lieberman adds to this by noting how the Lubavitch community became more certain in its belief each year that their Rebbe (i.e., Rebbe Schneerson) did, in fact, match all the requirements for a Jewish Messiah, as stipulated by Maimonides. For the Lubavitch, Rebbe Schneerson’s most important qualification was his emphasis on outreach/proselytising, as “Maimonides said the Messiah would be a Jewish leader who will ‘repair the breeches’”. Lieberman notes that one messianic rabbi, Eli Cohen, had told him that repairing the breeches was the same as fixing that which was missing in Jewish observance, which Lieberman notes is precisely what Schneerson did. He also adds that world events, such as the fall of the Soviet Union, which had suppressed Judaism, and anything related to the struggle over Israel, only served to increase the messianic fervour of the Lubavitch community (Mahler 2003:2). However, the community’s consensus was ripped apart on the night of June 12, 1994, when Schneerson died after having suffered a stroke a few months prior to his death (Mahler 2003:2).

There is also uncertainty regarding the reasons generally offered for Chabad’s current messianic stance. Although the mystical kabbalah texts that formed the basis of Hasidic theology have been identified as the sources of the group’s messianic inclinations, scholars still cannot agree as to why its messianic inclinations only came to fruition in the late 20th century. The second common reason offered for Chabad’s messianism, namely, that the Jews have, once again, survived a remarkable array of apocalyptic events, most notably the emergence of Zionism, the Holocaust, and the
establishment of the state of Israel, which all serve as the *chevlei moshiaḥ* (birth pangs of messiah), is also problematic and debatable. This is especially so because Chabad only assumed its intense messianic campaigning forty years after the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel.

### 3.9.5 Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship: the response beyond his community

Although the vast majority of Orthodox Jews have been, and still are, dismissive about Chabad’s messianic claims and beliefs, there are, nevertheless, certain segments of the Jewish community (beyond Chabad), who were and still remain critical of Chabad’s messianic beliefs and Schneerson’s messiahship. They include the Traditionalist Orthodox and most notably the Satmars, a *Hassidic* sect, based in Williamsburg, USA who are on record as saying that Jews have not been waiting for a messiah whose wife drives a car (Berger 2008:7).

Chabad’s critics include esteemed and influential rabbis such as the Traditionalist Orthodox Rabbi Aharon Kotler, founder of the Lakewood Yeshiva in New Jersey, who has also been critical of Chabad since the 1950s and Rabbi Elazar Schach. Rabbi Schach (1899-2001), the head of a notable yeshiva in Israel, has been a prominent critic of Chabad and its messianic beliefs since early 1980s. He not only denounced the movement, but the Rebbe (i.e., Schneerson) himself for false messianism. Rabbi Schach was especially scathing about an assertion that Schneerson had made about the Rebbe being “the Essence and Being [of God] placed into a body” and he compared this to *avodah zarah* (literally, foreign worship), which is a term customarily used when speaking of, or referring to, idolatry. Rabbi Schach’s followers also refused to recognise the Chabad Hashidim as members of authentic Judaism, and they will not eat meat slaughtered by Lubavitch shochetim (i.e., ritual slaughterers).

By 1991, Berger became a critic of Chabad as well, despite his initial great admiration for the Lubavitchers’ steadfastness under the shadow of communism. His change of heart was primarily driven by Chabad’s assertions of their Rebbe’s messiahship, which

---

153 Berger explains that due to the difficulties related to terminology when discussing Orthodoxy, *per se*, that he has chosen the term “Traditionalist Orthodox” (as opposed to opting for terms such as: Ultra Orthodox, rigorously Orthodox, fervently Orthodox, which invariably tend to offend one of the groups in question) when referring to a group (or groups) that possess a high degree of resistance to change; which is a central trait (though not necessarily an infallible trait) that enables one to set them apart (2008:7).
made him so uncomfortable that he wrote an article that noted the parallels between Lubavitch Hassidim and Sabbatai Sevi (Berger 2008:6, 9).

3.9.6 The Rebbe’s death shocks, and then divides his followers

Despite the Rebbe’s stroke and subsequent illness, his death still came as an unexpected shock to all his followers (Szubin 2000:219; Mahler 2003:3). Berger explains that Chabad’s shock was also, to a large degree, related to its belief that the Rebbe’s illness and subsequent incapacity (a side effect of his stroke), possessed redemptive significance (Berger 2008:23).

Chabad’s perception of the ill and incapacitated Schneerson and the way in which Chabad perceived the Rebbe’s illness as possessing redemptive significance (at this stage) is relevant to this thesis and its search for the commonalities that exist in the messiah template of the three surviving messiahs. Berger explains that Chabad managed to attach redemptive significance to the Rebbe’s illness, by placing the Rebbe within the same perceptual framework and context as that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. In this way, the suffering servant of Isaiah, who plays a crucial role in Christian theology and anti-Jewish polemic, was taken up and utilised by the Rebbe’s followers in Chabad who now used the text in a way that compounded and extended the text’s previous use in that the text was now used in such a manner that it could refer to “the suffering of the Jewish people in exile (mainstream medieval Jewish exegesis), or the crucifixion, or the spiritual agonies of Shabetai Tzvi after his forced apostasy, or as Chabad did in this instance, to refer to the stroke of the Lubavitcher Rebbe” (the italics are mine) (Berger 2008:23).

Chabad’s constructed redemptive significance of the Rebbe’s illness also meant that the Rebbe’s followers could (and did) believe that the Rebbe’s stroke would not be fatal, as the Rebbe was the designated Messiah of their generation, which was the generation of redemption. This perception of their Rebbe’s illness meant that, not only did they believe that his stroke would not be fatal, but they believed that Rebbe Schneerson would not die at all. Chabad’s belief in the eternal life of its messiah also stood in direct opposition to Maimonides, who had been clear in his writing that the messiah would pass away, at some stage, but only after he had completed his messianic mission (Berger 2008:23). The confusion that exists between Chabad’s use of the Christians’ censored version of Maimonides’ work on the messiah (which was...
done to support belief in Jesus as the Messiah) and the original uncensored text of Maimonides is dealt with more extensively further on in this chapter.

This belief meant that Chabad had no designated successor to Rebbe Schneerson, as they had deemed it inappropriate to prepare for the messiah’s death, let alone plan for a possible transfer of power (Szubin 2000:219; Mahler 2003:3). Nevertheless, some of the Rebbe’s followers from Chabad did accept that their messianic hopes had died with Schneerson. Mahler quotes Lieberman’s response to the news of Schneerson’s death, which shows how some followers began the process of accepting the reality that their messiah in waiting was gone:

―Sure I felt disappointment, but you have to move on,‖ Lieberman says. “What can one say other than that life is not always what you want it to be?” But many clung stubbornly to their faith, insisting that the rebbe never really died or that the process of redemption was under way and that the rebbe would soon return and be revealed as the messiah. “Exactly how this is going to come about we really don’t know,” Rabbi Cohen says. “What we do know is that if you open your eyes, you can see that bit by bit it’s coming to pass.” (Mahler 2003:3)

Although there were Hassidim who did acknowledge and mourn the Rebbe’s passing, and who were pragmatic about it (like Lieberman above), there was a significant segment who remained firm in their belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship (Berger 2008:23). There was also a large percentage who was adamant that the Rebbe’s death was only the next step in the redemptive process and who were celebrating the imminent arrival of global transformation (Szubin 2000:219).

The continued belief in Schneerson’s messiahship after his death was seen in the USA and in Israel. In Israel, a few days after the Rebbe’s demise, a messianist newspaper went as far as to compare the non-believers (i.e., those who do not believe in Schneerson’s messiahship), to the worshippers of the golden calf who had lost their faith when Moses was away for one day longer than they expected, and after this comparison, the newspaper stated that the Rebbe “will appear with literal immediacy and redeem Israel” (Berger 2008:24).

In the USA five days after the Rebbe’s death on 17th June 1994, the pro-messianic Chabad faction placed a full-page advertisement on page 11 of the widely circulated “Jewish Press”, an Orthodox weekly published in New York. The advertisement was headed: “Good tidings of Redemption” and provided a programme of an afternoon-
long event, on Sunday, 19th June 1994 (exactly one week after the Rebbe’s death), that would take place at Oholei Torah, the major Lubavitch yeshiva in Crown Heights. The text read as follows:

> With broken hearts we reaffirm our faith that we will at once all witness Techiyas Hameisim [the resurrection of the dead] and we will have the Rebbe lead us out of Golus [exile] immediately, and together we will proclaim, Yechi adonenu, morenu, verabbenu melech hamoshiach leolam voed [May our Master, Teacher, and Rabbi, the King Messiah, live for ever] (Berger 2008:11).

Soon after the Rebbe’s funeral, his followers divided into three factions that were defined by what each group believed had happened on the day the Rebbe had died:

**Group one** believed that while Schneerson had indeed been a worthy candidate to be the messiah, his death had shown them that he was not the one. They are known as the anti-meshichistim or non-meshichistim (anti-messianists or non-messianists).

**Group two** said that Schneerson was definitely the messiah, and that his death was merely “a momentary, divinely preordained, interruption of the redemptive process”.

**Group three** said that Schneerson did not really die on 12th June 1994, but that he had merely “removed himself” from human view. Alive in all senses of the word, he was expected to reveal himself to human eyes in the near future and then to proceed with his redemptive work. Group two and three have since aligned themselves against group one and are known as the meshichistim (messianists) (Szubin 2000:219-220).

The terminology used to define these three groups is, however, misleading, as there are many non-meshichistim who are still convinced that the redemption will soon come, even if Schneerson is not the messiah (Szubin 2000:220). Group three’s position has crystallised even further since Rebbe Schneerson’s death. The group is adamant that the Rebbe did not die, and that he remains alive in the literal sense of the word, and this group is on record for stating that the Rebbe “is absolutely not dead like other people are” (the italics are mine) (Berger 2008:25).

The Rebbe’s death also created an intellectual and emotional crisis as Chabad’s prime arguments for Schneerson’s messiahship collapsed with his death. Chabad scholars
worked swiftly and produced two volumes of work, one in English and the other in Hebrew, a few months after Schneerson’s demise, to provide grounds for continued belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship. In these works, Rebbe Schneerson’s strongest claim for the imminent redemption were now understood as literal prophecy, and thus, “when a prophet has spoken, no further evidence is necessary, and all other evidence is null and void” (Berger 2008:24).

Although Chabad scholars had fine-combed two thousand years of messianic literature in their production of these volumes, they had only managed to find a meagre picking of relevant, though inapplicable quotes, as well as some irrelevant quotes, which they used to illustrate their claim that Judaism does allow a belief in a messiah who returns from the dead. They also added that the Rebbe’s return is so imminent, that he will remain the Messiah of this generation and they tagged on a section at the end of the main body that contains a selection of troubling public statements that Rebbe M. M. Schneerson made soon after his predecessors’ death (Berger 2008:25).

As time passed, the Chabad messianists became even more fervent in their belief, and eventually a group of impassioned messianists came forward and claimed that “what happened on the 3 Tammuz 5754154 was an illusion, analogous to Satan’s stratagem before the sin of the golden calf when he showed the Jewish people what appeared to be the coffin of Moses. The Rebbe’s funeral, like Moses’ coffin, was

a test for carnal eyes … In truth, there was no passing away or leave taking at all, God forbid … What is special about the Prince of the generation is precisely that he is a human being in a physical body which must be part of the world, and that is how he unites the world with the Godhead. We cannot say, we do not wish to say, it is entirely impossible to say that there was any “passing away”, God forbid. The rebbe lives and exists [hai vekayam] among us now exactly as he did before, literally, literally [mamash, mamash] (Berger 2008:25).

These responses to Rebbe Schneerson’s death clearly show that the moderates’ view within the Chabad organisation had become “the belief that the Messiah really died in 1994 and will soon rise to redeem us” (Berger 2008:25).

154 The date of the Rebbe’s death given according to the Jewish calendar. This corresponds to June 12, 1994.
3.10 CHABAD: A DECADE AFTER SCHNEERSON’S DEATH

With the exception of Sabbatianism, Lubavitch messianists have already generated the largest and most long-lived messianic movement in Jewish history since antiquity. Along with Sabbatianism and Christianity, this movement has survived the death of its Messiah (Berger 2008:28).

An article in 2004 by Yair Sheleg, in the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, written less than a month before the tenth anniversary of Schneerson’s death, reveals that the divide between the pro-messianists (which he refers to as the messianists), and the anti-messianists had grown more complex by 2004. Sheleg describes how, in 2004, the Israeli-based Chabad messianists had organised a mass celebration of the Rebbe’s birthday (in April, 2004) at the sports stadium at Yad Eliahu, as well as a massive pro-messiah publicity campaign.

The publicity campaign consisted of signs on buses all over Israel that implored the public to dial a certain phone number so that they could receive a blessing from Rebbe Schneerson. The local Chabad (which, according to Sheleg, was anti-messianist), took umbrage at this campaign, as did the New York-based international Chabad establishment (also anti-messianist), and both groups requested that the Hassidic beit din (Jewish rabbinical court) order the messianists to stop their bus campaign. The Chabad youth organisation also asked the Haifa district court (as the instigator of the bus campaign, Yaron Bar Zohar, resided in Haifa) to order the messianists to honour the ruling of the Hassidic beit din and to desist from running their pro-messiah bus campaign. The Haifa court, however, refused to do so on the basis that it could not compel the messianists to obey a voluntary beit din, whose authority the Haifa court does not recognise.

Sheleg points out that the 2004 Israeli bus campaign rekindled the flames of the bitter running battle between the two groups, which the messianists had tried to dampen since the Rebbe’s death, by isolating the messianists. Sheleg explains that the main

---

155 Article accessed online June 6, 2009.
156 Mr Yair Sheleg is currently a researcher at the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), exploring issues of religion and state, specifically, the evacuation of Jewish settlements and the issue of non-Jewish immigration. He also writes for the Israeli daily newspaper Ha’aretz. Mr. Sheleg has published numerous articles and several books including: The New Religious Jews: Recent Developments among Observant Jews in Israel (Keter Publishing, 2000), and The Social and Political Ramifications of Evacuating Settlements in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (Israel Democracy Institute, 2004).
body of Chabad (the so-called anti-messianists) had achieved this by literally ignoring the messianists and by keeping them away from any jobs within the establishment. All this was done in a very quiet and understated manner in an attempt not to upset the same large majority who support the Rebbe’s messiahship.

Although the anti-messianists’ tactic had calmed the situation, it had also obliged the messianists to set up their own independent networks and organisations, and Sheleg points out that at the time of writing his article (in 2004), that of the six Chabad yeshivot in Israel, only one in Safed was an openly messianist yeshiva. Sheleg spoke to one of the leaders of the messianists, Rabbi Zimon Tzik, the director of Chabad House, in Bat Yam. Rabbi Tzik is one of the older converts to Chabad (from the early 1970s) and is the founder of a messianist newspaper set up during the Rebbe’s lifetime, called the Iton Haguela (“The Newspaper of Redemption”). He is also responsible for starting the weekly Torah portion newsletter, Sichat Haguela.

Rabbi Tzik told Sheleg that the messianists continue to believe that the Rebbe did not die, and explained their belief (using the Moses metaphor once again) as follows:

We don’t talk about his death, nor about his histalkut [‘departure’ – the term used by other Hasidim, a common religious term to describe the death of a tzaddik, a righteous person – Y.S.]. We believe that he is alive and well, and has only “disappeared” temporarily, and that he will reveal himself at any moment. Just as Moses disappeared for 40 days when he ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, and the delay of his return caused the Israelites to commit the sin of the Golden Calf, so we believe that the disappearance of the rebbe is also a test to see whether we will continue to adhere to his path (Sheleg 2004).

Rabbi Tzik then described how the idea of a “test” allowed the messianists to come to terms with the reality that their Rebbe who “disappeared” 10 years ago had not revealed himself as yet. Tzik did, however, concede to Sheleg that the longer people have to wait for the Rebbe to reveal himself, “the more doubts will arise regarding the assumption of messianism” which is why Rabbi Tzik explains that he “directs the answer on this issue to God: ‘That’s exactly the reason why we turn to God and implore: We did everything we could, now do your part and ‘reveal’ the rebbe.’” And, Sheleg affirms that the messianists are literally “demanding” that God reveal their Rebbe once more.

Sheleg draws attention to the way a messianist extremist, Meir Baranes, used this “demand tactic” in the print media in Israel. Baranes placed advertisements in the
Israeli papers that literally addressed God and demanded the Rebbe’s revelation. Meir Baranes also organised a street demonstration where the demonstrators demanded that God reveal their Rebbe once again. Baranes’ spokesman, Brod, told Sheleg that “they accept the fact that the rebbe died, ‘but they believe, as is written in the sources regarding the Messiah, that he will be the first to return to life when the dead are resurrected.’”

The similarity between Chabad’s messianists and Christians, who both believe in a messiah who has already appeared, then died, and who will appear again, does not trouble Rabbi Tzik at all. Tzik told Sheleg that “Judaism came before Christianity. So if Christianity has elements that were influenced by Judaism, do I have to reject my belief because of that? It’s exactly as though someone were to say that we should eliminate the prostrations during the Yom Kippur prayer, because it is reminiscent of the bowing by Muslims at their prayer.”

Sheleg notes that the followers of Chabad are in a quandary over the death of Rebbe Schneerson, a man whom they all regarded as their Messiah during his lifetime. He also notes that the late Rebbe himself is also partly responsible for the dilemma as Schneerson is on record for encouraging a belief in his messiahship, especially in his later years.

A decade after the Rebbe’s death, the anti-messianists’ focus was still directed at opposing the messianists’ idea that the Rebbe had not died and they were (still) striving to prevent the messianists from presenting the Rebbe as the Messiah. Sheleg explains that a small group of brave and outspoken anti-messianists were using a specific Midrash157 in their attempt to prove that the deceased Rebbe Schneerson was not the Messiah. The Midrash concerned states that “in every generation there is a person who is capable of being revealed as the Messiah, but only if the generation deserves it and God is willing does that same person realize his potential. Those people will therefore say that in his lifetime, they really did see the rebbe as ‘the Messiah of our generation’ – i.e., that he was the one with messianic potential in our generation, but with his death, it turned out that he hadn’t realized his potential”.

157 A homiletic method of biblical exegesis.
Sheleg notes that the Rebbe’s death did not appear to have had a negative impact on the Chabad movement by 2004. The movement was still flourishing, despite the fact that it was not running the same large campaigns and programs as it had done while Schneerson had been its leader. Brod pointed out the movement’s continuing success could, however, be seen in Chabad’s annual shluchim (i.e., their emissaries who go out to proselytise on Chabad’s behalf) conference, which is held each year in November, in New York. By 2004, the number of shluchim had more than doubled since 1994, and Brod estimated that there were more than 4,000 shluchim worldwide.

Sheleg does, however, admit that the overall picture in relation to Chabad, and to the messianic belief within Chabad, is far more complicated. He explains that this is primarily due to the fact that, although mainstream Chabad establishments claim to be anti-messianist in nature, the extended movement, which consists mainly of the new converts (i.e., the ba’alei teshuvah) to the movement, is primarily a messianist movement. This observation ties in with Berger’s observation, above, as well as with Szubin’s observations (below) (2000:222) about how the bulk of the new converts/ba’alei teshuvah are not only the majority of messianists within Chabad today, but are the driving force within Chabad as well.

3.10.1 What is driving modern-day Chabad messianism?

Scholars have offered two reasons for Chabad’s current impassioned messianism. They include: a theological explanation, and an apocalyptic event explanation (Szubin 2000:220-221).

The theological explanation states that the seeds of intense messianism were part of early hassidic teaching that lay dormant until Schneerson became the Rebbe. Scholars have identified the kabbalah’s mystical texts that were used to form the basis of hassidic theology, and Ba’al Shem Tov’s visions, as the principal sources for the messianic strain within Chabad. Szubin does, however, point out that the theological answer is far from adequate. The theological explanation fails, firstly, to explain why these theological messianic seeds only came to fruition under Schneerson in the latter part of the 20th century; secondly, although Szubin does concede that a) this explanation may explain why these texts are used to account for messianism in Chabad, and b) that these texts do provide inspiration for the eschatological claims of present-day Chabad messianists. He rightly points out that these texts “cannot alone
account for the fierce millenarianism which has engulfed the Chabad movement in the last decade” (which would be the 1990s) (Szubin 2000:220,221).

The apocalyptic event explanation refers to the unfortunate, important or apocalyptic events that have befallen the Jews in the last century. They include the emergence of Zionism, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. These events (as well as others, such as those listed in Chabad’s New York Times, join-the-dot, Mashiach campaign), have all allowed Chabad to draw the inescapable conclusion that redemption is imminent. This explanation seems feasible especially when it allowed Rabbi Yosef Yitzcoh Schneerson to equate the horrors of the Holocaust with the chevlei moshiach (i.e., the “pangs of the messiah”), which is a time of terrible suffering that precedes the redemption and the end of days. Rabbi Yosef Yitzcoh Schneerson’s equation was accepted by Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who often quoted his father-in-law as proof that the redemption was imminent.

The apocalyptic explanation is, however, still unsatisfactory as it does not explain two important facts, namely

- Why did Chabad wait for forty years before embracing its millenarian position?
- That the most ardent messianists in the 1980s who were the most enthusiastic proponents of the messianic focus, were the youth in Chabad and not the generation who had experienced and/or who remembered the chevlei moshiach (Szubin 2000:221).

The shortfalls in the above explanations have therefore prompted scholars to look for different reasons for the messianic focus within Chabad, and the main focus of this search has recently fallen on the new converts, or ba’alei teshuvah, as they are known within Chabad.

3.10.2 The Ba’alei Teshuvah: The key proponents of messianism within Chabad

Prof. Menahem Friedman of the sociology department at Bar-Ilan University recognised the role of the ba’alei teshuvah, as the driving force of the messianists group within Chabad in his 2004 interview with Sheleg in Ha’aretz. Friedman
explained that the “fire” of the great enthusiasm of the Chabad movement came from the messianists, and predicted that the name “Chabad” would eventually, over time, become identified with the messianists.

Szubin agrees that the *ba’alei teshuvah* are the main messianists within Chabad, but he also believes that the great influx of *ba’alei teshuvah* into Chabad in the 1970s and 1980s is one of the main factors that sparked the wave of intense messianism that burst forth in Chabad in the late 1980s and early 1990s (2000:222). Szubin offers three new explanations for the ardent messianism of the *ba’alei teshuvah*. They are:

- The messianists’ present-time world-view that allows them to see themselves as the most spiritually significant generation in time. While traditional religions’ world-view focuses on the past and the future, the Messianists’ world-view focuses instead on the present-time, and appeals to converts such as the *ba’alei teshuvah* as it accurately depicts religious reality as they experience it. For the *ba’alei teshuvah* come to religion through “thoughts, emotions, and inspirations that they personally experienced within their own lifetimes” and not through the mediums of

---

158 Szubin explains that traditional non-millenarian monotheists “glorify the distant past as a time of closeness between God and humankind and rely upon transmitted texts of such earlier times as the source for all religious authority. They walk forward in time with their eyes cast backwards to the time of the prophets, revelations, and miracles. The present is seen as a pale reflection of days gone by, as a time of divine reserve, if not impassivity, and degradation. As for the future, it is hoped that that it will again be an age of renewed intimacy between God and humankind, when the utopian prophecies of old will be realized. The task of the present generation, living in a time of modest spirituality, is to steadfastly endure by transmitting the teachings of the previous generation to the present one. In visual terms, the non-millenarian movement sits in a valley between two spiritual peaks of the distant past and the future” (Szubin 2000:224).

159 The millenarian movement acknowledges that the past was a time of religious genesis, however, “it asserts that time has borne spiritual ascendance rather than alienation. With each successive generation, humankind has come closer to apprehending the nature of the divine and realizing the ultimate goals of history. The force of the millenarian outlook does not derive merely from a sense of spiritual progress. Its focus is an expectation of imminent spiritual climax. *Now* is the time foreseen in the end-time prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel – eschatology and reality will soon become one. It is a spiritually narcissistic world view, declaring that the present generation represents the realization of all history” (Szubin 2000:224). For millenarians, “the present time is raised to the peak of the curve of spiritual history”, while “the past is concurrently lowered and the future is truncated, leaving a curve that steadily climbs, attains its zenith, and proceeds no more”. Thus millenarians conceive of the future only in the short term – as a glorious promise waiting to be realized by those currently alive and enjoyed by them forever after. If millenarian believers envision a distant future it is not a future destined for their descendants but for their own generation. “For our generation is the last generation of the exile and the first generation of the redemption. And, this, our generation, is entering the time of the redemption, into eternal life without interruption”. Szubin calls this radical conception of time “present orientation” and refers to religious movements, such as Chabad, who manifest this concept of time as “present oriented” movements (Szubin 2000:225).
tradition, transmission and continuity. This means that their experience of religion is one of an isolated moment in time that has no historical prologue. This allows the ba’alei teshuvah to gravitate towards the messianic present-time world-view, which in turn reinforces their perception, namely, that they, the present generation, are the most spiritually significant generation in time. This perception then allows them to literally downplay the importance of “days gone by” (Szubin 2000:225). Consequently, new converts to a messianic-oriented movement, such as Chabad’s ba’alei teshuvah, will generally embrace messianism, “which subjugates the past and future eras in favour of the all important present” (Szubin 2000:226)

- Embracing messianism in their desire for imminent change in their generation. New converts tend to see the world, especially the spirit world, in simple “right” and “wrong” terms, which allows them to be drawn to activist ideologies that promise revolutionary upheavals, as opposed to gradual change. Consequently, any doctrine of messianism and apocalyptism that predicts the sudden, and possibly violent takeover of human chaos by divine order, has great appeal for any converts, including Chabad’s ba’alei teshuvah (Szubin 2000:222, 223).

- The adoption and utilisation of messianism in their desire to overcome the religious traditions and religious hierarchies that discriminate against religious converts and oppress them, causing anxiety and distress. This explanation certainly applies to the ba’alei teshuvah who discover that admission to the Chabad movement does not mean that they are “completely inside.” Upon their initial conversion process, the ba’alei teshuvah are always made to feel welcome, and receive nothing but encouragement. However, once they become members, they discover that “there are hierarchies within the faithful of the Lord, and chosen people among the chosen” (Szubin 2000:226,227).

The marginalisation of the ba’alei teshuvah is marked and problematic in Chabad, where all ba’alei teshuvah automatically belong to a “distinct and marginalized caste.” The marginal status of the ba’alei teshuvah was also recognised by the late Rebbe Schneerson, who described the ba’alei teshuvah as people of the lowest status, in a
public lecture in 1981 (Szubin 2000:227). The ba’alei teshuvah are not allowed to rise above certain positions within the community. For example, they are encouraged to become teachers, but they are not allowed to become school directors or leaders of the community. The ba’alei teshuvah are only allowed to marry other ba’alei teshuvah, and not people who were raised as Lubavitch. A marriage between ba’alei teshuvah and a founder members’ offspring is not only forbidden, but also seen as harmful to both parties (Szubin 2000:227).

The only way for converts to do away with the barriers that prevent their full integration is “not to step outside the movement but to transform the movement from within.” It is therefore in the quest of such transformation that the Chabad converts turn to millenarian ideology, as

[t]he revolutionary character of millenarianism offers new religious immigrants the opportunity to dismantle the elitist hierarchy that marginalizes them and replace it with a messianic culture that is far more egalitarian (Szubin 2000:230).

The ba’alei teshuvah move towards a millenarian worldview not only lowers but also completely removes the traditional markers that separate them from the parent body. Their ardent messianism also allows them to disparage their ignorance of previous Chabad Rebbes’ teachings and of the history of their movement, and to proclaim instead the supreme importance of the new. In this instance, their focus falls on Rebbe Schneerson’s speeches and teachings alone (Szubin 2000:231).

The ba’alei teshuvah’s focus on messianism also shaped Chabad’s corpus over the last few years, which is why it is more common today to find Chabad yeshiva students studying Inyanei De-gulah (i.e., Issues pertaining to the Redemption, a Chabad publication), than the Bible, Talmud, kabbalah or halakha (codes of Jewish Law) (Szubin 2000:231,232).

---

160 The Rebbe’s lecture dealt with the teachings of the Alter Rebbe and its influence on all Jews, from the “heads of tribes”, to the “water drawers”; which Schneerson linked to: a) the righteous Tzaddikim (the heads of tribes), and b) the ba’alei teshuvah/the penitents (the water drawers). This clearly indicated that he also recognised that the ba’alei teshuvah were of the lowest status. Szubin points out that the Chabad Hassidim are acutely aware of these caste divides, and that they often refer to the ba’alei teshuvah as “new” – even ten years after their absorption into the movement (2000:227).

161 Chabad published this series of books in the last decade. They are primarily compilations of Jewish texts on the eschaton and specific prescriptions on how to accelerate its coming (Szubin 2000:232).
Schneerson’s insistence that the present generation’s most important task was to hasten the coming of the messiah, plus Chabad’s present-time messianic focus shaped the converts’ code of practice (2000:232). Schneerson did not however absolve his followers from observing the mitzvoth (Jewish religious Law) and obligations of mainstream Orthodoxy, but he was nevertheless specific that his followers’ free energies should be devoted to hastening the redemption, and that their main duty was

[*] to learn and teach issues concerning the Messiah and the redemption. To live the days of the Messiah, and to spread the news of the coming redemption across the entire world. It is simple to approach another Jew and to say to him, “Jew, wake up! Presently the King Moshiach is coming” (Szubin 2000:232).

Consequently, no Chabad follower, including the ba’alei teshuvah, can be taken to task for ardently spreading the messianic call to arms at the expense of neglecting more demanding traditional pursuits, such as Torah study, as Chabad’s messianic endeavour was initially endorsed by Rebbe Schneerson himself (Szubin 2000:233).

Rebbe Schneerson also stated that fundamental requirements of Hassidic life, namely study, prayer, and communal living, had changed to spreading the news of the redemption (Szubin 2000:234). The result was that Chabad publications began to print lists of messianic-focused activities that anyone could use to recognise Rebbe Schneerson’s followers. What was notable about these activities was the fact that any member of Chabad, even the most recent ba’alei teshuvah, could perform them. The messianic-focused activities include some of the following:

- Learning Torah, specifically issues pertaining to the Moshiach and the redemption;
- Charity, about which it is said, “great is charity that hastens the redemption”;
- Love of Israel, baseless love, to love every Jew because he is a Jew;
- Anticipation of the redemption and prayer to the Master of the Universe: “Until when? We want Moshiach now!”;
- Great Joy, due to the fact that we are now standing on the brink of redemption;
- The proclamation that reveals the realities of the King Moshiach, and activates the redemption: “Long live our Master, our Teacher, and our
These lists are important as they reveal the extent to which Chabad’s previous demands of penitence, prayer and study, have been replaced by charity, love, anticipation, joy and, of course, by messianic proclamation. The list also indicates that these new traits are to be seen as the new markers of the righteous Chabad Hassid, and most importantly for the convert, these new traits and their praxis are such, that they could never hinder the ba’alei teshuvah in their quest to seek approval from the main body. Chabad’s messianism and its new markers of a righteous Hassid has thus enabled the acculturation of the ba’alei teshuvah by moving Chabad’s emphasis from praxis to belief (Szubin 2000:234).

The messianic-focused ba’alei teshuvah have therefore altered the Chabad movement “from an elitist sect that emphasized the importance of erudition – wisdom, understanding, and knowledge – to a far more egalitarian movement which places more value on millenarian zeal and public declarations that the Rebbe is the Messiah” (Szubin 2000:236).

3.10.3 The significance of Chabad’s rejection of its traditional markers

Chabad’s messianic-driven shift in markers that are used to identify a righteous Chabad member is of value to this thesis, particularly to the concerns listed in the aims of this thesis, and are noted below. This shift in markers is also significant because when Chabad’s rejection of traditional markers (described above) is taken to the extreme, that is, “whereby observance of traditional law is not only superseded in importance but entirely jettisoned as inappropriate to the current messianic age”, then it will eventually result in antinomianism (Szubin 2000:235). This was exactly the situation that occurred within the Sabbatian (and Frankist) movement, when the leaders stated that “Torah law was no longer binding in the age of final redemption” (Szubin 2000:235), and it is also what happened when the early founders of Christianity rejected the observance of Torah laws, and declared that the Mosaic law was literally “nailed to the cross” (Szubin 2000:235).

Although Chabad’s current shift from praxis to belief has not moved it into the antinomian arena as yet (in the sense that it still stands within the limits of Jewish orthodoxy), Chabad’s rhetoric does contain and reflect clear antinomian elements and
tendencies. An allegorical story from a pro-messianist Chabad publication provides us with a good example of the way Chabad’s rhetoric reflects antinomian elements. Szubin describes the story, “To Jump on the Train of the Redemption”, as follows:

The story describes a group of Jewish refugees in wartime Russia who stood for days on a train platform hoping to catch a train travelling away from the war-zone. As days passed without a train in sight, the refugees began to unpack their suitcases and set up a few of their belongings on the platform. One day without warning, the train pulled in. Some threw their belongings into the train and quickly boarded, but others wanted to repack their suitcases neatly and properly. Before they knew it, the whistle had sounded and the train had pulled away, leaving them stranded with all of their suitcases. The moral of the story is then provided:

Each of us has many “packages” that we need: “packages’ of Torah study, of the observances of the commandments that are between man and God, and those that are interpersonal, of all sorts of good and true things that we truly cannot get along without, and that indeed work to bring the complete redemption; but it is sometimes possible to “get stuck” with all the “packages” and to be left outside “the train of the redemption.”

The allegory concludes:

“The only task remains,” says the Rebbe, King Moshiach, “is to welcome the face of our righteous Messiah,” and all of the work in Torah and commandments needs to be oriented towards this goal. If people occupy themselves only with “the packages” (that are indeed essential and necessary) and “forget” about the need “to board the train of the redemption,” they might, heaven forbid, “be left behind” and miss the “train” (Szubin 2000:235).

Szubin draws attention to the way the author of the story has used quotation marks whenever the story borders on the heretical with its antinomian suggestion that the observance of traditional commandments might interfere with one being redeemed. The author’s use of quotation marks reveals the caution with which this subject is treated, even in an allegorical story like this, and indicates that there is an understanding that any increase in antinomianism could well lead to a clash between Chabad traditionalists and messianists in the future (2002:235).

162 The publication is Rabbi Tzik’s weekly Torah portion newsletter Sichat Ha-guelah. The article is “Ha-agudah le-ma’an Ha-guelah” (i.e. “To Jump on the Train of the Redemption”) (September 15, 1995) (Szubin 2000:235).
3.10.4 Chabad Today

Although the intellectual endeavours and mega-structures of Chabad scholarship is necessary to establish the legitimacy of Chabad, the real driving force of faith in the current organisation is based instead on their belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship. Rebbe Schneerson’s pro-messianic followers concede that their movement would not be the same if they acknowledged the death of their Rebbe. A French Chabad publication has confirmed this view and states that the Rebbe’s followers have candidly affirmed “that without the Rebbe life would be bereft of meaning” (Berger 2008:26).

Chabad’s extreme messianic position and beliefs are also so strange and unfamiliar to outsiders, that most people, not only non-Jews, but especially the Jewish community outside Chabad, such as the general Jewish community, and most notably Orthodox Jewry, just cannot bring themselves to see the truth about Chabad’s current messianic beliefs. Berger (2008:26-27) elucidates as follows:

The dominant elements among the Hasidim in the major Lubavitch population centers of Crown heights in Brooklyn and Kfar Chabad in Israel – perfectly normal people representing a highly successful, very important Jewish movement – believe that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson will return from the dead (or from his place of concealment) and lead the world to redemption. (Berger 2008:26).

Chabad’s belief in their Rebbe’s messiahship has also never been spoken in secret, in fact, it is certainly the most revealed secret of the last decade and it is regularly confirmed in public by notable Chabad rabbis in interviews and articles163. They include:

- Rabbi Halperin (from K’hilas Chabad, Rehovot), who declared that there was no point in concealing their belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship as “everyone knows that all the Lubavitch Chassidim, despite the differing opinions, believe that the Rebbe is Melech HaMoshiach” (i.e., the King Messiah) (Berger 2009:xxxv; Raynitz 2003).

163 Kohanzad also points out that Rabbi Rappaport’s response to David Berger, where Rappaport appears “to deny the existence of any statement by the Rebbe himself affirming his own messianic potential”, is “totally indefensible and massively refuted” by the evidence that Kohanzad has collated and listed in his thesis. He also points out that Rappaport’s response “is clearly motivated by apologetic, and is a dubious application of the Talmudic principle of dissembling towards ones enemy ‘for the sake of peace’” (Kohanzad 2006:53-54).
Rabbi Israel Handel (rabbi of Lubavitch community in Migdal Ha’emeck), who wrote in the *Hama’ayan Journal* that “all Chabad Hassidim believe that the Lubavitcher Rebbe will arise at the resurrection and be the King Messiah” (Berger 2008:xxxv).

Chabad’s inclination towards messianism can be traced back to the eighteenth century when the Ba’al Shem Tov stated that he had assurance from the Messiah himself that the end would come “when Hassidic teachings spread”. Over time this messianic mission and the leadership role that comes with this assurance, was directly channelled into the Chabad rabbi lineage, creating the Chabad presumption that the Messiah will therefore be a Lubavitcher Rebbe “of whichever generation merits the redemption” (Berger 2008:124-125).

It is thus Chabad’s understanding and perception of messianism that permits the present-day messianists’ production of what they regard as a significant set of interlocking claims that they use to sustain their belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship. This chain of interlocking claims, supporting the Rebbe’s claim to messiahship, was all spoken by the Rebbe himself and is on record. The chain begins with the Rebbe’s deceased father-in-law,

whose soul he [i.e. the Rebbe] is believed to have shared and who consequently serves as a surrogate or code for the Rabbi Menachem Mendel himself, is the prince (nasi) of this generation and will redeem us. The prince of this generation is the Messiah of this generation. This is the generation of the redemption. The metaphysical process of separating the sparks of holiness from the domain of evil has been completed. The Messiah has already been revealed; all that is necessary is to greet him. The Messiah is coming right away. “The time of your Redemption has arrived.” The final Temple will descend from heaven to a spot in Crown Heights adjoining 770 Eastern Parkway, and only then will the two buildings be transferred to Jerusalem. The Messiah’s name is Menachem (Berger 2008:125).

It is therefore hardly surprising to learn that the Chabad messianists now control the main synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway, and that they have a constant video stream on the web of “the invisible Rebbe walking to his empty chair, reciting the blessing

164 These claims can be read in Wolpe’s *The Last Trial* (1994), and the details regarding the final Temple can be read in R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s “Pamphlet on the Small Temple, The House of our Rabbi in Babylonia” (Berger 2008:125).

165 The name Menachem means “consoler” and is one of several names listed for the Messiah in *Sanhedrin 98b* (Berger 2008:125).

over the new moon, and distributing wine to his Hassidim” (Berger 2008:xxxviii). This video indicates that Chabad currently views the main synagogue at the Lubavitch headquarters as a sanctuary in which God is worshipped through his manifestation in an invisible human being. This perception is important to the first proposal of this thesis (namely that Chabad is akin to Christianity), as this behaviour is precisely what occurs in Christian sanctuaries, where Jews are not meant to go (Berger 2008:xxxviii).

Sadka’s conversation with Chabad youth in February 2007, at the Chabad Yeshiva in Safed, is also very revealing. Below is an excerpt from his interview in the article “The Lubavitcher Rebbe as God” in Ha’aretz:

Why do they think that Schneerson is alive? “The Rebbe was no normal human being,” is the response. He was a polymath who “studied under Einstein in Berlin” before “inventing the atom bomb”.

How do they view the connection between Schneerson and God? “The Rebbe is not something different from God – the Rebbe is a part of God,” says a British teenaged student.

Does this not ‘idolize’ Schneerson, in the literal sense? “We cannot connect to God directly – we need the Rebbe to take our prayers from here to there and to help us in this world. We are told by our rabbis that a great man is like God and the Rebbe was the greatest man ever. That is how we know he is the messiah, because how could life continue without him? No existence is possible without the Rebbe.”

Would they go so far as to describe the Rebbe and God as one and the same, as some extreme Messianists have done? “No, some people have gone too far and described the Rebbe as the creator”.

“They say that God was born in 1902 and is now 105 years old. You can pray to the Rebbe and he will answer, and he was around since the beginning of time. But you must be careful to pray only to the Rebbe as a spiritual entity and not the body that was born in 1902”.

Does the Rebbe have a will of his own? What if the Rebbe and God disagree? “That is a ridiculous question! They are not separate in any way”.

So the Rebbe is a part of God. “Yes, but it is more complex than that. There is no clear place where the Rebbe ends and God begins”.

Does that mean the Rebbe is infinite omnipotent and omniscient? “Yes of course,” an Argentine student says in Hebrew. “God chose to imbue this world with life through a body. So that’s how we know the Rebbe can’t have died, and that his actual physical body must be alive. The Rebbe is the conjunction of God and human. The Rebbe is God, but he is also physical” (Sadka 2007).

Berger notes that it is “[w]ith rare, courageous exceptions, the Hassidim who do not believe this, among them some impressive intellectuals and communal leaders, remain

---

167 Article accessed online at Ha’aretz.com.
publicly silent in the face of social pressures that are very difficult to resist” (Berger 2008:26).

This assessment of Chabad as a messianic-focused movement is also borne out by two recent articles that reveal the followers’ messianic inclination. The first article comes from NY1/24 Hour Local News, dated July 14, 2009. The article “Tens of Thousands Mark Anniversary of Rabbi’s Death” by Ty Milburn, reads as follows:

Tens of thousands of people filtered into a Queens cemetery Wednesday night to honor a former leader of the Jewish community. NY1’s Ty Chandler filed the following report from Cambria Heights:

It’s been 15 years since Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson died, but those paying tribute Wednesday night said the man who became known as “the Rebbe” left behind a legacy that is everlasting.

“It’s special to us, he’s special to us,” said one young mourner. “And he died, so we come here to pray to him”.

“The Rebbe really changed the face of Judaism, post-Holocaust Judaism, to a message of hope,” explained Rabbi Motti Seligson of Chabad.org. “And the 50,000 people that come here every year, is really a tribute to that”.

Observances of the anniversary of his death began at sundown, but visitors began to file into his final resting place long before that. Notes to the Rebbe were everywhere from everywhere, each containing a message for him or a request for blessings.

“I’m carrying from Thailand hundreds of requests from members of our community who have been touched by our work and asked when I visit the resting place of the Rebbe if I would deposit their names,” said another mourner.

The Rebbe served as spiritual leader of the Chabad Lubavitch movement in Crown Heights.

“I still remember getting a nickel one night from the Rebbe and he told me to take it and put it inside the charity box,” said a third mourner.

But his teachings of good will and charity went much further than Brooklyn, with a network today of more than 4,000 emissaries in 74 countries.

“The 50,000 people who show up here and the 100,000 messages sent via fax or email speak to the inspiration that people get from the Rebbe’s teachings and his life,” said Rabbi Seligson. “And that continues still today and, in fact, is increasing”.

The lines looped around Montefiore Cemetery, with some waiting more than three hours just for a few moments at the Rebbe’s grave site. It may be quick, but many find it moving.

“Before that, I was very heavy,” said a mourner. “After that, I am very light, like everything is off my shoulders”.

“I go out feeling heavier,” said another “I go out feeling like I haven’t done enough this past year, and this year I need to have more of an impact with those I come in contact with, starting with myself”.

184
People of all faiths are expected to visit the Rebbe until sundown Thursday. Beyond that, the hundreds of thousands of letters, emails, and faxes sent by those who could not be here will also be placed at the grave site.

The second paragraph of the article, above, clearly illustrates that the Rebbe’s followers’ belief about their late Rebbe, as well as the difficulty that Jews not affiliated to Chabad have with Chabad, namely, that they are literally praying to their Rebbe, who is a dead man, and not to God, which in Judaism is an act that qualifies as idolatry (i.e., avodah zarah\textsuperscript{168}).

This subtle move towards Chabad’s deification of the late Rebbe is very significant to this thesis. Chabad’s deification of their Rebbe is directly linked to two key ideas in the thesis, firstly, that messianic-focused Chabad could be a new emerging religion, and secondly that Chabad appear to be following (albeit unconsciously) the same path as the early Christians did when they began to deify Jesus, and move away from mainline Judaism.

The Chabad custom of visiting/making pilgrimage to the Rebbe’s grave also has other implications that need to be noted. Berger points out that Chabad’s focus on the Rebbe’s grave is also linked to Chabad’s argument that “despite the movement’s doctrine that there must be a physical prince (nasi) of any given generation residing in a specific location, we are living in unusual times, so that the prince can be spiritual. At the same time, he is indeed present in a specific location, to wit, the gravesite (ohel) in Old Montefiore Cemetery. In other words, it is the position of Lubavitch moderates that this generation is being governed from the site of the Rebbe’s grave in Queens, New York” (Berger 2008:xxxii).

\textsuperscript{168} Student rightly notes that the accusation of heresy seems quaint by today’s standards as people living in open societies agree “that every person has the right to choose what he believes” (2002:92). However, he does point out that if a person “chooses to believe in a heresy then he will be removing himself from the community of believing Jews” hence “an apikorus” (i.e., a heretic), is someone who rejects a fundamental belief of Judaism. Should an outwardly observant Jew reject such a belief, as is his legal right in a free country, then he is no longer in the community of believers. He is no longer part of Orthodox Jewry (2002:92). To this end, Student notes that heresy (in Judaism) “is not merely a matter of semantics and labels” and that there are serious halakhic consequences. For example, an apikorus is not a valid witness for any halakhic testimony, such as weddings or divorces, thus a get (a bill of divorce issued by a Jewish rabbinic court), is invalid if signed by an apikorus, so the couple is still regarded as married, and any subsequent “marriages” are deemed adulterous (2002:93).
The second article is from the online Chabad Lubavitch Global Network News. The article, “In Conversation with Rabbi Adin Even Yisrael Steinsaltz” is a transcript of an online video interview conducted by Baila Olidort, the editor of Lubavitch.com – on June 25, 2009. The section of the transcript, where Rabbi Steinsaltz speaks about Schneerson clearly reveals Chabad’s belief about the divinity of their Rebbe:

Baila Olidort: In the last fifteen years since that day in June 1994, now referred to as Gimmel Tammuz, so much has been written about the Rebbe, his life as an individual, as a leader, and his legacy. What happens to the Rebbe over time?

Rabbi Steinsaltz: It’s a complex thing. The Rebbe is unlike so many heroes whose biographies you can’t sell a year after they’ve died. The Rebbe remains a very active figure even though he doesn’t move with us in this world.

When the Rebbe was alive, he was not just a spiritual leader; he was in many ways a king, a commander of an army, and he made people move.

Now he is becoming spiritualized, he is becoming a force, a figure like Elijah the prophet.

We’re not really uncovering new stories or details or parts of his life. Instead, what appears is a picture of an individual who is almost a supernatural being.

The Rebbe is becoming very much – and perhaps this is not the right term – a mythical figure. The Baal Shem Tov, for example is now a power of nature. And the Rebbe is becoming like that.

This section of the interview is informative and is vital to this thesis as it is directly connected to this thesis’ proposal that we could be witnessing the emergence of a new religion, namely the modern-day messianic-focused Chabad. This possibility certainly begins to emerge when Rabbi Steinsaltz compares the late Rebbe to Elijah, as Steinsaltz’ comparison appears to imply that the late Rebbe Schneerson, like Elijah, did not die in the literal sense; hence the Rebbe is gradually being perceived as a super-natural (possibly divine) being. This understanding then allows Chabad to perceive the Rebbe as one who came (and who will come again) from the sacred/transcendental realm originally, as opposed to the Rebbe being an ordinary human being who came from the human/profane realm. These ideas, as noted above, are certainly not part of mainstream Judaism and appear to indicate that new, Christian-like religious concepts seem to be developing and coalescing within the Chabad arena, literally in the present time.

169Rabbi Steinsaltz is a noted rabbi, scholar, philosopher, social critic and author. He is best known for his translation of the Talmud into Hebrew, French, Russian, and Spanish. He has also translated the primary source text of Chabad, the Tanya into English. In 1988, he was awarded the Israel Prize, which is Israel’s highest honour for Jewish studies. See Olidort (2009).
The issue of the Rebbe’s deification (avodah zarah), is also discussed by Berger, who points out that this process can clearly be seen in the choice of terms that the Rebbe’s followers used to describe him. The first term under discussion is atzmut einsof (i.e., Essence of the Infinite), which was initially used for a short period of time while the Rebbe was alive. Student points out that those who believe that the Rebbe is the literal essence of God contradict the second and third principles of Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles (2002:100). Berger notes that this term, atzmut einsof, and all it implies, reveals that the Rebbe’s followers do believe that their Rebbe is the literal essence of God, and he notes that the use of this term has resurfaced since the Rebbe’s death. Berger also draws attention to the dangers of the regular use of this term and its ability to inculcate a belief in a divine Rebbe (2008:51). He points out that there are Chabad members, that include Lubavitch staff members from Lubavitch institutions inside the USA, who speak of, and tell their children, that the Rebbe is the Ribbono shel Olam (i.e., the Master of the Universe), which is another term that bestows divine identity (Berger 2008:52).

During the Rebbe’s lifetime, his followers are also on record for the way they used a well-known and favoured midrash (i.e., a rabbinic homily) of medieval Christian polemicists that describes “the Messiah as greater than Moses and the ministering angels”, while others occasionally described him as “the essence of the Infinite in physical garb” (Berger 2008:30). This belief has also survived the Rebbe’s passing and it is common for the Rebbe’s followers to point out that their Rebbe is responsible for

---

170 Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles of faith are regarded as the classic formulation of the fundamental beliefs of Judaism and have been widely accepted as authoritative (Student 2002:94).

Maimonides’ second principle reads as follows: “The second principle is the unity of God, may he be exalted. In other words, to believe that this Being, which is the cause of all, is one. This does not mean one as in one of a pair nor like a species nor one as is in the object that is made up of many elements nor a single simple object which is infinitely divisible. Rather, He, may he be exalted, is a unity unlike any other possible unity. This principle is indicated by the verse ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one’ (D’varim/ Deuteronomy 6:4). Hence, belief that God is in any way divisible, is contrary to this principle” (Student 2002:94).

Maimonides third principle reads as follows: “The third principle is that He is not physical. This means to believe that the One whom we have mentioned is not a body nor a force within a body. The characteristics of physical bodies such as movement and rest cannot be a part of His nature nor can they happen to Him. Therefore the Sages of blessed memory denied to him the concepts of combination and separation in saying, ‘There is no sitting, nor standing, nor shoulder, nor fatigue’ … This third principle is indicated by the verse ‘For you did not see any form’ (D’varim 4:15), in other words, you did not perceive Him as being an entity with a form, because as we mentioned, He is not physical and his power is not physical” (Student 2002:95).

Student therefore points out that the third principle clearly states that “any claim that God has a body or can appear as a body is clearly beyond the pale of Judaism” (2002:95).
disseminating more Torah than Moses, which denotes that they perceive Schneerson as being, a) their Messiah, and b) greater than Moses (Berger 2008:30).

3.10.5 Chabad’s messianic beliefs and Maimonides’ Mishne Torah

Berger categorically states that Chabad’s belief that the Moshiach ben David (Messiah son of David) can die in the middle of an unfulfilled mission (which Chabad use to support their claim that the late Rebbe Schneerson is indeed the long awaited Jewish Messiah), is

antithetical to the deepest messianic convictions of our ancestors … There is no source in all of Jewish literature that supports it. Our ancestors rejected it in a context that often led Kidush Hashem (Martyrdom). The major halakhic sources dealing with the Messiah rejects it explicitly and firmly (Berger 2008:51). [the bold is mine]

He points out that Jewish literature, especially Jewish polemical literature, abounds with arguments that the Messiah could not have come, or for that matter, that Jesus (in most instances the two formulations appear interchangeable) could not have been the Messiah “because the prophecies of the end of days remain unfulfilled” (Berger 2008:151). He explains that, due to the fact that

the very definition of the concept of Messiah is rooted in biblical descriptions of visible, global redemption, Judaism properly recoiled from scenarios without a shred of biblical justification in which the Messiah’s mission is interrupted by death in an unredeemed world … The God of the Hebrew Bible sends the messianic king to accomplish his end, not to follow a two-part script in which the hero tragically dies and the words “to be continued” suddenly appear on the screen (Berger 2008:151).

The consistent and unfailing Jewish denial of the possibility that the Messiah could die with his mission unfulfilled has been stated by various Jewish sages, rabbis and scholars throughout the ages. Berger draws attention to a small sampling of clear relevant texts, including the important work of Maimonides on the Messiah (discussed in this section, in relation to Chabad’s use of the church censored text of the Mishne Torah as opposed to the original text). Below are two examples of Jewish writing related to the issue, as well as the work of Maimonides on the Messiah:

Midrash beresheit Rabba 98:

Our father Jacob saw Samson [in a prophetic vision] and thought that he was the King Messiah. Once he saw that he died, he said, “this one too has died. For your salvation I wait, O Lord” (Berger 2008:151).
I cannot believe in [Jesus] Messiahship, for ... the prophet said that in the time of the Messiah, ‘No longer will they need to teach one another and to say to one another, “Know the Lord”, for all of them shall know me etc.’ (Jer. 31:34). And it says, “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as waters cover the sea” (Isa.11:9). And it says, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares ... Nations shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war” (Isa. 2:4). And from the days of Jesus till today the entire world is full of pillaging and robbery ... indeed, how difficult it would be for you, my Lord the King, and for your knights, if they would never again know war. Furthermore, the prophet says concerning the Messiah, “He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth” (Isa. 11:14). The aggadah explains ... ‘If the messianic king is told, “The nation has rebelled against you”, he will say. “Let the locust come and destroy it”’ ... and this was not true of Jesus (Berger 2008:153).

Maimonides (1138-1204) Mishne Torah, Law of Kings 11:4. In the uncensored version\textsuperscript{171} of the Mishne Torah:

If a king arises from the House of David, who studies the Torah and pursues the commandments like his ancestor David in accordance with the Written and Oral Law, and he compels all Israel to follow and strengthen it and he fights the wars of the Lord – this man enjoys the presumption of being the Messiah. If he proceeds successfully, defeats all the nations surrounding him, builds the Temple in it its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, then surely he is the Messiah. But if he does not succeed to this extent, or is killed, it is evident that he is not the one whom the Torah promised; he is, rather, like all the complete and righteous kings of Israel who have died....

Jesus of Nazareth, who imagined that he would be the Messiah, [caused Israel to stumble]. But no human being can grasp the thoughts of God, for our ways are not his ways, and our thoughts are not his thoughts. In fact, all the events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite [Muhammed] who came after him were for the purpose of straightening the way for the King Messiah and preparing the entire world so that all will serve the Lord together, as it is written, ‘For then I will make the peoples pure of speech, so that they all invoke the Lord by name and serve Him with one accord’ (Zeph. 3:8). How is this so? [Because of Christianity and Islam'] the entire world has been filled with discussions of the messiah, the Torah, and the commandments. These matters have spread to the distant isles and to many benighted nations, who debate these issues and the commandments of the Torah. Some say that they were true but have been annulled in our time since they were not intended for all generations. Others say that there are hidden meanings in them so that they are not to be understood according to their plain sense; rather, the Messiah has already come and revealed their secrets. But when the King Messiah will truly arise, succeed and be exceedingly exalted, they will all repent and realize that their forefathers inherited falsehood and their prophets and ancestors misled them (Berger 2008:152). [the italics are mine]

\textsuperscript{171} Please note that the thesis has already drawn attention to the difference between the Church-censored and the uncensored versions of Maimonides’ \textit{Mishne Torah}, in Chapter 2, (Section 2.6.3.2 Maimonides’ work and the messianic ideal).
Maimonides’ text on the Messiah, above, is thus clear when it states that if a person presumed to be the Messiah dies, then that person is not the Messiah.

The thesis also draws attention to the way certain Chabad messianists use the Church-censored version of Maimonides’ *Mishne Torah*, on the Messiah, to support the Chabad messianists’ belief in the late Rebbe’s Schneerson’s messiahship. Chabad’s utilisation of Maimonides’ uncensored *Mishne Torah* to support its messianist position is clearly seen in a debate that was conducted between the messianist Chabad Rabbi Sholom Ben Kalmanson and Rabbi Yitzi Greenberg. The debate was on ‘Talkline Communications.com’, hosted by Zev Brenner, in January 2008. Shmarya Rosenberg, of FailedMessiah.com, analysed the debate. Rosenberg’s analysis of the debate is important to the first proposal of this thesis and is directly related to Berger’s evaluation of the content and different meanings that exist between the Church-censored text and the uncensored text of Maimonides’ *Mishne Torah*, above.

Rosenberg explains that Rabbi Kalmanson was incorrect when he claimed that Maimonides’ *Mishne Torah* supported his belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship. Rosenberg explains that Maimonides

---

172 Rabbi Kalmanson is the Executive Vice president, Chabad of Southern Ohio, and Spiritual Leader, Congregation Chabad. Information accessed online on June 8, 2009 at “Meet the Rabbis” http://www.chabadofh.org/page.asp?pageID=2AE7BA25-E588-4A5C-9774-3A8E9B0DE68E

173 Rabbi Greenberg is the President of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation. Greenberg also served as Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council from 2000 to 2002. He has written extensively on the theory and practice of pluralism and on the theology of Jewish-Christian relations. An ordained Orthodox rabbi, a Harvard Ph.D. and scholar, Rabbi Greenberg has been a seminal thinker in confronting the Holocaust as an historical transforming event and Israel as the Jewish assumption of power and the beginning of a third era in Jewish history. From 1974 through to 1997, he served as founding President of CLAL - The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, a pioneering institution in the development of adult and leadership education in the Jewish community and the leading organisation in intra-Jewish dialogue and the work of Jewish unity. Before CLAL was founded, he served as Rabbi of the Riverdale Jewish Center, as Associate Professor of History at Yeshiva University, and as founder, chairman and Professor in the Department of Jewish Studies of City College of the City University of New York. Information accessed online on June 8, 2009 at http://www.clal.org/clal_faculty_yg.html

174 The debate can be heard online at http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/failed_messiahcom/2008/01/rabbi-yitz-gree.html

175 Shmarya Rosenberg, is a former Chabad/Lubavitch Hasid, Baal teshuvah and a graduate of Hadar Torah. Soon after joining Chabad, he requested that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, together with Chabad, assist in an effort to rescue the small, endangered Black Jewish community of Ethiopia. Chabad’s initial reluctance to become involved and the Rebbe’s inability to even acknowledge the Ethiopians’ Jewish identity led to Rosenberg leaving Chabad. He started his blog, www.FailedMessiah.com by publishing his original letter to the Rebbe as well the Rebbe’s response, (which can be read at http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/failed_messiahcom/rabbis-ethiopian-jews.html),
did not write regarding a person thought to be the messiah that if that man dies before building the Temple, ingathering the exiles, and doing the rest of the job the messiah is supposed to do, this man is not the messiah promised by God. Rabbi Kalmanson insisted the Rambam only used the Hebrew word meaning killed. Therefore, Rabbi Kalmanson’s logic goes, the Rebbe, who died but who was not killed can still be the messiah according to the Rambam.

This is what the Rambam actually wrote:

Rambam, Yad Hazaka, Hilhot Melachim, Chapter 11, Halacha 4:

If a king will arise from the House of David who delves deeply into the study of the Torah and, like David his ancestor, observes its mitzvos as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law; if he will compel all of Israel to walk in [the way of the Torah] and repair the breaches [in its observance]; and if he will fight the wars of G-d – we may, with assurance, consider him Mashiach.

If he succeeds in the above, builds the [Beis Ha] Mikdash on its site, and gathers in the dispersed remnant of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach.

If he did not succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not [the redeemer] promised by the Torah. [Rather,] he should be considered to be like all the other proper and legitimate kings of the Davidic dynasty who died. G-d caused him to arise only in order to test the multitude. As it is written (Daniel 11:35), “Some of the wise men will stumble, to purge, to refine and to clarify, until the appointed final time, for it is yet to come.”

[The Rambam goes on to lambaste Christianity and its founder.]

The sentence has a dependent clause. If the supposed messiah does not ingather all the exiles, fight and win the battles of God, rebuild the Temple and reinstitute Temple service, etc., or if he is killed, this supposed messiah should be considered just like any good king from the House of David who died.

Either way, killed in battle or dies before rebuilding the Temple, etc., he is not the messiah according to Maimonides.

Rabbi Kalmanson insisted (screamed, actually) over and over again that, “the Rambam wrote no such thing”.

Rabbi Kalmanson’s error may be because Rabbi Kalmanson has only learned the Church-censored text of the Rambam as published in those large volumes that look like volumes of Talmud, Tur or Shulkhan Arukh. The Rambam’s Mishne Torah was censored by the Church to eliminate anti-Christian positions expressed by the Rambam. But the full, uncensored version of the Rambam survived in manuscript form and was printed in a wildly popular version by Mosad HaRav Kook, Rambam L’Am. If you were in Chabad

to expose the failings and hypocrisy of Chabad and Orthodox Jewry. Due to his refusal to back down and take down his blog, the Chabad movement promptly excommunicated Rosenberg.

176 Rambam is another name for Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), the Spanish-born medieval Jewish philosopher, renowned Torah scholar, rabbi, physician, and philosopher. The name, Rambam is an acronym taken from the other name Maimonides goes by, namely, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon. His fourteen-volume Mishne Torah retains canonical authority as a codification of Talmudic Law, to the present day.

177 Rosenberg has crossed out this text to emphasise that at no stage was this line part of the original version.
Houses and Chabad yeshivot before the Rebbe’s passing, this would most likely have the edition of the Rambam you would have seen. The Rebbe praised this edition, and many volumes were once in 770.

The Church-censored version of the Rambam looks something like this:

Rambam, Yad Hazaka, Hilhot Melachim, Chapter 11, Halacha 4 (censored version)\textsuperscript{178}:

If a king will arise from the House of David who delves deeply into the study of the Torah and, like David his ancestor, observes its mitzvos as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law; if he will compel all of Israel to walk in [the way of the Torah] and repair the breaches [in its observance]; and if he will fight the wars of G-d – we may, with assurance, consider him Mashiach.

If he succeeds in the above, builds the [Beis Ha] Mikdash on its site, and gathers in the dispersed remnant of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach.

If he did not succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not [the redeemer] promised by the Torah. [Rather,] he should be considered to be like all the other proper and legitimate kings of the Davidic dynasty who died. G-d caused him to arise only in order to test the multitude. As it is written (Daniel 11:35), ‘Some of the wise men will stumble, to purge, to refine and to clarify, until the appointed final time, for it is yet to come.’

[The Rambam goes on to lambaste Christianity and its founder]

How ironic it is that a leading Chabad messianist rabbi would be ignorant, intentionally or otherwise, of the Rambam’s attack on the very type of messianism this Chabad rabbi espouses (Rosenberg 2008).

[The strikethrough in this quote is intentional by the author. See footnotes 176 and 177 related to crossed-out text]

There is also an interesting observation made by Rosenberg about this debate that concerns the use of a particular phrase used by the Chabad messianist women who called in to express their views on the Rebbe’s messiahship. When the Talkline host, Zev Brenner, asked one of these women,

“How ironic it is that a leading Chabad messianist rabbi would be ignorant, intentionally or otherwise, of the Rambam’s attack on the very type of messianism this Chabad rabbi espouses (Rosenberg 2008)."

Zev Brenner, asked one of these women,

“What Zev Brenner heard is normative Chabad messianist theology. The Rebbe, no longer confined to his body, is everywhere. He is omnipresent and almost, but not quite omnipotent, as well. He answers your prayers and intercedes for you on high. He watches you and he watches over you.

\textsuperscript{178} The text that has been crossed out shows the text that the church censored from the original version.

\textsuperscript{179} Mahler explains that the synagogue in the basement of the Lubavitch headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn is “the closest thing to holy ground for the Hassidic movement” (Mahler 2003:1).
Whatever this theology is, calling it Judaism is incorrect’ (Rosenberg 2008).

Rosenberg notes that all the women who called in were adamant that the Rebbe had not passed away and that he was “at this very moment the messiah, and those of us with little faith be damned”.

Rosenberg then draws attention to link between the way the Chabad messianist women all used the phrase – *those of us with little faith be damned*, and to the way this phrase “O ye, of little faith” is used in Christianity (see Luke 12:27; Matthew 8:25; Matthew 8:26; Matthew 14:30; Matthew 14:31). He points out that the phrase was usually used as a rebuke that was levelled at the Disciples of Christ who appeared to doubt his divinity, and that the Chabad messianist women’s use of this phrase appears to mirror the way it is used in Christianity (Rosenberg 2008). Rosenberg concludes his assessment of this debate by concluding that spoken words of the messianist Chabad Rabbi Kalmanson and his messianist followers are therefore clear indicators that

[w]e are watching the evolution of another Christianity right before our eyes. And I do not think any human being has the power to stop it. It is too far gone, and we who have tried to stop it are too few, too weak and too late (Rosenberg 2008).

Gil Student also deals extensively with the issue under discussion above in his book *Can the Rebbe be Moshiach?*\(^{180}\) (2002) where he uses texts from Gemara, Midrash and Rambam (i.e., Maimonides). This thesis will look at Chapter 4 of this book called “Can a dead man be Moshiach?” where Student refers to Maimonides as he explains that, not only did the Rebbe not fulfil the five criteria listed by Maimonides for being a Messiah, namely,

- compel all of Israel to walk in the way of the Torah;
- repair the breeches in observance;
- fight the Wars of God;
- build a *Beis Hamikdash*\(^{181}\) in its place;
- gather in the dispersed exiles of Israel (Student 2002:50-51).

---

\(^{180}\) Student’s book was read online at Moshiachtalk.tripod.com.

\(^{181}\) The Temple in Jerusalem.
But, that Maimonides’ language was crystal clear that the Messiah must be a king from the house of David, and that “only by a wild stretch of the imagination – and a careless reading of Rambam [Maimonides] – can the Rebbe be considered to have been a king” (Student 2002:51). He compares this with Bar Kochba\(^{182}\):

for whom there is archaeological evidence that he ruled as king and was punctilious in his observance of mitzvos. The Rambam also says that one who is bechezkas Moshiach will fight the wars of G-d. In which battle did the Rebbe fight in the army? In fact, the Rebbe wrote in Likkutei Sichos vol. 16 pp. 304-305 n. 49 that the Rambam’s language here of “fight the wars of G-d” means literal wars including the destruction of Amalek. It is not merely a figure of speech. But the Rebbe did not fight a war and did not destroy Amalek.

The Rambam’s definition of a failed Moshiach is quoted above from halachah 5. Note that the Rambam says “did not succeed ... or was killed” so being unsuccessful in completing the messianic task is sufficient to disqualify him from being Moshiach. But how can the Rambam list not accomplishing these five items as rendering someone definitely not Moshiach? Maybe he\(^{183}\) will be resurrected and finish these tasks? Or maybe he will complete them in his trips to this world from under the Seat of Glory? No one can ever fall into this category if the Moshiach can come back from the dead and finish his messianic tasks. We must say that, according to the Rambam, Moshiach cannot come back from the dead to complete the criteria. Otherwise, half of this halachah is impossible. We would never be able to declare someone who is bechezkas Moshiach as being definitely not the promised Moshiach for not succeeding. If we allow for the possibility that someone can come back to this world and finish these tasks, then we have nullified the Rambam’s words in this halacha. Rather, when someone who is bechezkas Moshiach dies we unfortunately discover for certain that he is not Moshiach.

The Rebbe did not succeed in the five criteria\(^{184}\) listed directly above. He certainly accomplished an enormous amount in his life. However, he did not accomplish enough to be considered Moshiach. If the Rebbe had begun the five tasks listed by the Rambam, even if he had accomplished enough to be considered bechezkas Moshiach, the fact that he has died without successfully

---

\(^{182}\) Rabbi Hertzberg points out that the military commander, Bar Kochba, was the last major messianic figure who led a war against Rome in 132 CE and who resided over an independent Jewish government in Israel until he was defeated by the Romans in 135 CE (1999:10).

\(^{183}\) Student is referring to Rebbe Schneerson in this discourse.

\(^{184}\) There are Chabad followers who argue that the Rebbe did fulfil most of criteria, in that the Rebbe

- did initiate his very successful proselytising campaign that brought many Jews back to the fold of observant Judaism;
- fought the spiritual battles of God against assimilation and secularism by sending out his vans, known as “mitzvah tanks” and “armies” of youth to proselytise;
- built a monumental holy place at 770 Parkway (where the Rebbe lived);
- was instrumental in the mass migration of Russian Jews to Israel.

But, Student notes that none of these tasks are complete, that most Jews are not observant, that the Temple Mount is still under Arab control and that the majority of Jews still reside in the Diaspora (2002:50).
completing these tasks, proves that he is not Moshiach. Of course, if he had not even begun these tasks then we have nothing to discuss. There is no reason to declare him Moshiach other than pure speculation. But if the Rebbe had begun the mission of Moshiach – gathering in the exiles, fighting the wars of G-d, etc. and failed to successfully complete them, then he cannot be Moshiach.

Rabbi Akiva discovered the same almost 2000 years ago when the Moshiach he supported, who actually fought real battles and even ruled as a king in Israel, was killed before fulfilling all five criteria. As the Rambam writes in Hilchos Melachim 11:3:

Once [Bar Koziba] was killed it was known that he was not Moshiach

[ ]

But Rabbi Akiva was a humble and intellectually honest man. When the Moshiach he wholeheartedly supported was disproven, he had the strength of character to admit his mistake. If only there were more Rabbi Akivas in the world (Student 2002:51-53).

Student also noted in the Introduction to his book (2002:6), that the scholars in Chabad who recognise Chabad’s misuse of sources to support their belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship are “almost entirely silent”, and from the interview between Zev Brenner and the messianic Chabad Rabbi Kalmanson, above, this would still appear to be Chabad’s attitude towards the way it selects and interprets sources to provide textual support for its messianic claims. It is thus Chabad’s continued and deliberate misuse of textual sources to support its messianic beliefs, despite overwhelming counter proof texts that negate their claims, that lends credence to, and supports this thesis’ proposal, that we could be witnessing the birth and literal creation of a new religious belief system, through the efforts of the messianic-focused rabbis and followers of the Chabad/Lubavitchers.

3.10.6 Does the messianic-focused Chabad have a future?

According to Rosenberg’s view, expressed above, the Chabad messianists appear to have a future and are already well on the road to their future where Chabad’s messianic-focused Judaism will most probably become a new religion in the religious landscape. Berger also notes that not only has Chabad generated the largest and most long-lived messianic movement in Jewish history since Christianity and Sabbatianism, but that Chabad is still growing and continuing to flourish, despite the Rebbe’s passing, and that the movement shows no signs of decline.
Berger notes that people outside Chabad are gravely mistaken if they believe that they can confidently predict that Chabad messianism will fade over time due to the fact that the movement’s beliefs in the messiahship of its Rebbe are irrational and misguided. He explains that we should consider that Chabad’s belief in the messiahship of its Rebbe is no more irrational to Chabad members than Christianity’s belief in their messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, is to Christians, and that Christians also believe that their messiah was resurrected, ascended into heaven, and that he will one day return to redeem the world (Berger 2008:29).

Chabad’s belief that Rebbe Schneerson is the Messiah of “this generation” (i.e., those who knew and followed the Rebbe while he was alive) not only continues to grow and become more firmly entrenched each day but is also being extended by the movement’s younger followers, namely the ‘next generation’ of believers. The ‘next generation’ is deliberately shifting and expanding Chabad’s beliefs in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship, so that the Rebbe is not only Messiah for the generation who knew him (i.e., this generation), but also the Messiah for the ‘next generation’ as well. This shift in perception is being achieved by Chabad in a simple but highly effective way, namely by Chabad members teaching their young children to chant each and every day, “May our Master, Teacher, and Rabbi, the King Messiah, live forever” (Berger 2008:29).

The present Chabad generation’s firm belief in the Rebbe’s messiahship, plus the fact that they instil their messianic beliefs in their children in this simple and repetitive fashion each day, all clearly indicate that Chabad’s messianic beliefs are not only extremely well-established but that they are also being carefully inculcated and disseminated, and that it would be exceptionally naive to believe that these messianic beliefs could simply be eradicated (Berger 2008:29).

Nevertheless, the long-term future of Chabad is, according to Berger, still open to debate. He explains that Chabad’s future will not only be determined by issues such as internal financial liquidity or possible internal dissent, but to a large degree, by the long-term response of the Orthodox community.

---

185 Chabad has shown that it is not immune to the present sub-prime-induced economic climate, and the South Florida Business Journal reported, on June 30, 2009, that the Lubavitch Education Center in Miami Beach, which is affiliated to the Chabad Lubavitch, faces foreclosure. The foreclosure names the
The current indifference of the Orthodox community is seen as one of the key factors that could sustain the movement. Berger is particularly perturbed about the future of Chabad’s messianists. He qualifies his fears that their beliefs may eventually become a part of the beliefs of mainstream Judaism (2008:31) and that

the bearers of this faith will remain an accepted part of Orthodox Judaism because bemused /sympathetic /tolerant /self-deceiving/ distracted/ contemptuous leadership does nothing to delegitimize them (Berger 2008:30,31).

Berger explains that should the Orthodox Jewish community’s indifference continue, there is a possibility that

the fluidity of the Jewish messianic idea will have proven to be greater than our ancestors could have imagined, our children will no longer be able to tell Christian missionaries that the Jewish faith does not countenance belief in a Messiah whose mission is interrupted by death, and of the defining characteristics of Judaism in a Christian world [which] will have been erased’ (Berger 2008:31).

3.11 THE SABBATIANS, THE CHABAD/LUBAVITCHERS AND CHRISTIANITY: THE KEY SIMILARITIES

The examination, above, has revealed that the two Jewish messianic movements and Christianity share a significant number of similarities as well as differences which the thesis has listed below.

The most obvious and significant similarities between Sabbatianism, Chabad and Christianity include:

- a belief in a charismatic, Jewish born messiah who died;
- the utilisation of the Jewish paradox of the suffering servant, which they subsequently redesigned to suit their respective needs;
- the belief (held by many but not all Lubavitch messianists) that the messianic figure is not really dead (Berger 2008:28);
- the belief that their respective Messiah will soon return, i.e. resurrection.

non-profit friends of Lubavitch of Florida and the for-profit 17330 NW LLC. Rabbi Betzion Korf, who is listed on the Lubavitch Education Center’s Website as the director, manages both entities, which took an $8 million loan from the bank. Information accessed online on the, South Florida Business Journal website http://southflorida.bizjournals.com/southflorida/stories/2009/06/29/daily18.html
imagery;

- faith in an immediate return, which is then postponed;
- the creation of new grounds for belief in response to apparent failure;
- the followers’ subsequent deification of their Messiah;
- the citation of evidence from biblical verses, and, in the case of the Sabbatians and Lubavitch, from rabbinic literature as well, to support their belief in the messiahship of their respective Messiahs and in their deification of their Messiahs.

There are also crucial differences.

**What Christianity does not share with Sabbatianism and Chabad:**

- The appeal by the Sabbatians and the Lubavitch Hassidim to Maimonides’ affirmation of ignorance regarding the details of the messianic process.

**What Sabbatianism and Christianity do not share:**

- The doctrine of the Trinity;
- The incarnation of the Godhead in the messiah (Scholem 1973:796).

**What Chabad and Christianity do not share:**

- The doctrine of the Trinity.

Unlike the Sabbatians who do not subscribe to the belief that their Messiah is the incarnation of the Godhead, Chabad’s view of its Rebbe bears more than a marked resemblance to that of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation.

186 Rabbi Shraga Simmons explains that the Christian idea of the Trinity, especially the Roman Catholic view of the Trinity, breaks God into three separate beings: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19). He then compares this to the Shema in Judaism, which forms the basis of Jewish belief that states: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE” (Deut. 6:4). Simmons points out that this affirmation of God’s One-ness are the first words a Jewish child is taught to say and the last words Jews speak before dying. Jews also declare the Shema every day, men bind it to their hand and heart with their Tefillin and it is written on parchment inside each Mezzuzah on a Jewish household’s doorposts. The worship of a three-part God is considered as avodah zarah (i.e. idolatry) in Judaism, and it is understood that a Jew should choose death over avodah zarah, hence the reason Jews chose death as opposed to converting to Christianity during the Spanish Inquisition. Accessed online at About.com: Judaism June 17, 2009.
3.11.1 Chabad’s beliefs and the Christian doctrine of Incarnation

In relation to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, Berger explains that the Jews have always viewed the Christians as a group who were different to the pagans “because they worship the Creator of heaven and earth; nonetheless, Jewish worship of Jesus as a manifestation of God, and even the worship of God understood to include Jesus, is ‘avodah zarah’” (i.e., heresy) (Berger 2008:161).

With this explanation in mind, we now turn to the Chabad messianist, Avraham Baruch Pevzner and his work, Al hatzadikin (On the Righteous), so that we may see how similar the Christians’ doctrine of Incarnation is to the Chabad belief in their Messiah. Pevzner’s work is not an obscure publication, but a mainstream publication from the House of the Union of Chabad Hassidim (Beit Agudat Hassidei Habad) in Kfar Chabad in Israel.

Berger discusses Pevzner’s explanation of Schneerson’s statement, in his early years as the leader of the Chabad movement, when Schneerson said that “a rebbe is ‘the Essence’ and Being [of God] placed into [areigehstelt] a body” and notes that Pevzner is correct when he states that this idea is not unknown in Jewish texts (Berger 2008:159). Nevertheless, Pevzner’s interpretation of what the Rebbe meant is problematic. Pevzner says that what the Rebbe meant by this statement was that “a unity is established between a hassid who is one with the rebbe and the rebbe himself who is ‘the Essence and Being itself placed into a body’. All are one.”

Berger points out that Pevzner’s explanation of the Rebbe’s words would certainly have sat uncomfortably with Maimonides, and that it was probably this type of theological claim by Chabad (and the Rebbe) that was responsible for the Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools’ assertion that hasidism is in itself avodah zarah (Berger 2008:163).

187 Rabbi Simmons explains why Maimonides would be uncomfortable. Maimonides devoted “most of the ‘Guide for the Perplexed’ to the Fundamental idea that God is incorporeal, meaning that He assumes no physical form. God is Eternal, above time. He is Infinite, beyond space. He cannot be born, and cannot die. Saying that God assumes human form makes God small, diminishing both His unity and his divinity. As the Torah says: ‘God is not mortal’ (Num 23:19). Judaism says that the Messiah will be born of human parents, and possess normal physical attributes like other people. He will not be a demi-god, and he will not possess supernatural qualities. In fact, an individual is alive in every generation, with the capacity to step into the role of the Messiah (see Maimonides – Law of Kings 11:3).” Rabbi Simmons, online at About.com.:Judaism. Accessed on June 17, 2009.
Chabad’s theology about their Rebbe is therefore remarkable for its uncanny resemblance to the Christian Doctrine of Incarnation in that Chabad’s theology asserts that

the Rebbe is nothing but divinity, that he is indistinguishable from God, that nothing can occur without his agreement, that no one can tell him what to do, that he could answer any question instantaneously that he is entirely without limits (Berger 2008:170).

The Chabad followers’ custom of directing their petitions/prayers to Rebbe Schneerson, even now that he is deceased, also needs to be noted, especially in light of their theology regarding their Rebbe (above). Berger observes that this type of Incarnation theology, plus Chabad’s recent custom and practice of directing their prayers directly to Rebbe Schneerson’s image, usually a picture or photograph, reveal that his followers not only believe that Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson is truly a manifestation of divinity and all-powerful which is “more than enough to generate the most serious consequences in Jewish law” (2008:170); but that they also openly practice this belief (by directing their prayers to his image), which makes the Chabad believer who directs his prayers at the Rebbes’ image a practitioner of avodah zarah (heresy) (Berger 2008:171)

Chabad’s recent prayer customs must also be placed and considered alongside the views of Traditional Rabbinic-based Judaism, who judges any action of directing any prayers “towards any human being, dead or alive, whose thoughts and speech are seen as literally those of God, is at the very least an appurtenance (abizrayhu) of avodah zarah, which generates the obligation of martyrdom” (Berger 2008:173).

3.11.2 What Chabad's beliefs and theology reveal

These divergent beliefs and actions of Chabad, as well as all the other information related to Chabad’s messianism and particularly the statements made by the Rebbe’s followers, in relation to their belief that Rebbe Schneerson is, despite his death, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, all reveal that

- Chabad’s highly unorthodox perception of messianism and its belief in its

---

188 Chabad has also used the term Atzmus (meaning, the literal essence of God), when they speak of the Rebbe being the “literal essence of divinity”. See Appendix no 1: The definition of atzmus for Kohanzad’s clarification of the Hassidic term Atzmus, as it is understood by the Chabad/Lubavitchers.
Rebbe’s messiahship, are potentially as volatile, appealing and divisive as the messianic beliefs of Jesus and his followers;

- Chabad’s messianic beliefs and praxis, especially those related to the Rebbe, are all clearly incompatible with the classic fundamental theological boundaries of Judaism, and would thus support this thesis’ proposal namely, that we could be witnessing the emergence of a new religious belief system whose beliefs and praxis appear to be akin, but not identical, to Christianity.

The apathy of the present-day Orthodox Jewish community, as documented by Berger in his book *The Rebbe, The Messiah, And The Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (2008) would also appear to indicate that the current, unrestricted, and uncensored religious landscape could well be one of the key reasons why Chabad’s contentious messianic beliefs are so popular and have gained such a foothold amongst Jews worldwide, unlike those of the Sabbatians, who were persecuted and often maligned by many traditional Jewish rabbis during the 1600s and up to the present day. This could well be the reason why Chabad managed to emerge so smoothly and capture so many followers in such a relatively short space of time. It is also the most probable reason why Chabad is able to provide radically revised messianic belief options, which run counter to mainstream orthodoxy, without any serious censure or opposition, unlike previous messianic episodes in other time periods, again most notably, that of Sabbatians and their Messiah Sabbatai Sevi.

### 3.11.3 Sabbatian theology and Christianity

The Sabbatians’ formulation of their new theology began prior to their Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi’s death, with Sabbatai’s conversion to Islam, as the Sabbatian movement’s survival depended on what Scholem has described as “the paradoxical assumption that the messiah’s apostasy was a mystery and – appearances notwithstanding – an essentially positive event” (Scholem 1973:793). Hence the Sabbatians’ formulation of a new theology, that would allow the believers to live between the tensions of an inner and outer reality, preceded Sabbatai’s death. This new theological perspective also meant that the Sabbatians were redefining their Judaism as one that was based on “realized eschatology” (Scholem 1973:793-794). Consequently, the newly formulated Sabbatian theology soon began to resemble Christianity.
The similarities between Christianity and Sabbatianism are as follows:

- both movements are the result of their followers’ endeavour to reconcile and rationalise faith and historical reality;
- both movements had to construct and provide an ideology that accounted for their initial disappointment at the death (and in the case of Sabbatianism, for the apostasy, of their Messiah, ten years prior to his death) of their respective master/messiah;
- both movements became mystical-based faiths that that were built on a specific historical event;
- both drew their strength from the paradoxical nature\(^{189}\) of this historical event (Scholem 1973:795);
- both movements produced a new religious value – the concept of pure faith, except that the Sabbatian concept of pure faith was not connected to specific works and required no miracles or/and signs. The Sabbatian concept of faith had, instead, Paul’s doctrine of pure faith as its precursor (Scholem 1973:796).

The Sabbatians, like the early Christians before them, also moved to destroy traditional values, in what Scholem describes as “an outburst of antagonism toward the Law” in the wake of their disillusionment and intense religious awakening. This antagonistic response to the law was also seen in Christianity, in the antinomian doctrines of men like Paul.

\(^{189}\) Although the idea of messiah who becomes an apostate or of a savior who dies as a criminal are equally unacceptable to the simple religious consciousness, these realities became the source of strength from which both movements drew their religious justification. Both believed in a “second manifestation in glory of him whom they had held in degradation”. Just as the early Christians believed in the return of the crucified after his ascension into Heaven, so too the Sabbatians believed that their redeemer’s absence (albeit a moral absence after his apostasy as opposed to a physical absence after death), was temporary and that he too would soon return to complete his messianic mission. The passing of time and increased disappointment of the believers, within both early Christianity and the Sabbatian movement, only served to increase the radical nature of these movements’ dogmatic formulations. This led to the development of doctrinal statements in both movements. Initially both movements’ doctrinal statements were focused on their messiah and the hidden mystery of his suffering. However, just as early Christian doctrine soon began to move away from traditional Judaism and Jewish belief, the Sabbatian movement duplicated this pattern as well (Scholem 1973:796).
3.11.4 The writings of Nathan of Gaza, Paul and Rebbe Schneerson

Nathan’s writings were very important to the Sabbatians and Nathan’s contribution to the formulation of Sabbatian doctrine is very similar to the role that Paul and his letters played in the subsequent development of Christian doctrine (Schollem 1973:797).

Rebbe Schneerson had no need for a man like Nathan or Paul, as he, unlike Jesus and Sabbatai Sevi, was a prolific writer during his lifetime (writing mainly in Yiddish and in Hebrew) and his writings and discourses were preserved intact. Kohanzad has examined the Rebbe’s material, which consists primarily of oral lectures and discourse, as well as a small collection of notebooks, letters and responsa (a written decision or ruling usually made by a rabbinic authority, such as the Rebbe, to a submitted question or problem). The Rebbe’s lectures and discourse that often contained quotes in either Aramaic, or Hebrew and Yiddish, or all three languages, which were delivered in Yiddish and Hebrew, were fortunately written down by the Rebbe’s followers and the secretariat. There is also material from the Rebbe’s private audiences, known as Yechidus as well as other personal accounts and stories, which have also been preserved (Kohanzad 2006:337).

The Rebbe’s talks, both edited and unedited, are an extremely large body of work and have been published in a series of fifty volumes. Initially, they were published in 1983, as M. Sefer Hitvadiyos and then republished in 1993 under a new title, Torahs Menachem Hisva adiyos. An unedited collection of “inspired” discourses and talks, lifted from the previously mentioned publications, was also published in 1986, and is known as the Sichos Kodesh (Kohanzad 2006:338).

There is also a collection of work whose genre is defined by Kohanzad as Maamorim. This body of work consists of the “inspired” discourses and talks that are only “said by a ‘Rebbe’ in his role as spiritual leader and figure head”, and are published in a series of six books called Sefer Ha Maamorim Melekut (Kohanzad 2006:338). Kohanzad’s list of Schneerson’s material is extensive (see Appendix No 2: List of Schneerson’s Work).

There is also an extensive body of work produced, and still being produced, by the Rebbe’s followers that deals with a diverse selection of topics that include the religious customs and ritual observance of Chabad, Chabad’s attitude towards science
and technology, as well as publications such as *Heaven on Earth* (2002) by Faitel Levine, which Kohanzad describes as one of the most important theological books to be written to date, about the Rebbe’s paradoxical theology “that transforms the world into God”, and the movement’s beliefs after the Rebbe’s death (Kohanzad 2006:333).

### 3.12 CHABAD’S MESSENIANISM DETERMINES ITS ATTITUDE TOWARDS JEWRY BEYOND CHABAD

Chabad’s indifferent response to the plight of European Jewry in 1943 and to Ethiopian Jewry in 1983, is noted by the thesis as Chabad’s response, in both incidents, was primarily determined by the movement’s intense messianic-focused beliefs.

Rosenberg elucidates, and draws a comparison between Chabad’s response to the plight of Jewry in Europe in 1943 and in Ethiopia in 1983, to illustrate how Chabad’s focus on messianism and its subsequent insular world view shaped the movement’s response to the plight of Jewry beyond Chabad. He explains that the Union of Grand Rabbis and the Agudah HaRabbonim issued a plea in 1943, which called on all rabbis to attend the Rabbis March on Washington. The call read as follows:

> The Union of Grand Rabbis, as well as the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, appeals to support the action of the Emergency Committee to save the Jewish people of Europe as the Redemption of Captives [pidyon sh’vuim]. It is important for the aim of rescuing the remnant of Israel in Europe that all Rabbis be present in Washington to add weight to the manifestation of the Rabbis, the Grand Rabbis and the leaders.

However, neither the sixth Rebbe (Rebbe Yosef Schneerson, the predecessor of Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson), or his brother in law, or any other senior rabbis from the Chabad/Lubavitch community of Crown Heights attended this march in Washington in 1943.

In 1983, a letter was sent out from the Ad Hoc Rabbinic Committee to save Ethiopian Jews. The letter called for support for House Resolution 107 (Senate Concurrent Resolution 55), and asked that petitions in favour of it be circulated in synagogues.

---

190 All information in this section was accessed online at Failed Messiah.com

The letter also included an advertisement that had been placed by this Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe on February 16, 1943.

Rosenberg notes that the Ad Hoc Committee’s letter was signed by Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yosef Ber Soleveitchick, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University, and Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. But, Rosenberg points out that there were no Chabad/Lubavitch signatories. He writes that Chabad did not support the House Resolution. In the Rebbe’s letter on the rescue of Ethiopian Jews, he ridicules US Government involvement in rescue and refuses to support the House Resolution because such support is not in the job description of Lubavitch.

The 1943 Rabbis March led to the rescue of 250,000 Jews from the Nazis. The 1983 Letter led to US backing, and involvement in, the rescue operation that saved more than 25,000 Ethiopian Jews.

Rosenberg also provides a copy of an English translation of the Rebbe’s reply (written in Hebrew) to Rosenberg’s letter(s) where he (i.e., Rosenberg) asks the Rebbe for help to rescue the Ethiopian Jews. Below are copies of Rosenberg’s first and second letter sent to Rebbe Schneerson.
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Shlita
770 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11232

Dear Rebbe Shlita,

I appeal to the Rebbe Shlita for guidance in a most urgent matter and for the Rebbe Shlita’s blessings, not only for myself in this matter but, especially and most importantly, for those that I am trying to rescue and for all others who are trying, with great devotion, to rescue.

I am appealing to the Rebbe Shlita on the behalf of the 20,000 souls of our brethren stranded in Ethiopia and in squalid refugee camps located in surrounding countries of the Horn of Africa.

I am desperately seeking the Rebbe Shlita’s counsel in this matter. What should I myself be doing to help the Beta Israel and what should we, the Jewish people of the free world, be doing to help the Beta Israel?

I most urgently await the Rebbe Shlita’s counsel and his blessings in this matter. As one who sits in darkness I appeal to one who walks in light.

I am most truly yours,

[Handwritten signature]

Sherry Rosenberg
1411 Eleanor Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55114
(612) 699-4139
Figure 2: Rosenberg’s second letter sent to Rebbe Schneerson

7 Kislev 5724
November 13, 1963

Shmarya Rosenberg
20 East 48th
New York, NY 10017

The Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson Shliita
770 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11213

Dear Rebbe Shliita,

I write the Rebbe Shliita with very little expectation of receiving an answer, for I and others have come to believe that the Rebbe Shliita and Lubavitch have no intention of answering these questions. However, the cause is one of extreme importance and our time is running short so I must ask the Rebbe Shliita again, this time very specifically:

1. Are the Beta Yisroel of Ethiopia (Falashas) Jewish? If not, why not?
2. If they are Jewish, what is Lubavitch doing to help them?
   A. Many can leave Ethiopia on student visas. Have any Lubavitch schools, such as Kfar Chabad, Safed, Kabar Rabbinat, Merkaz Hatorah, Bais Chana, etc., offered scholarships? If not, why not?
   B. Ethiopian Jews living in Israel need help to adjust to modern Judaism and Israeli society. They need friends, clothing, education, and support. Have Lubavitch Kitzye Tzaske visited these? Has Lubavitch tried to help? If not, why not?
   C. Has Lubavitch, either in the U.S. or worldwide, sought help in this matter from governments? Has Lubavitch attempted to intervene on the behalf of the Beta Yisroel? If not, why not?
   D. Does Lubavitch support Congressional Resolution 475 (copy enclosed)? If not, why not?
   E. Why are Lubavitcher Shlichus almost totally ignorant of, and in many cases completely uncertain about, this horrible situation?
   F. Why are Lubavitcher children and young adults not taught about Ethiopian Jews in cheder or yeshiva?

Fifty years ago, within a horrible frame of destruction, a great and tragic paradoxy happened. This paradoxy hasn't died out, nor has the frame. Why must Lubavitcher Chasidim choose between cleaving to the Tractate of this generation and saving Ethiopian Jews? It has been my experience that the Rebbe Shliita's silence on this matter, especially when compared to the Rebbe Shliita's public stance on Soviet Jewry, frustrates this choice—a choice that no Jew should ever have to make, especially in silence. The list of what Lubavitch can do to help Ethiopian Jews is infinite; so far, only the response has been finite. The Rebbe Shliita can change that—pray that he will.

Imagine that this is 1943 and the Rebbe Shliita had written a similar letter concerning European Jews. (Think perhaps of the Joel Brand letter to Veltman in 1944.) How would the Rebbe Shliita feel and what conclusions would he (rightly) draw if his letter was not answered in writing and with concrete action. I have chosen to view this letter in that manner.

Sincerely,

Shmarya Rosenberg

207

The Rebbe’s letter to Rosenberg reads as follows:

Baruch HaShem 12 Shevat 5744 [Monday, January 16, 1984] Brooklyn, NY
Mr. Shmarya Rosenberg
1 S. Paul, MN 55116
Shalom u’Bracha!

Your special delivery registered letter with enclosures dated 7 Kislev [Sunday, November 13, 1983 – two months before the Rebbe wrote this letter] was received in it’s proper time. You are raising several questions beginning with a question that is related to a complicated problem of Jewish law (“Halakha”). As is well-known and widely publicized, it is outside the scope of my duties to render Jewish legal decisions (“paskin shailot”). I can only suggest that your question be addressed to a qualified rabbinical body, like Agudat HaRabbonim.

Aside from this, I am surprised by the wording of your letter because I do not remember receiving any letter from you in the past.

Your attitude appears presumptuous and unbecoming. You demand to know why Chabad-Lubavitch representatives (“shluchim”) are not doing anything or are not doing enough, related to this problem that you are very concerned with. Not only this, but your letter is tasteless and illogical, because your questions would be no more logical if you asked a physician why he is not actively involved in a matter related to engineering.

You should know that Chabad-Lubavitch representatives (“shluchim”) have a specific mission assigned to them, which is to spread Judaism in the communities designated to them. Congressional resolutions and the like are not part of those duties that are planned for them.

Furthermore, there is very little – if anything – they can achieve in the area that interests you most. Therefore, to divert their minds and to turn their energies and their time to something not related to their mission will be wasteful and diversionary to the work that they already do superbly and with full devotion.

Equally, your claims regarding scholarships and other projects you mention in your letter are not logical and they do not fit in with the activities and duties of Chabad-Lubavitch institutions of representatives (“shluchim”).

The impression received from your letter is that you are probably not familiar with the correct way to achieve success for the cause you are so eager to work for.

In light of the above mentioned, and because you have begun your letter with B”H [an abbreviation for Baruch HaShem, Blessed is God], it is absolutely correct for me to ask you two questions related to this matter:
1. Remember the law ("din kadima") that the needs of the poor of your own city come first. Did all the Jews in your city receive adequate necessities to cover their Jewish [i.e. spiritual] needs? If not, why not?

2. What have you done and what are you currently doing – are you doing all you can? – to convince and encourage the Jews in your community – men, women and children – to live their lives as truly devoted Jews, Jews devoted to the Torah and its laws, fulfilling the daily mitzvot and acting as Jews? If not, why not?

Of course, there are many differences between your questions and mine. In fact, an operation to benefit the Jews of your community (along with it having precedence in Jewish law, "din kadima") can be carried out without the necessity of assistance from the American Congress and without the approval of any foreign government. Furthermore, such an operation would undoubtedly be successful – it depends only on you and your willingness and determination to carry out such an urgent action. Surely there is no need to explain to you the conditions in America – including in your state and in your city – that so very many Jews – men, women and young children – are carried away on the stream of assimilation, influenced by foreign surroundings that leads to intermarriage, etc. So many of them are lost to our people day-after-day, and, according to our sages, even the soul of one Jew is regarded as an entire world, and certainly it is so with regard to the rescue of so many of our brothers [from assimilation].

I must say that the purpose of my letter to you is not to argue with you or even to give you mussar ("moral guidance") because I do not know you. Your letter is one of very many letters I receive and your letter does not fit in with any of them. It occurs to me that perhaps it is providential ("hashgakha pratit"), and that this gives me the opportunity to bring to your attention the fact that the many Jews nearby you have important needs and that an effort must be made to reach and save them – they have the priority, the first claim on Jews like you.

May G-d give you the correct answers to answer my questions, not for my self-indulgence but for the sake of our brethren ("acheynu b’nai yisrael"), especially the younger generation in your city, assuming that you are a resident there for at least a few years or perhaps were born there.

With The Respect That Is Fitting ("B’Kavod HaRoy"),

[Signed]

P.S. I would like to respectfully ask you as an additional question related to this matter: In what way can it be helpful to this issue (that you are so angry about) for you to be well-informed on what I do or do not do to benefit it?

Rosenberg draws attention to the fact that the Rebbe’s reply to his letters regarding the plight of Ethiopian Jewry made it very clear that Chabad’s position was that a Jewish educational project in Minnesota was far more important than saving the lives of starving, tortured African Jews. The Rebbe was firm that this was his (and Chabad’s) position regarding Ethiopian Jewry, despite the fact that Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the Dean of the Rabbincic Court of Agudat HaRabbonim, had ruled that that Ethiopian Jews must be saved and that this ruling had been widely publicised. Soon after this Rabbi Feinstein and Agudat HaRabbonim were even more explicit regarding the
correct response to the plight of Ethiopian Jewry and passed a new ruling that clearly stated “that one can and certainly must in fact violate all Sabbath restrictions in order to carry out the rescue if it be necessary to do so”. Rebbe Schneerson blatantly ignored both rulings and continued to withhold all help, “both with the rescue and with absorption and acclimation to Israeli society and modern Judaism”.

The Rebbe is also on record as saying that the request to send his “Mitzvah Tanks” (Mitzvah Tanks are large vans, travel trailers, recreational vehicles and even pickup trucks that Chabad use as portable “education and outreach centers” and even as mini synagogues to reach out to non-observant and alienated Jews) into absorption centres to visit Ethiopian Jewry to help them settle into their new homeland, was not a logical request. The rebbi said that this did “not fit in with the activities and duties of Chabad-Lubavitch institutions of representatives” which is focused on hastening the coming of the Messiah, which Chabad believes can be done by the doing good deeds (also known as mitzvot) and by fulfilling the requirements of Jewish law, such as laying tefillin and the lighting of the Sabbath candles.

Chabad’s response, or more accurately, their total lack of response, to the Jewish community’s call to assist European Jewry during the Holocaust in 1943, and to rescue and resettle Ethiopian Jewry in 1983, clearly shows how Chabad and Rebbe Yosef Schneerson, and Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s focus on messianism and the hastening of the coming of the messianic age allowed them to ignore the plight of fellow Jewry beyond Chabad. Chabad’s indifferent response also reveals that Chabad’s insular and inward-looking atitudewhich was the result of the messianic preoccupation, allowed Chabad and its Rebbes to ignore the plight of Jews beyond Chabad and practice a type of self-serving “selective compassion” as opposed to universal compassion, which is one of the hallmark traits of classical rabbinic Judaism as stipulated and demanded by Jewish prophets (see Isaiah 1:15-17), sages, and by rabbis like Hillel.

3.13 CHABAD’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHRISTIANS AT THE END OF DAYS, AS DEFINED BY SCHNEERSON

The thesis draws attention to Chabad’s more benevolent and compassionate attitude towards non-Jews as opposed to the Christian evangelicals’ attitude of zero tolerance
for anyone of a different faith, such as the Jews, who do not belong to the evangelical fold at the end of time.

Rabbi Simmons (2009)\(^{191}\) notes the Jews’ attitude towards the Gentiles at the end-of-time when the Jewish Messiah comes, and explains that

Judaism does not demand that everyone convert to the religion [Simmons is referring to Judaism]. The torah of Moses is a truth for all humanity, whether Jewish or not. King Solomon asked God to heed the prayers of non-Jews who come to the Holy Temple (Kings 18:41-43). The prophet Isaiah refers to the Temple as the “House for all Nations”.

The Temple service during Sukkot featured 70 bull offerings, corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. The Talmud says that if the Romans would have realized how much benefit they were getting from the Temple, they would never have destroyed it. Jews have never actively sought converts to Judaism because the Torah prescribes a righteous path for gentiles to follow, known as the “Seven Laws of Noah”. Maimonides explains that any human being who faithfully observes these basic moral laws earns a proper place in heaven (Simmons 2009).

This thesis draws attention to Chabad’s attitude towards Christians at the end-of-time, as defined by Rebbe Schneerson, who believed that all Gentiles who followed the Seven Noahide Laws would enter heaven at the end-of-time. Rebbe Schneerson’s position on the Noahide Laws is based on the following rationale:

At the dawn of human history, G-d gave man seven rules to follow in order that His world be sustained. So it is recounted in the Book of Genesis as interpreted by our tradition in the Talmud. There will come a time, our sages told us, that the children of Noah will be prepared to return to this path. That will be the beginning of a new world, a world of wisdom and peace.

At the heart of this universal moral code is the acknowledgement that morality - indeed, civilization itself - must be predicated on the belief in G-d. Unless we recognize a Higher Power to whom we are responsible and who observes and knows our actions, we will not transcend the selfishness of our character and the subjectivity of our intellect. If man himself is the final arbiter of right and wrong, then “right”, for him or her, will be what they desire, regardless of its consequences to the other inhabitants of earth.

At Mount Sinai, G-d charged the Children of Israel to serve as His “Light unto the nations” by bringing all of humanity to recognition of their Creator and adherence to His laws.

For most of Jewish history, however, circumstance did not permit our people to spread these principles, other than by indirect means. When the Lubavitcher Rebbe began speaking about publicizing them as a preparation for a new era, he was reviving an almost lost tradition.

\(^{191}\) Rabbi Simmons, on “Jesus as Messiah: Jews and Gentiles”, was accessed online on June 17, 2009 at http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_o/bl_simmons_messiah3.htm
What is most beautiful about these laws, is the breathing room they provide. They resonate equally in a hut in Africa or a palace in India, in a school in Moscow or a suburban home in America. They are like the guidelines of a great master of music or art: firm, reliable and comprehensive—but only a base, and upon this base each person and every person may build (Schneerson 2009).

THE 7 NOAHIDE LAWS

1. Acknowledge that there is only one God who is Infinite and Supreme above all things. Do not replace that Supreme Being with finite idols, be it yourself, or other beings. This command includes such acts as prayer, study and meditation.

2. Respect the Creator. As frustrated and angry as you may be, do not vent it by cursing your Maker.

3. Respect human life. Every human being is an entire world. To save a life is to save that entire world. To destroy a life is to destroy an entire world. To help others live is a corollary of this principle.

4. Respect the institution of marriage. Marriage is a most Divine act. The marriage of a man and a woman is a reflection of the oneness of God and His creation. Disloyalty in marriage is an assault on that oneness.

5. Respect the rights and property of others. Be honest in all your business dealings. By relying on God rather than on our own conniving, we express our trust in Him as the Provider of Life.

6. Respect God’s creatures. At first, Man was forbidden to consume meat. After the Great Flood, he was permitted – but with a warning: Do not cause unnecessary suffering to any creature.

7. Maintain justice. Justice is God’s business, but we are given the charge to lay down necessary laws and enforce them whenever we can. When we right the wrongs of society, we are acting as partners in the act of sustaining the creation (Schneerson 2009).

Kohanzad notes Schneerson’s outlook on the Gentiles’ fate at the end-of-time, and explains Schneerson’s outlook in relation to the Seven Noahide Laws in the following words:

His view of the status of non-Jews in the “Future to Come” was strongly positive. In contrast to previous traditions that envisioned the physical destruction of Israel’s enemies, he foresaw a spiritual “nullification” of the gentile nations, so that they could “speak with a pure tongue and all serve God together”. The Gentiles do not necessarily convert to Judaism, nor are they destroyed or annihilated, but rather purified and lifted up into the Camp of the Holy; they live morally and realize the divine in their lives. In fact, at times the distinction between Jew and non-Jew almost totally disappears in his thought. He stresses, in line with the Talmud and Maimonides, the tradition that a Gentile who keeps the seven Noahide laws is as holy as the High Priest in the Temple or Tabernacle. This type of universalism is a distinct feature of Schneerson’s view of messianism (Kohanzad 2006:16).

This thesis draws attention to the Rebbe’s view towards the Gentiles at the end-of-time since the Rebbe’s view stands in sharp contrast to the Christian evangelicals’ fate of the Jews, described in the Rapture. The thesis also notes that Rebbe Schneerson’s benevolence towards non-Jews at the end-of-time also stands in marked contrast to his indifferent attitude towards the plight of fellow Jews, notably the European Jews during the Holocaust in 1943, and the Ethiopian Jews in 1983.

3.14 SUMMARY

This thesis’ examination of Rebbe Schneerson and his followers’ beliefs and conduct, both during the Rebbe’s life and the period after his death (i.e., from 1994-2010), as well as

- Chabad’s belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship, which Chabad’s new converts emphasise to gain equality within the movement;

- Chabad’s constant deification of the Rebbe, which is linked to Chabad’s belief that the Rebbe has not really died, but that he is simply “hiding” beneath the throne of God until his imminent return,

support the main the proposal of the thesis, namely, that Chabad will eventually become a religion removed from mainstream Orthodox Judaism. The thesis believes that it only remains to be seen how this will occur. It could be due to either of the factors below or it could be a combination of the two. The two factors are:
• the rabbis and the *beth dinim* (rabbinical courts) decision to sever ties with Chabad. This was the manner in which the rabbis, *beth dinim* and *kehilloot* (religious community councils) dealt with Sabbatai Sevi’s messiahship and his followers during his lifetime prior to Sabbatai’s apostasy, and with the Sabbatian movement, both after the fluorescence of post-apostasy Sabbatianism, and with the movement immediately after Sabbatai’s death;

• Chabad’s decision (conscious or otherwise) to gradually and eventually distance itself, over time, from mainstream Judaism, due to its extreme and heretical messianic beliefs, and in doing so, establish a new religion, which falls beyond mainstream Rabbinic based, Orthodox Judaism.
CHAPTER 4: ISRAEL KNOHL AND THE GABRIEL STONE: SUFFERING SERVANT MESSIAHS, VICARIOUS ATONEMENT AND JEWISH RESURRECTION IMAGERY

Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him),
No looks to attract our eyes:
a thing despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering,
a man to make people screen their faces;
he was despised and we took no account of him.
And yet ours were the sufferings he bore,
ours the sorrows that he carried.
But we, we thought of him as someone punished,
struck by God, brought low.
Yet he was pierced through our faults,
crushed for our sins.
On him lies a punishment that brings us peace,
and through his wounds we are healed193
(Fox 1995:586).

This chapter notes Knohl’s messiah hypothesis (from his work The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls (2000)), and directs attention at Knohl’s “‘suffering servant’ and dying and rising messiah” messiah template which he posits for Jesus. This is also the messiah template that this thesis has identified as the three successful Jewish Messiahs’ common template. The thesis notes the text on the Gabriel Stone, which appears to support Knohl’s messiah hypothesis. The information gleaned from this examination is used to support this thesis’ argument that three successful Jewish messiahs’ “‘suffering-servant’ and dying and rising messiah” template is related to the wide appeal and enduring success of these three Jewish Messiahs, as it offers these messiahs’ followers the very ancient option of vicarious atonement.

This thesis acknowledges that there is no documented proof that Jesus perceived himself as the embodiment of the “suffering servant”, and that the Synoptic Gospels hardly ever refer to the “suffering servant”. The idea was, however, part of Paul and John’s concept of Jesus, who are in turn responsible for projecting their interpretation of Jesus to the Gentiles. Due to the fact that there is no recorded claim of messiahship by Jesus himself, it is nevertheless important to enquire, especially in the light of the Sabbatians and Chabad’s documented public declarations of these two messiahs’

193 This text has been taken from The Jerusalem Bible as it is closer to the original Hebrew text, and does therefore not align itself to the regular verse division in most standard English Bibles.
followers’ firm belief in their messiahs’ messiahship (as well as their documented perception of their messiahs as “suffering servant” messiahs) whether Jesus’ followers thought he was the messiah. The only affirmative response to this enquiry is the disciples’ reply to Jesus’ question, “Who do men say I am?” in Matthew 16:15, when they answer Jesus’ question by stating that “Thou art Christ” (Matthew 16:15).

The thesis acknowledges that the Gospel of Matthew was a late production written well after the death of Jesus of Nazareth yet the thesis believes that the disciples’ reply can be deemed as type of unspoken acknowledgment regarding Jesus’ apocalyptic framework that he set up as an apocalyptic teacher (Fredriksen 1999:226), in that Jesus can be understood as a prophet who preached the imminent coming apocalyptic Kingdom of God (Fredriksen 1999:266); hence the term messiah used by his disciples, which becomes even more significant when we consider that the term christos, used in Matthew, is Greek for messiah, and is derived from mashiah, which is Hebrew for messiah (Shermer 2000:187).

In his discussion of Jesus as messiah myth, Shermer (2000:187-188) also points out that for many early Christians, the Hebrew Bible spoke to them of a returning Messiah and that these prophecies would have been particularly reassuring to a people (like them) who were caught under the oppressive rule of Rome. He notes that the foundations of the oppression and redemption myth, which underlies believe in Jesus’ messiahship can be seen in the words of Paul:

To the Colossians: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (1:14);

To the Hebrews: “Neither by the blood of goats or calves, but by his own blood he entered at once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (9:12).

The beginning of the Jesus messiah myth foundation, identified here in the words of Paul, are therefore also important to the thesis as they indicate that Jesus was already perceived and portrayed by Paul, soon after his death, as the “‘suffering-servant’ messiah”, who offers vicarious atonement to his followers.
Fredriksen also argues that Jesus’ core followers (i.e., those who knew him during his lifetime), were so shocked by his crucifixion that they sought answers from Scripture, and she explains that,

[i]t was there that they found various ways to conceive of their vindicated leader. Paul’s letters, the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and other writings that would eventually comprise the New Testament – all these record the creative meditations of the first apostolic generation and those of the believers who came into the community after them. In these texts Jesus still stands as his earliest followers during his mission had perceived him: a true prophet, commissioned by God. Through Isaiah, they saw Jesus as God’s Suffering Servant: “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities … the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is 53:5). The language of Leviticus offered images of sacrifice upon the altar of God; Jesus, then, might be understood as a sacrifice, a corban: Behold the Lamb of God!” (Jn 1:36). He was the Son of man appearing at the End of Age, at first suffering, but later returning with the clouds of heaven. To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom … His kingdom shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:14; Mk 13:26). And he was God’s anointed one, champion of the Kingdom, his messiah (Fredriksen 1999:265).

Fredriksen points out that this last title, messiah (above), came to the fore due to the particular events that occurred on the disciples’ final Passover with Jesus, namely the “the jubilant popular acclaim, the ugly execution as king of the Jews” (1999:265). Yet the disciples’ experience of Jesus’ resurrection placed all these incidents in a new perspective. Consequently, Fredriksen observes that “In the post-Resurrection retrospect of Jesus’ core followers, “messiah” – variously modified, to be sure, in the light of this retrospect – came to figure as the most fitting title” (1999:256-266). In the light of Fredriksen’s argument it would therefore appear that Jesus’ followers were not that different from those of Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson, in that they too found a way to argue for, and proclaim, the messiahship of their leader and teacher Jesus, after his death.

Burton Mack has also identified three key interconnected ideas that arose in the 30s and 40s after Jesus’ death, in the wake of his teachings that were meant to sustain his followers until the Second Coming, which can be said to contribute to the making of the Jesus messiah myth. They are:

- the vague notion of a perfect society conceptualized as a kingdom. The Jesus people latched on to this idea and acted as if the kingdom they imagined was a real possibility despite the Romans. They called it the kingdom of God;
any individual, no matter of what extraction, status, or innate capacity, was fit for this kingdom and could act accordingly if only one would;

the novel notion that a mixture of people was exactly what the kingdom of God should look like (Mack 1985:43, 226).

The thesis’ choice of Israel Knohl’s “‘suffering-servant’ and dying and rising messiah” template for these three messiahs was influenced by the words of the New Testament, as quoted above, as well as by the work of Jesus scholars, Burton L. Mack (The Christian Myth: Origins, Logics and Legacy (2002)), and Paula Fredriksen’s historical reconstruction of Jesus in her work, Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews (1999), that revealed the similarities that exist between the historical Jesus and the lives, beliefs and conduct of the other two well documented Jewish Messiahs, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Shneerson, and their followers.

This thesis identification of the three Jewish messiahs’ common “suffering servant” messiah template, as described by Knohl, is linked to the option of vicarious atonement that this messiah template provides. The concept of the “suffering servant” messiah in this thesis is therefore to be understood as one who “suffers” on behalf of another person (or people) as a substitute for another. This is akin, but not identical, to the original biblical scapegoat, namely, the Azazel (a person in the wilderness) to whom the goat merely transports all the iniquities of all the people (as described in Leviticus 16). The thesis would like to draw attention to the fact that the concept of the Azazel (scapegoat) that appears in Leviticus 16:8 and the concept of the “suffering servant” (messiah or otherwise) who “suffers” on the behalf of another person or people, are nevertheless similar, in that the Azazel and the “suffering servant” both allow people who subscribe to, and/or believe in, either of these concepts, to evade the task of assuming individual responsibility/accountability for any of their actions, which includes their transgressions.

This chapter looks briefly at the concept of vicarious atonement as first described in the Hebrew Bible, in the account of the Azazel, as seen according to Jewish texts and interpreters that preceded Jesus, as opposed to the later Christian texts and their interpretations of the “suffering servant” messiah concept.
### 4.1 THE TORAH AND THE CONCEPT OF THE SCAPEGOAT

The appeal of the concept of vicarious suffering, in the sense that it entails the idea of allowing “another” (as in a person or beast) to suffer on your behalf, is a very old pagan custom that predates Judaism. The incorporation of the concept of vicarious suffering into early Jewish religious praxis (i.e., prior to 800 BCE when the Hebrew prophets began to call for individual accountability, as opposed to the practice of sacrifice, most notably for absolution and atonement in Judaism) is clearly seen in the Hebrew Bible in Leviticus 16:8 (Fox 1995:586):

> Aaron shall place lots upon the two he-goats: one lot “for Hashem” and one lot “for Azazel”.

The above text refers to the very old custom of placing the peoples’ sins, in this instance, on a goat, as the vehicle for the Azazel. Hence the English translation of the Hebrew term, Azazel, as “scapegoat”. This ancient custom of “scapegoating”/vicarious atonement sits uncomfortably with most modern-day people and scholars, both within Christianity and Judaism. Janowski rightly notes that, since Kant’s work on religion in 1793, the majority of people have moved to embrace the idea that guilt is an “intrinsic personal feature, and as such, it therefore becomes nontransferable” (1996:50).

Yet the concept of vicarious atonement and its praxis, has, despite the objection voiced in Kant’s work, as well as the ongoing objections of various rabbis and sages, retained its appeal within Judaism and survived to the 21st century. The practice of vicarious atonement can still be seen within the present-day Jewish Haredi communities, in their praxis of the ritual of Kapparot (i.e., forgiveness), where a fowl, and not a human, takes on the sins of the person who carries out the ritual, albeit unwittingly so. The Kapparot ritual is regarded as one of the most controversial Jewish pre-Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement customs. The ritual consists of a person circling a white fowl, held at its feet around his head as he recites,

> This is my substitute …

> This fowl will die and I will enter upon a good and long life …

Bloch explains that “the fowl is then slaughtered and its cost is given to charity. The innards of the fowl are fed to the birds in a spirit of compassion for all living creatures” (Bloch 1980:159). The Kapparot ritual is thought to date back to approximately the ninth century. Bloch explains that the Gaonim (Gaon (singular), is
the title given to the presidents of the two great Jewish Academies in Sura and Pumbedita in Babylon (589-1038 CE)), were not entirely sure of its rationale and that they “assumed that the custom reflected a symbolic transfer of fate from the individual to an animal” and that the “ritual of Kapparot was probably designed as a reenactment of the biblical rite of Azazel” (Bloch 1980:159).

Although most people and certain scholars view the goat in Leviticus 16 as the Azazel (i.e., the literal scapegoat), there are scholars, like Oesterley and Robinson, who do not. Their reading of the text allows them to see the Azazel as person/entity in the wilderness, and that this person/entity (and not the goat) is therefore the true scapegoat/vicarious atoner. This allows them to point out that the goat in the text is merely the designated animal that “carries” the peoples’ transgressions (i.e., all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, all their transgressions and all their sins), to a person/entity called Azazel, who resides in the desert.

Before we proceed to the work of Oesterley and Robinson, the thesis refers to a more precise translation of the actual Hebrew text of Leviticus 16:6-26 than the Standard King James text. This is done firstly, to gain a better understanding of the sense of the text and the term Azazel as used in the original Hebrew text and secondly, to cast more light on Oesterley and Robinson’s argument. The thesis has chosen Fox’s English translation over and above any other English translation due to the fact that Fox’s translation of the Pentateuch is shaped by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s monumental German translation of the Pentateuch (1925-1962). Buber and Rosenzweig’s translation was done with careful attention paid to rhythm and sound, allowing their translation to mimic the particular rhetoric of the Hebrew text whenever possible and in doing so, to lead the reader back to the sound structure and form of the original Hebrew text. Fox has taken note of and adapted Martin Buber’s and Franz Rosenzweig’s principles in his English translation and produced a translation that strives to be as authentic as the information that currently exists about the original audiences of the text allows (Fox 1995: xxiv).

Fox’s translation is also significant to this discussion as it appears to indicate, in line 26 (see Fox’s text below) that the goat itself is not the Azazel, and that the Azazel (i.e., the scapegoat) is a different entity who resides somewhere in the wilderness. Fox’s translation (1995:585-589) reads as follows:
5From the community of the Children of Israel he is to take two hairy goats for a hattat-offering, and one ram for an offering-up.

6And Aharon is to bring-near the bull for the hattat-offering that is his, so that he may effect atonement on behalf of himself and on behalf of the household.

7He is to take the two hairy (goats) and is to stand them before the presence of YHWH, at the entrance to the Tent of Appointment.

8Aharon is to place upon the two hairy (goats) lots, one lot for YHWH and one for Azazel.

9Aharon is to bring-near the hairy-one for which the lot of YHWH came up, and to designate it as a hattat-offering;

10And the hairy-one for which the lot of Azazel came up is to be left standing-alive, before the presence of YHWH, to effect-atonement upon it, to send it away to Azazel into the wilderness.

11Then Aharon is to bring-near the bull of the hattat-offering that is his, effecting atonement on behalf of himself and on behalf of his household; he is to slay the bull of the hatta-offering that is his,

12and is to take a panful of fiery coals from atop the slaughter-site, and from before the presence of YHWH, and (two) fistfuls of fragrant incense, finely ground, and is to bring (it) inside the curtain.

13Then he is to place the incense on the fire, before the presence of YHWH, so that the cloud (from) the incense covers the Purgation-Cover that is over the Testimony, so that he does not die.

14Then he is to take (some) of the blood of the bull and sprinkle (it) with his finger on the front of the Purgation-Cover, eastward, and before the Purgation-Cover he is to sprinkle, seven times, some of the blood with his finger.

15Then he is to slay the hairy-goat of the hattat-offering that is the people’s, and bring its blood inside the curtain, doing with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull: he is to sprinkle it on the Purgation-Cover, and before the Purgation-Cover.

16So he is to effect-purgation for the Holy-Shrine from the tum’ot of the Children of Israel, from their transgressions, for all of their sins, and thus he is to do with the Tent of Appointment, which dwells with them in the midst of their tum’ot.

17No human is to be in the Tent of Appointment when he enters it to effect-atonement in the Holy-Shrine, until he goes out. He is to effect-atonement on behalf of himself and on behalf of his household, and on behalf of the entire assembly of Israel.

18Then he is to go out to the slaughter-site that is before the presence of YHWH, and to effect-purgation on it, he is to take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the hairy-goat and is to place (it) on the horns of the slaughter-site, all around;

19He is to sprinkle on it from (the rest of) the blood with his finger seven times; he is to purify it and he has to hallow it from the tum’ot of the Children of Israel.

---

194 Hattat-offering is a purification offering which utilises the blood of sacrifice (Fox 1995:584).
195 The Hebrew word in the Torah used for he-goats is Se’irim, meaning the “hairy ones” – hence the placement of the word goat in brackets, after the word hairy in verse 7, by Fox in his translation above.
20When he has finished purging the Holy-Shrine and the Tent of Appointment and the slaughter-site, he is to bring-near the live hairy (goat),

21Aharon is to lean his two hands on the head of the live hairy (goat) and is to confess over it all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, all their transgressions for their sins; he is to place them upon the head of the hairy (goat) and is to send it free by the hand of a man for the occasion, into the wilderness.

22The hairy (goat) is to bear upon itself all their iniquities, to a land cut off: he is to send-free the hairy (goat) in the wilderness.

23Then Aharon is to enter the Tent of Appointment and is to strip off his linen garments in which he dressed when he entered the Holy-Shrine, and is to leave them there;

24then he is to wash his flesh in the water, in a holy place, and is to dress in his garments, he is to go out and sacrifice his offering-up and the offering-up of the people; so shall he effect-atonement on behalf of himself and on behalf of the people.

25And the fat of the hattat-offering he is to turn-into-smoke upon the slaughter-site.

26**Now the one who set free the hairy (goat) for Azazel** is to scrub his garments and wash his flesh in water; after that he may reenter the camp. (Leviticus 16:5-26). [the bold is mine]

In their work *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development* (2003) Oesterley and Robinson discuss the term “Azazel”, noting that the Azazel (masculine) “began and ended by being a person, but went through an intermediate demonic stage” (2003:66). They also note that the present form of the Hebrew word “Aza’zel” (meaning “complete removal”) is awkward and that its formation is very unusual. They explain that the present form of “Azazel” was probably a deliberate corruption, no doubt from reverential feelings, the original form being ‘Azaz ‘el, which means “God strengthens”, formed like Azaziah in 1 Chron. 15:21. They then explain the meaning of Leviticus 16:7-28 as follows:

Two he-goats are taken from the congregation of Israel for a sin-offering; these Aaron sets before Yahweh “at the door of the tent of meeting.” Then it is said that “Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for Yahweh, and the other for ‘Azazel.” Clearly from these words ‘Azazel is regarded as a personal being like Yahweh. Therefore to make ‘Azazel equivalent to the scapegoat is doing violence to the text. It then goes on to say that the goat upon which the lot for ‘Azazel fell was sent away for ‘Azazel into the wilderness, clearly meaning that it was an offering to ‘Azazel. From this we also see that “Azazel dwelt in the wilderness.” … the data suggests that Azazel was originally a god of the flocks, just as Astarte was a cow-deity – and that this Azazel-ritual was a development and adaptation of what at some early period was an offering to the God of waste, possibly being thought of as the head of the Se’irim. Finally, he became identified with the author of all evil, i.e. Satan (Oesterley & Robinson 2003:66).
4.1.1 The Jewish sages and scholars: the concept of the “suffering servant”

North notes that there are four theories that address the identity of the suffering servant. They include the following:

- the Servant was an anonymous contemporary of the Second Isaiah, a man who, the prophet believed, was destined to be the messiah, which was initially proposed by R. Kittel and supported by both Rudolph and Oesterley;
- the servant was the prophet himself. This theory was initially proposed by Mowinckel then later retracted by him;
- the collective theory (and the most popular of the theories), supported by Peake and Wheeler Robinson. North notes that the theory has different variations, but in essence, the theory places emphasis on the ancient idea of corporate personality and tends to refer to Israel;
- the Messianic theory (North 1956:3-4).

This chapter will focus primarily on the messianic theory.

In his introduction to Driver and Neubauer’s in-depth study of The “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah: According to the Jewish Interpreters (1969), Pusey notes that the Jewish scholars and sages contemplated either the suffering of the Messiah or his exaltation, and that they seldom attempted to reconcile these two opposing facets (Pusey 1969:xl).

Although the kabbalah comes after Jesus, and does not explain the attraction of the “suffering servant” messiah prior to the destruction of Qumran and during Jesus’ lifetime, the thesis includes a 16th century kabbalist’s interpretation due to the kabbalah’s extensive influence on the Jewish Messiah Sabbatai Sevi and the manner in which kabbalah-based beliefs underlay people’s belief in Sabbatai Sevi’s messiahship. Pusey notes that a 16th century kabbalist wrote that “bruised for our iniquities” meant that the “suffering servant”, the messiah who bears our iniquities, is literally being bruised by doing so. Consequently, those who will not acknowledge that the “suffering servant” messiah literally suffers for bearing our iniquities, must therefore endure and suffer them himself (Pusey 1969:xl).
The attraction of the “suffering servant” messiah, who willingly and unconditionally suffers on another’s behalf, especially in the Jewish community during Sabbatai Sevi’s lifetime, can therefore be traced back to this 16th century kabbalah interpretation of the “suffering servant” messiah. This kabbalist interpretation also explains the Sabbatians and Chabad’s proclivity for a kabbalah-based interpretation of a “suffering servant” messiah.

To understand the concept of the “suffering servant” messiah before and during Jesus’ lifetime we need to look at interpretations of the “suffering servant” concept of Isaiah, which would have been known to the Jews prior to the life and death of Jesus. Driver and Neubauer refer to a selection of interpretations that fit this time frame in their work *The “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah: According to Jewish Interpreters* (1969). They include the interpretation of Rabbi Yose the Galilean (a contemporary of Hillel and Shammai, who flourished during the time of King Herod (Rodkinson 2006:5)) taken from the Siphre. 196 According to the Siphre, Rabbi Yose the Galilean said the following about Isaiah’s “suffering servant”:

> Come forth and learn the righteousness of the King Messiah and the reward of the just from the first man who received but one commandment, a prohibition and transgressed it: consider how many deaths were inflicted upon himself, upon his own generations, and upon those that followed them, till the end of all generations. Which attribute is the greater, the attribute of goodness, or the attribute of vengeance? He answered, the attribute of goodness is the greater, and the attribute of vengeance is the less; how much more, then, will the King Messiah, who endures affliction and pains for the transgressors (as it is written, ‘He was wounded,’ etc.) justify all generations! And this is what it meant when it is said, And the Lord made the iniquity of us all meet upon him (Driver & Neubauer 1969:10-11). [the bold is mine]

This excerpt from the Siphre would therefore indicate that the concept of the “suffering servant” messiah is perceived as one who suffers on a person/people’s behalf, and that it was probably common knowledge prior to Jesus’ birth.

Hengel and Bailey (1996:75-76) also make an observation about Isaiah 53 and its influence on thought in the pre-Christian period that confirms the conclusion reached above. They explain that in the pre-Christian period, Isaiah 53 “was not only read and interpreted; it was apparently also interpreted messianically”. They also note that Isaiah 53’s influence varies in Judaism, and that

---

196 Rodkinson explains that “the Siphre, or as its fuller title reads, the books of the school of Rab, comprises the traditional interpretations of the book of Numbers, beginning with Chapter V., and the whole of Deuteronomy” (2006:3).
with the exception of the Hebrew (both MT and 1Qsa2) and Greek texts of Isaiah 53 – and perhaps Daniel 11-12, the Aramaic Apocryphon of Levi 4Q540-541, and the Testament of Benjamin 3:8 – the motif of vicarious suffering tends to recede in the background in the Jewish tradition, especially where the savior’s exaltation or his role as judge is prominent (e.g. 1 Enoch; Self-Glorification Hymn 4Q491). Nevertheless, the demonstrated uses and echoes of this text are enough to suggest that traditions of suffering and atoning eschatological messianic figures were current in Palestine Judaism, and that Jesus and the earliest Church could have known and appealed to them. This would explain how first Jesus and then his disciples could assume that their Messiah’s vicarious atoning death would be comprehensible to their Jewish contemporaries (Hengel & Bailey 1996:75-76).

4.1.2 The Dead Sea Scroll’s messianic hymns and the “suffering servant messiah”

Knohl (2000:25) notes that the prevailing approach in New Testament studies states that Jesus

- did not consider himself the Messiah;
- did not identify himself with the messianic figure of the “son of man” of the Book of Daniel 7:9-14;
- did not see himself as the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 53.

Hence, Knohl also notes that all the above perceptions were only made after Jesus’ death, by his disciples. Knohl clarifies this school of thought by quoting R. Bultmann, who was the main proponent of this New Testament approach:

Of course, the attempt is made to carry the idea of the suffering Son of Man into Jesus’ own outlook by assuming that Jesus regarded himself as Deutero-Isaiah’s Servant of God who suffers and dies for the sinner, and fused together the two ideas Son of Man and Servant of God into a single figure of the suffering, dying and rising Son of Man. At the very outset, the misgivings which must be raised as to the historicity of the predictions of the passion speak against this attempt. In addition, the tradition of Jesus’ sayings reveals no trace of consciousness on his part of being the Servant of God of Isaiah 53. The messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was discovered by the Christian Church and even in it not immediately (Knohl 2000:25).

Knohl then proceeds to explain that the messianic hymns from Qumran do however cast doubts on Bultmann’s conclusions.

Before we examine Knohl’s argument, this thesis would also like to point out that Bultmann’s claim that “[t]he messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was discovered by the Christian Church and even in it not immediately”, may also be questioned due to
the information noted above, where this thesis notes that a) the Siphre reveals that the Jewish rabbis and sages were familiar with concept of a “suffering servant” messiah, prior to the life and death of Jesus; and b) that Hengel and Bailey’s observations on the influence of Isaiah 53 in the pre-Christian period reveal that “traditions of suffering and atoning eschatological messianic figures were current in Palestine Judaism, and that Jesus and the earliest Church could have could have known and appealed to them” (Hengel & Bailey 1996:76). This data indicates that the concept of the “suffering servant” Messiah was most probably familiar to Jews before and during Jesus’ lifetime, and that it was known by men such as Rabbi Yose the Galilean. It is therefore entirely feasible that the concept of the “suffering servant” messiah was known by certain rabbis from Galilee, and most probably by Jesus and his followers as well.

Knohl quotes an excerpt from the messianic hymn from Qumran that reveals that the hero of the messianic hymn

- claimed divine status;
- claimed that he was superior to the angels;
- describes himself as taking a seat in heaven surrounded by angels;
- compares himself to the biblical God;
- depicts himself as “despised and rejected” of men.

And, most importantly, the hymn\(^{197}\) states:

‘Who has born[e all] afflictions like me?
Who compares to me [in enduri]ng evil?

Knohl points out that the hero of this hymn, the Qumran Messiah, clearly identifies himself with the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 53 (2000:25). This text reveals that “the messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was not discovered by the Christian Church, as it was already developed by the Messiah of Qumran who lived one generation before Jesus” (2000:26). Knohl also adds that this specific combination of divine status and suffering was unknown prior to these hymns from Qumran. This observation is

\(^{197}\) The excerpt comes from 4Q491 frg. 11, col. 1:9. (Knohl 2000:111).
contrary to this thesis’ discussion (above) of Rabbi Yose the Galilean’s interpretation of the “suffering servant” messiah as noted in the Siphre. Either way, both the messianic hymn from Qumran, and the interpretation of Isaiah 53 by Rabbi Yose the Galilean, as recorded in the Siphre, would indicate that Bultmann may well have erred, as the concept of a “suffering servant” messiah, and knowledge thereof, appears to have preceded both Jesus and the Christian Church.

This realisation allows this thesis to therefore consider the possibility that, despite the absence of documented proof, and in the wake of the documented pattern of the other two Jewish Messiahs, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson, whose messiahship projected the “suffering servant” messiah template, and their followers who are on record as perceiving their Messiahs as “suffering servant” messiahs, that Jesus’ followers may well have regarded Jesus as a “suffering servant” Messiah especially after his death, as Fredriksen argues in her work Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews (1999:265-266). The preceding discussion and observations of Hengel and Bailey also indicate that early Jewish followers of Jesus would probably have been familiar with the concept of the “suffering servant” messiah. The Jewish followers of Jesus would also have been familiar, and comfortable with the concept of vicarious atonement, as depicted in the idea of the Azazel/scapegoat described in Leviticus 16, and in the “suffering servant” in Isaiah 53.

Knohl uses two apocalyptic works, the Oracle of Hystaspes and the Book of Revelation, to establish the historical context of the Qumranic messiah who was responsible for the crystallisation of the “suffering servant” messiah concept at Qumran (2000:27-50). From a close reading of these works and the Dead Sea Scrolls (notably the description of Herev-El (the sword of God) in the Scroll of the War between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness), Knohl deduces that “the tradition concerning the killing of the prophet or the Messiahs, that we find in these works, came from the members of the Qumran sect or some circle close to them. It thus appears that the messianic leaders whose deaths were related in these sources, belonged to the Qumran community” (Knohl 2000:41-42).

Knohl then notes that the two messianic leaders were killed in 4 BCE. If we accept that they were indeed active in the time frame prior to that year, which was during the reign of King Herod (37-4BCE), then all four copies of the messianic hymns from
Qumran were written during this particular time frame. Knohl then points out that this “suffering servant” messiah/hero of the messianic hymns had no priestly characteristics. The messianic hymns do, however, speak of sitting on a “throne of power” and mention a “crown”, which allows Knohl to conclude that the “suffering servant” messiah of the messianic hymns was most likely the royal messiah as opposed to a priestly messiah (Knohl 2000:42).

The death of the “suffering servant” Messiah from Qumran in 4 BCE, and that of the three other Jewish Messiahs, Jesus, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson, brings the thesis to the next two important questions related to Knohl’s “‘suffering servant’ dying and rising messiah” template, namely,

- is resurrection a Jewish concept?
- did resurrection imagery precede Jesus?

4.1.3 Suffering, Dying and Rising Messiahs, Knohl’s theory and The Gabriel Stone

4.1.3.1 The Gabriel Stone

The Gabriel Stone is a 3 foot high and 1 foot wide piece of grey coloured limestone that has broken onto 3 pieces since it was first found. It has 87 lines of Hebrew script written in ink, not engraved, across two neat columns, one of 44 lines and the other of 87 lines that are similar to the columns found in the Torah. The fact that some of the text has faded, and that the stone is now broken into three pieces has, however, meant that what scholars’ claim the text may say, is open to debate (Bronner 2008; Yardeni 2008). The front of the stone is polished and has the script written across it, while the back of the stone is rough and unfinished which indicates that it may well have been part of a wall. Either way, mounted or lying on the ground, Yardeni notes that it must have been very awkward to write on the polished side of the stone. This may well be the reason why the script looks so shoddy, despite the fact that this writing was clearly the work of a professional scribe (Yardeni 2008).

Professor Yuval Goren, a professor of archaeology from Tel Aviv, who specialises in the verification of ancient artefacts, has examined and analysed the Gabriel Stone. Goren found no reason to doubt or question the stone’s authenticity (Bronner 2008:2).
The stone’s authenticity has also faced no challenges to date, which means that the stone will be able to cast new light on scholars’ attempts to understand the troubled and turbulent time frame that contains the source and roots of early Christianity (Yardeni 2008\(^\text{198}\); Bronner 2008:1).

The stone is not a recent discovery, but was found about ten years ago and was bought from a Jordanian antiquities dealer by David Jeselsohn, an Israeli-Swiss collector. Jeselsohn explains that he kept the stone in his Zurich home and that he did not know how significant it was until Ada Yardeni saw the stone and told him “You have got a Dead Sea Scroll on a stone” (Bronner 2008:1).

The main part of the text is a vision of an apocalypse that is transmitted by the angel Gabriel, and the “text draws on the Old Testament, especially the prophets Daniel, Zechariah and Haggai” (Bronner 2008:1). Yardeni also points out that the person who composed the text:

- often writes like the prophets and uses the “word of Yahweh”, the personal name of God;
- opens many prophecies with the words “Thus (or therefore) said the Lord [that is Yahweh and sometimes the more generic Elohim] of Hosts”;
- uses Eloheie Yisrael, “God of Israel”;
- uses numerous references to Yahweh’s kavod, or glory, that students of the Hebrew Bible are familiar with;
- mentions “My servant David”;
- refers occasionally to “David the servant of Yahweh”;
- mentions Jerusalem several times;
- supports the Davidic dynasty;
- uses the expression “shows mercy to thousands” (found in Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; Jeremiah 32:18);

---

quotes directly from Haggai 2:6, “And I will shake the heaven and the earth”;

refers to the “messenger” (or angel Michael), who is mentioned in Daniel 10:13 as well as in Revelation 12:7 and Jude (the New Testament) and in extra biblical sources like Enoch and the Dead Sea Scroll known as the War scroll (1QM) (Yardeni 2008).

The text’s frequent mention of apocalyptic figures would also suggest that the Gabriel Stone text is primarily apocalyptic, and that it is referring to the end of days. Yardeni surmises that it is likely that a rivalry between messianic groups underlies the texts’ composition and, as noted above, that the composer had aligned himself with the Davidic Messiah. Yardeni also notes that “the text as a whole is not known from any other Jewish source” (Yardeni 2008).

As an expert on Hebrew script, especially script from the time of King Herod, Ada Yardeni has used palaeography and language to date the text. Even though the stone has not been well preserved and the letters that are visible are often hard to decipher, Yardeni places it between the late first century BCE and the early first century CE, which is the same time frame as the Dead Sea Scrolls. She points out that this dating is also “confirmed by the Hebrew of the text (post-Biblical and pre-Mishnaic) (Yardeni 2008). Bronner (2008:1) agrees with Yardeni.

Yardeni points out that the text is written in the first person, possibly by someone named Gabriel and she points to line 77, which reads “I Gabriel” which is why the stone has been given the name of the Gabriel Stone or Tablet and the text itself is known and referred to as the Gabriel Revelation.

4.1.3.2 Knohl’s theory, the Gabriel Stone and resurrection imagery

Knohl’s well-researched theory, mentioned above, that posits the hypothesis that resurrection may be a Jewish concept, and that resurrection imagery pre-dated Jesus, became a more plausible reality after the publication of an article that dealt with the text of the Gabriel Stone. The article, “Document: A First-Century BCE Prophetic Text Written on a Stone: First Publication” (Cathedra 123, in Hebrew), was written in
2007 by Yardeni and Elitzur. The article discusses the text written on the Gabriel Stone. The text is an apocalypse transmitted by the angel Gabriel which is the reason why scholars now refer to the text as *Hazon Gabriel* or Gabriel’s Revelation.

Knohl wrote a short introduction (2008c) for the Shalom Hartman Institute for an article “‘By Three Days, Live’: Messiahs, Resurrection, and Ascent into heaven in *Hazon Gabriel*” that was published in the Journal of Religion, University of Chicago (2008d), which he wrote in response to Ada Yardeni and Binyamin Elitzur’s article and their findings regarding the Gabriel Stone. In this introduction he notes that

Based on its linguistic features, they date the text, written in Hebrew on stone, to the late first century BCE. This suggestion is corroborated by the paleographic evidence which points to the late first century BCE or the early first century CE.

Then in the same introduction he states that he believes that

Hazon Gabriel confirms my thesis that the belief in a slain and resurrected messiah existed prior to the messianic activity of Jesus. The publication of this text is extraordinarily important. It is a discovery that calls for a complete reassessment of all previous scholarship on the subject of messianism, Jewish and Christian alike.

In Knohl’s theory (2000:51-71) we find a specific messianic figure whom Knohl identifies as Simon, who was slain by a commander in the Herodian army, according to Josephus. Knohl also suggests that the writers of the Gabriel Stone were probably Simon’s followers and that the death of their Qumran Messiah provided the catalyst for his followers’ “catastrophic” ideology. Knohl explains that “the rejection of their Messiah, his humiliation, and his death were thought to be foretold in the Scriptures and to be necessary stages in the process of redemption” and a necessary step towards national salvation (2000:45). Bronner directs our attention to lines 19-21 of the tablet that support Knohl’s theory. The lines read as follows: “In three days you will know that evil will be defeated by justice, as do other lines that speak of blood and slaughter as pathways to justice” (Bronner 2008:2).

---

199 Information related to this article, by A. Yardeni and B. Elitzur, was accessed online at the website, Shalom Hartman Institute. May 14, 2009. http://www.hartmaninstitute.com/SHInews_View_Eng.asp?Article_Id=124

200 Accessed online via the Shalom Hartman Institute
http://www.hartman.org.il/SHInews_View_Eng.asp?Article_Id=124
The followers of this slain Messiah from Qumran also believed that their “suffering servant” Messiah had “been resurrected after three days and had risen to heaven on a cloud”, and that “he now sat in heaven as he had described himself in his vision – on a ‘throne of power in the angelic counsel’” (Knohl 2000:45). Knohl proceeds to draw attention to line 80, as line 80 is linked to the followers of Simon and their belief that their Messiah had been resurrected after three days. Hence, Knohl points out that line 80 begins with the words, “L’shloshet yamin” meaning, “in three days” (according to his English translation which reads “In three days, live”).201

Knohl explains that although the next word was considered to be only partially legible by Yardeni and Elitzur, Knohl’s expertise of Biblical and Talmudic Hebrew has however enabled him to recognise the partially legible word as “hayeh” or “live” in the imperative, despite its unusual spelling, which he points out is in keeping with the era. Knohl has also managed to decipher the other two partially legible words. This means that Knohl reads line 80 as: “In three days you shall live, ‘I Gabriel com[mand] yo[u]’” (Bronner 2008:2: Knohl 2008a; 2008d:150-151).

This reading changes the context of the text. Consequently, what line 80 then implies, is that the angel Gabriel was speaking to a specific person and giving this person orders to live, meaning that in three days, this person shall return to life in the sense that this person will be resurrected from the dead (Knohl 2008a; 2008d:150-151).

From Knohl’s reading of the Gabriel Stone text, we may therefore deduce that Knohl’s theory is supported by the text on the Gabriel Stone, and that resurrection imagery, contrary to most scholarship, has a Jewish origin and that it appears to have preceded Jesus.

The exact identity of the person that Gabriel speaks to (i.e., the “suffering servant” messiah who dies and is resurrected) is, however, not revealed, as the text is not preserved. But, the next line says “Sar hasarin” or prince of princes, and since the Book of Daniel (one of the primary sources of the Gabriel stone) speaks of Gabriel and of “a prince of princes”, Knohl argues that the Gabriel stone text is about the death of a leader of the Jews who will be resurrected in three days (Bronner 2008:2).

201 See Appendix 5 for full text of Knohl’s translation of the Gabriel Stone text in English.
Knohl also notes that the text mentions “Ephraim, the Messiah son of Joseph, who according to Jewish tradition, was killed in battle and is resurrected by the Messiah son of David”. In the light of this, he proposes that the resurrected character in Hazon Gabriel is a messianic figure as well (Knohl 2008d:150-151) but that this messianic figure is another messiah, who was already known in the late first century as “Ephraim” or the “Messiah son of Joseph”, and that this messiah symbolised a very different and new kind of messianism as Ephraim, the Messiah son of Joseph, the Messiah of suffering and death (Knohl 2008a).

Knohl’s theory of the suffering servant messiah that he derives from the messianic hymns of Qumran (2000:44-45), also gains support and plausibility from the text of the Gabriel Stone. Knohl explains that although the Gabriel Stone’s text is the earliest reference to Ephraim as a messianic figure, and that there is no evidence of Ephraim as a messiah in the Hebrew Bible, he, nonetheless, believes that the Gabriel Stone’s figure of Ephraim is probably based on biblical verses from Jeremiah 3:17-20 and Hosea 11:1-8 that depict him as the Son of God (Knohl 2008a), and that

[the] biblical verses … describe him as the suffering son of God. The atmosphere of Hazon Gabriel contains elements of mourning and exile, death, and bloodshed. It appears that “Ephraim” is a symbolic figure containing all these elements. Unlike the messianic figure of “David,” which traditionally represents bravery, military skill, and triumph, the figure of “Ephraim” symbolizes a very different, new type of messianism. “Ephraim” is a Messiah of suffering and death. It should also be noted in this context that some books written at approximately the same time as Hazon Gabriel also have the image of Ephraim’s father, Joseph, as a son of God and one who atones with his suffering for the sins of others.

In the book entitled “Joseph and Aseneth”, Joseph is described as the “son of God.” This book, that was probably written between 100 BC and 115 CE, also gives Joseph the title of “God’s firstborn son.” While scholars are undecided whether these titles were originally intended to designate Joseph as a messiah or redeemer, readers of the book could have perceived Joseph as a messianic figure.

In another work of the second temple period, “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs”, we find a connection between Joseph and the figure of the “suffering servant.” In the Testament of Benjamin (5:8), Jacob says to Joseph: “In you will be fulfilled the heavenly prophecy which says that the spotless one will be defiled by lawless men and the sinless one will die for the sake of impious men.”
The author of the testament had clearly identified Joseph with the “suffering servant” of Isaiah 52–53. He was probably led to this idea by the fact that Joseph had himself been a suffering slave. At the same time, one could say of Joseph, as of Isaiah’s “suffering servant”: “Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high” (Isa. 52:13).

Thus, it seems that the designation of the suffering Messiah as the “son of Joseph” extends back to sources from the second temple period, including Joseph and Aseneth, the Testament of Benjamin, and now to the recently deciphered text on the Gabriel Stone. In light of these sources, we should also understand the tradition about Ephraim or the Messiah, son of Joseph, as the slain Messiah (Knohl 2008d:152-154).

From these observations, Knohl concludes that the text on the Gabriel Stone clearly confirms that “the character of ‘Ephraim’ as the ‘Messiah son of Joseph’ was already known in the late first century BCE” (Knohl 2008d:154). Knohl also points out that the inscription on the Gabriel Stone seems to imply that a different type of Messiah, one who was not a brave, militant, and triumphant Messiah, like the Messiah, son of David, was gradually evolving during this period. This other Messiah, the Messiah of Joseph, was seen instead as “a Messiah who suffered, died and rose” (Knohl 2008a). Knohl notes that the Gabriel Stone text also reveals that a belief in resurrection “after three days”, and the ascent to heaven of some people who were killed, was also evolving at the same time as the concept of the suffering and dying Messiah (Knohl 2008d:154).

### 4.1.4 Sabbatai Sevi as the suffering, dying, and rising Messiah

Scholem points out that Sabbatai’s followers perceived Sabbatai as their suffering servant messiah, and that they believed that he too would soon be resurrected. Scholem explains that, although the Sabbatians used the ancient Jewish paradox of the “suffering servant” Messiah of Isaiah 53, they nevertheless had to resort to a more ingenious and innovative interpretation in the instance of Sabbatai (1973:795). The image of the “suffering servant” messiah template was also an obvious template choice for Sabbatai who suffered periods of manic depression, in the sense that his “illness” allowed his followers to perceive Sabbatai Sevi as the Messiah who “was wounded because of our transgressions” (Isaiah 53).
Scholem explains that the Hebrew word for wounded, meholal, can also be translated as “profaned”, hence “after the apostasy the ‘profanation’ of their Messiah Sabbatai Sevi could be interpreted in several ways. Hence, Nathan declared that their Messiah was profaned by the rabbis because of the ‘sins of the world’ (that is, the sins of his contemporaries; there is no reference here to original sin”). Scholem also points out that the typological interpretation of the “suffering servant” is perfectly accountable in terms of its Jewish background and to the inner logic of Sabbatian homiletics. He explains that there is no need to look for any links to Christian belief and its influence, as the Sabbatians found allusions to the fate of their apostate Messiah and his future glory in the Book of Psalms (Scholem 1973:804-805).

Scholem clarifies his comment on the Sabbatians’ ingenious and innovative interpretation of Isaiah 53, by describing how both Christianity and Sabbatianism ultimately gave rise to a mystical faith centered on a definite historical event, and drawing its strength from the paradoxical character of this event. A savior who dies like a criminal and a redeemer whose mission leads him to apostasy are equally unacceptable to the naïve religious consciousness. Yet the apparent stumbling-block proved to be a source of strength from which both movements drew their religious justification, for both believed in a second manifestation of glory of him who they held in degradation. The early Christians believed in the return of the crucified after his ascension into Heaven, the Sabbatians too believed that the redeemer’s absence (a moral absence after his apostasy, a physical absence after his death) was temporary only and that he would return before long to achieve his messianic mission. As time passed and disillusionment deepened, the dogmatic formulations became increasingly radical. At first the doctrinal developments bore mainly on the nature and person of the messiah and on the hidden mystery of his suffering. But very soon early Christianity found itself diverging widely from traditional Jewish belief and practice. The same also happened with the Sabbatian movement, and with the same rapidity (Scholem 1973:796).

4.1.5 Rebbe Schneerson: Chabad’s suffering, dying, and rising Messiah

Although this thesis has already noted and discussed Chabad’s firm belief and public declarations that their Rebbe Schneerson is indeed the long waited Jewish “suffering servant” Messiah, it now draws attention to Kohanzad’s personal experience of the last two years of the Rebbe’s life that cast more light on this particular belief. Kohanzad explains that Chabad’s belief in Schneerson as their suffering servant Messiah, began in earnest in 1994. During 1994 the Rebbe became very ill as he suffered several minor heart attacks, organ failure, other medical complications, as well as a second
major stroke. Kohanzad describes how the Rebbe’s illness, pain and suffering in 1994 was seen and interpreted by certain pro-messianist members in Chabad as a “cosmic sign”, and he points out that the Rebbe’s illness and suffering also contributed to the messianic frenzy that obsessed the movement during this period (Kohanzad 2006:70).

Kohanzad explains that the Rebbe’s followers truly believed that their Rebbe, as the messiah, was literally fulfilling the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53 by “‘suffering’ through illness, and with each passing day their messianic expectancy and urgency increased”, until the Rebbe finally passed away after a fatal heart attack at a hospital in Manhattan during the night of June 12th 1994 (2006:70).

Kohanzad describes how many of the Rebbe’s followers, especially those who had gathered outside the Lubavitch Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in the early morning of the day following the Rebbe’s death, had not been informed that the Rebbe had in fact already died and that his body was already inside 770 Eastern Parkway. He explains how these uninformed followers continued to sing and dance outside 770 Eastern Parkway, where fruit salad, beer and vodka was being served, as Hassidic music poured out of speakers. He also describes another circle of Yeshiva students who were dancing in front of the general dancing populous, who were continuously chanting ‘Yechi Adonainoo’. He describes how they continued to do so until the deceased Rebbe’s covered body was brought out at 8am. Kohanzad then tells how the crowd and the dancing students suddenly fell silent as all those present realised that the Rebbe had, in fact, died and that a miraculous recovery was not going to occur.

Kohanzad explains that Chabad’s belief in the Rebbe’s resurrection also began that very day, when the Rebbe’s body was brought out in front of the people and that the reality of his death prompted his followers to change the words of the Yechi chant. From that moment onwards, the Yechi chant began to reflect Schneerson’s followers’ newly emerging belief in their Rebbe’s imminent resurrection that crystallised soon thereafter.

Kohanzad clarifies his view by explaining that at first the Yechi chant had been a celebration of the Rebbe’s new messianic leadership, that was about to be revealed to the world, but with time it came to express something different. It became a prayer that the Rebbe would be resurrected any moment, perhaps even magically brought to life by the very singing. The chant in a sense claimed that despite what people might think had happened, true believers
knew that the Rebbe was still the potential Moshiach and that he would lead the world out of Exile and into the Redemption (Kohanzad 2006:71).

4.1.6 Similar “historical events” provide the required catalysts for messianic movements?

The second part of this chapter draws attention to the broad contextual similarities also referred to as the “historical event” as described by Shermer (see footnote 202) that all three messianic movements share, albeit that each one has its own context specific details, that trigger the return of the messiah myth response. Similar historical events initiated apocalyptic beliefs within Judaism, underlay Qumran’s messianic beliefs, provided the required catalyst(s) for duplicating the Qumran-derived pattern in Christianity, ignited the Jews’ unequalled response to the Jewish Messiah Sabbatai Sevi, and is responsible for modern-day Chabad’s belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship. These historical event similarities include:

- a troubled social context that includes widespread upheaval and conflict;
- dysfunctional religious systems and/or hierarchies (whether by accident or deliberate design).

---

202 Please note that the events and behaviour that Kohanzad describes outside 770 Eastern Parkway on the night and the morning when the Rebbe died, is what he was part of, and what he personally experienced and witnessed at that time (Kohanzad 2006:71).

203 Kindly note that the thesis uses the term “contextual similarities,” in the discussion, above, as defined by Shermer. Shermer notes that there are a limited number of responses to perceived oppression and the hardships of the human condition, and that a belief in a returning Messiah who will bring salvation and/or redemption is the most common response (albeit that each group’s response has its own unique traits) that is seen across varying cultures. He explains that the return of the culture specific messiah myth is bound to history, which is an extraordinary combination of the specific and the general and the unique and the universal. Consequently, the past is neither one damn thing after another (Heraclitus’ river), nor is it the same damn thing over and over (Spengler’s life cycles). Rather, it is a series of generally repeating patterns, each one of which retains a unique structure and set of circumstances. History is uniquely cyclical. Wars and battles, witch crazes and social movements, holocausts and genocides, all recycle through history with remarkable periodicity. The reason is that while there are an infinite number of combinations of specific details, there are a limited number of general rules that channel those details into similar grooves. Every historical event is unique, but not randomly so. They are all restricted by the parameters of the system. Such events recycle because the conditions of these parameters periodically come together in a parallel fashion (Shermer 2000:190).

Hence Shermer concludes that when social conditions include oppression of a people, there is a strong possibility that the response will be a belief in a rescuing messiah who delivers redemption and that although the messiah myth, like all myths, may be fictitious narrative, it nevertheless represents something deeply non-fictional about human history (Shermer 2000:190).
Israel’s historical event’s unique context-specific details that gave rise to the messiah myth response during Jesus’ lifetime includes

- the Hasmoneans who became both high priest, and King, despite their lack of the “correct biblical pedigree for either job”;

- the rise of the many religious parties, such as the Sadducees, Essenes, and Pharisees (Fredriksen 1999:122) who, along with the Hasmoneans, triggered “the highly charged apocalyptic convictions that gave the intertestamental period its mutagenic religious intensity” (Fredriksen 1999:123).

- the increasingly complex political and religious landscape that led to Israel’s participation in pan-Mediterranean politics, as well as Jerusalem’s involvement in the civil wars that marked Rome’s transition from republic to empire, also saw Jerusalem besieged and its inner sanctum violated and sacked by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BCE (Fredriksen 1999:122).

- The termination of Hasmonean rule marked beginning of Herod’s tumultuous reign (37-4 BCE (1999:122), which saw Augustus place Judea directly under Roman authority, after Herod’s death, which was a period marked by series of inept Roman prefects (Fredriksen 1999:122-123).

Under these oppressive and turbulent conditions, messianism became more appealing and popular, while the messianic prototype of earlier scripture began to alter significantly (Fredriksen 1999:123). Qumran’s literature shows the development of various types of messiah figures, which reveal Qumran’s context-specific circumstances that produced them. For example, their belief in the Davidic messiah reveals their negative reaction to the non-Davidic Hasmonean kingship, while the concept of an End Time priestly messiah reveals their frustration with the way the Temple was run. Their belief in a priestly and a kingly messiah reveals their disapproval of the way the Hasmoneans combined the position of king and high priest (Fredriksen 1999:124). The variety of messiah figures found within the Qumran texts alone provide an excellent example of the extent to which Jewish messianic and apocalyptic hope could be interpreted to accommodate the requirements of various
contextual specific situations and realities of their historical events (Fredriksen 1999:124).

The Qumranites and the early Christians’ embrace of messianism and the development of a new messianic figure, in this instance the “suffering servant Messiah”, known as Ephraim, and/or as the Son of Joseph, can be seen in these two groups’, the Qumranites and the Christians, response to the context-specific issues that existed in their historical event, namely,

- their problematical relationship with the Temple;
- their reaction to Hasmonean, Herodian and Roman interference and their abrogation of Temple ritual, hierarchy and power, especially when these groups appointed the Temple High priest for their own political expediency;
- Rome’s brutal invasion and repressive rule of Israel, which the Qumranite and the early Christian messianists expected to end, when the messianic promise of Israel’s redemption was realised and brought apocalyptic change that (they believed) would end Roman rule and finally allow Good to triumph over Evil (Fredriksen 1999:124).

The “historical events” (as defined by Shermer (2000:190) that gave rise to the messianic myth response of the Qumranites and the early Christians, also played out, in a similar manner, albeit with a different combination of context-specific details, during the rise of Sabbatians and with the present day Chabad messianists.

The Sabbatians’ historical event, which resembled the Qumranites and the Christians’ historical event, and which sparked the Sabbatians’ unprecedented messiah myth response (along with their kabbalah beliefs) includes their context-specific details. They are

- the restrictive and suffocating restrictions of halakha, and what Ehrlich describes as the rabbinic community’s “obsession with halakhic nuances” (2001:23), and that Sabbatianism developed a resistance to the forces that
had stopped its predecessor\textsuperscript{204}. It would not be tripped up by internal paradoxes raised by the demands of halakhic observance. Quite the opposite, a system that recognised the need to openly break halakha seemed to be the only way to begin the redemptive process. The way that this could be sanctioned in a predominantly religious and believing society was through the appeal of mysticism and communion with God as the higher calling, even greater than the Law. But the final stroke against the halakhists who sought to halt the spirit of nationalism and renaissance through their restrictive legalisms, was the declaration that the messiah had arrived and, in doing so, legitimately contending that the era of classic halakha had come to an end. Tradition recognised that the law would change and even be annulled in messianic times. Declarations of his arrival legitimised for many, till then, halakhic observers that the annulment of restrictive laws was now possible (Ehrlich 2001:24).

- the manner in which the marranos, who returned to the Jewish fold, chose to embrace messianism and Sabbatianism instead of Orthodox Judaism, in response to their chronic problems of identity and location, in society\textsuperscript{205} which they suffered when they re-embraced Judaism after living as Catholics (Sharot 1982:108). The marranos chose Sabbatai as their messiah, since they felt that this choice confirmed their full commitment to Judaism and immediately negated the problems of adopting Orthodox Judaism’s complex religious rituals. Their commitment to the Jewish messiah Sabbatai Sevi was therefore a procedure that would absolve and negate their past transgressions and assure them of redemption (Sharot 1982:109). In this sense, it would be fair to say that Sabbatians’ more egalitarian, messianic-focused choice trumped traditional Rabbinic

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Prior to the emergence of Sabbatianism there was an attempt in Safed in 1538, by Jacob Berab and his followers to re-establish the Sanhedrin and to renew the semikhah. Ehrlich describes the actions of Berab and his followers as “messianic aspirations of a more rational/political kind” (2001:22) that were designed to “inspire a Jewish religious enlightenment in the Holy Land” and establish “a supreme religious authority to interpret halakhah according to their needs” (Ehrlich 2001:22). Their failure to do so is repeatedly linked to “the objections raised by opponents whose primary contentions were halakhic minutiae and the preservation of certain religious status quo” hence Ehrlich points out that “it became evident that the halakhah, a system designed to preserve Judaism and the will of God through His Law, was ironically preventing the nation’s promised and long yearned-for renaissance” (2001:23).
\item In a manner akin to what Peter Berger defines as alternation, which is an experience that occurs when a person has to pass between logically contradictory meaning systems (Sharot 1982:108).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Judaism, which required the circumcision of all returning male marranos, in addition to the knowledge of religious ritual praxis and law (Sharot 1982:107).

- The manner in which the poor, the powerless, and the persecuted chose to embrace messianism and Sabbatianism. They include the Jewish communities of Yemen and Morocco, who were the poorest and most persecuted in the Muslim world, and the Jewish communities in Frankfurt and Prague, as well as other German communities who had suffered greatly during the Thirty Years War (Sharot 1982:113). These communities’ embrace of Sabbatai and Sabbatianism can be interpreted as their response to the political oppression of the whole Jewish community, or as a prepolitical protest of people who were politically disenfranchised (Sharot 1982:95).

- The people’s embrace of Sabbatianism which was linked to the “crisis of the seventeenth century”. This crisis was the result of serious economic and political upheaval and economic decline, especially in areas around the Mediterranean that experienced a marked drop in banking profits and prices, political instability and social revolts (Sharot 1982:110). The crisis began in about 1620 and peaked between 1640 and the 1670s, which is probably the reason why Sabbatianism, the greatest messianic movement of Jewish history, occurred at that moment, peaking in the communities of the great trading centres – Smyrna, Leghorn, Venice, Amsterdam and Hamburg in the middle 1660s, as prices reached their lowest point (Sharot 1982:110). The crisis of the seventeenth century can be seen and followed in Salonika, which was a very important city to the Sabbatians, especially in the year 1666. This city, with its rich and sparkling intellectual and cultural life, which had prospered between 1536 and 1593, due to the lucrative and successful Jewish-run cloth industry, its commercial trade and its bustling port, began to falter in the 1660s. In the 1660s the community experienced a financial and political crisis, due to corrupt administration, heavy taxes, money depreciation, extortions, ransoms and a decline in the cloth trade,

and everyone ran to escape his creditors, and he bemoaned that God had decreed that the city would be crushed by misfortune. Other documents of the
time, letters and memoirs, also indicate an atmosphere of desperation. Nehama noted the parallel developments of millenarianism and mysticism in the city; each added suffering was seen as a sign of the coming messiah, and greater numbers devoted themselves to ritual ablutions, flagellations, and the study of cabbalah (Sharot 1982:111-112).

Chabad’s present-day/historical event also resembles the historical event of Qumran, the early Christians and the Sabbatians. Chabad’s context-specific details that construct the historical event which triggered their messiah response are as follows:

- **the new religious immigrants’ response to what they perceive as their oppression by Chabad’s elitist hierarchy** who marginalises them. Consequently, the new religious converts’ embrace of messianic culture offers them the opportunity to dismantle and replace the elitists’ hierarchal culture with the more egalitarian messianic culture. Messianic culture’s revolutionary character also succeeds in demolishing the traditional markers that alienate the ba’alei teshuvah [new converts] and allows them to transform their religion from within (Szubin 2000:230);

- **Chabad’s firm belief that the End of Days is very imminent** which is linked to their belief that certain events of the past fifty years, as well as current events, like the current sub-prime-induced world-wide recession, are indicative that the time of suffering, a period known as the chevli moshiach (pangs of the messiah) has come. Chabad also regard the Holocaust and the establishment of State of Israel as the principle indicators of the chevli moshiach, which they regard as the precursor to the redemption and the end of days. Since two key events, namely the Holocaust and the establishment of State of Israel, have passed, they now believe that we are drawing even closer to the end of days, which they regard as very, very imminent (Szubin 2000:221).

---

206 Chabad was “viciously anti-Zionist until after the founding of the State of Israel. When Jews could have fled Europe and gone to Israel or America, Lubavitch rebbes opposed leaving Europe. The 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe, a vicious anti-Zionist in his own right, told his followers there would be no war and that it was safe to stay in Europe. He did this from Warsaw in the summer of 1939, less than 4 months before World War II began with the bombing and invasion of Poland. He was rescued by the American government. What did he ask for as he was brought to safety from amidst the destruction and horror? To save more Jews? No. The man asked for his silver collection and his rare book collection – Sherlock Holmes in Yiddish translation alongside of ‘sefarim’. Not a peep from the holy man’s mouth about saving Jews” (S. Rosenberg 2006. Accessed online). The 5th Lubavitcher’ Rebbe’s infamous and widely circulated letter on anti-Zionism, written in about 1900 can be read in Appendix no 4.
The information reveals that Christianity, Sabbatianism, and Chabad’s current messianic episode appear to have arisen in response to similar historical events (as described by Shermer, that trigger the oppression-redemption/messiah myth response), albeit that each similar historical event has its own context-specific details, and that all three groups have a Jewish Messiah who projects a “suffering servant”, dying and rising messiah template (that appears to have originated at Qumran), which two groups’ followers, the Sabbatians and Chabad, unlike the early Christians, are on record for noting.

4.2 SUMMARY

This survey reveals that the idea of allowing “another” (as in a person or a beast) to become the bearer of a person (or all the people’s) sins, is a very old pagan custom that not only predates Judaism, but was known and practiced within ancient Judaism. Leviticus 16:8 reveals that the custom of vicarious atonement was practiced in early Judaism, when the priests sent the people’s sins away into the desert/wilderness upon the back of a hairy goat, to a person/entity who eventually mutated into a demon, known as Azazel, who dwelt in the wilderness.

The modern-day praxis of Judaism’s pre-Day of Atonement/Yom Kippur ritual of Kapparot, reveals that the practice of vicarious atonement has not only retained its ancient and primitive appeal (despite philosophers like Kant’s harsh criticism of vicarious atonement), but that this custom still forms part of present-day Traditional Rabbinic-based Judaism. This allows us to conclude that the concept and practice of vicarious suffering was familiar to the ancient Jews prior to 800 BCE. It would also appear that the concept of vicarious atonement per se predated Isaiah’s depiction of vicarious atonement, as seen in the figure of the “suffering servant”. And that it may well be that Isaiah’s suffering servant was destined to suffer on behalf of a person or people for their personal salvation as opposed to being understood as the one whose only duty and destiny was to suffer on behalf of Israel (as a nation and state) for its redemption.

The writing of Jewish sages such as Yose the Galilean, who preceded Jesus (and is recorded the Siphre), and the messianic hymns from Qumran, also appear to indicate that the concept of the “suffering servant” messiah was not only a Jewish notion, but
that this concept was, contrary to Bultmann’s view, well known amongst the Jews before Jesus and the advent of the early Christian Church. This realisation allows the thesis to argue that Knohl’s theory and his reading of the Gabriel Stone may well be correct, in that Jesus and his followers would not only have been familiar with the Qumran-based (hence Jewish) idea of the “suffering servant” Messiah, but that Jesus may well have been, in the light of the pattern set by Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson, seen as a “suffering servant” messiah by his followers during his lifetime and in the period immediately after his death.

The Gabriel Stone also reveals that there was another Messiah, besides the Davidic Messiah, known as Ephraim, or the Messiah, son of Joseph (whom Knohl also identifies and discusses in his theory in his book), who was already well-known in the late first century BCE. This Messiah, son of Joseph, however, symbolised a different type of messiah, in that the Messiah, son of Joseph, represented suffering and death. Knohl draws attention to the way in which “the setting of ‘Gabriel’s Revelation’ reflects elements of death and bloodshed” (Knohl 2008b).

Knohl also points out how, when we realise that the identity of the “suffering servant” Messiah is that of the Messiah, son of Joseph, and not the messiah, son of David, that this casts light on the manner in which Jesus rejected the idea that the Messiah is the son of David. This rejection is seen in Mark 12:35 where Jesus asks “How can the scribes say that Christ is the son of David?”

Knohl points out that Jesus then quotes Psalm 10 (attributed to David himself in the Hebrew Bible), saying:

“David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit declared… “

Jesus then recites a passage from the psalm:

“The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at my right hand,
till I put my enemies under thy feet.” (Mark 12:36).

Jesus then uses this passage to prove his point:

“David himself calls him [the Messiah] ‘Lord,’ so how is he his son?”

That is, David speaks of the Messiah as “my Lord,” rather than as “my son.” The Messiah therefore cannot be a son of David. Using Psalm 110 as his proof text, Jesus here refutes the scribes’ view that Christ, the Messiah, should be a son or descendant of David (Knohl 2008b).
Some scholars have suggested that Jesus wished to claim that the Messiah is not merely a son of David, but rather has a superior status—possibly that of the Son of God. However, if this were the case, we would have expected Jesus to anchor his claim in Psalm 2:7, “You are my son, today I have begotten you,” rather than on the first verse of Psalm 110, which makes no explicit reference to the Messiah as the Son of God.

In citing Psalm 110, [Knohl notes] that Jesus may well be seeking to dispel the prevalent expectation of a triumphal messiah, the traditional “son of David”.

His ideal messianic model is different. As with the Messiah Ephraim, son of Joseph, Jesus’ Messiah involves suffering and death (Knohl 2008b).

Knohl points out that the Gabriel Stone also shows a belief in a messiah who is resurrected “after three days” and the belief in the ascent to heaven of some people who had been killed, were already well-known concepts amongst the Jews prior to and during the time of Jesus (Bronner 2008:2; Knohl 2008c:154). This would indicate that Jesus’ predictions of his suffering in the Gospels were therefore not later inserts, but that these words reflect, instead, the beliefs of that time.

Knohl also argues that these factors also support his belief that Jesus would therefore have believed that

His mission is that he has to be put to death by the Romans to suffer so his blood will be the sign for redemption to come … This is the sign of the son of Joseph. This is the conscious view of Jesus himself. This gives the Last Supper an absolutely different meaning. To shed blood is not for the sins of people but to bring redemption to Israel (Knohl in Bronner 2008:2).

Knohl’s argument, above, that Jesus himself, and his early Jewish followers saw Jesus as the “suffering servant” Messiah who suffers and dies “not for the sins of people but to bring redemption to Israel” is an interesting observation. This observation indicates that the belief that Jesus shed blood for the sins of the people alone (personal salvation), as opposed to shedding blood for the redemption of Israel and later to lead them out of exile, probably came to the fore as Christianity became a popular belief system outside Israel (post 70 CE) when the idea and belief of shedding blood to bring redemption for Israel would have been both unsuitable and irrelevant in a non-Jewish context.

Knohl’s assessment of Jesus as the “suffering servant” Messiah, son of Joseph, who sheds blood to bring redemption to Israel, also places him in the same category as the other two Jewish messiahs, discussed in this thesis, namely Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson.
The discussion on vicarious atonement, above, along with Knohl’s theory and his reading of the Gabriel Stone indicate that

- the idea of the suffering servant Messiah, also known as Ephraim, or Messiah son of Joseph, is a Jewish concept, that appears to have arisen and developed at Qumran, prior to Jesus;
- the idea of a dying, and (three day later) rising, messiah predated Jesus.

It would also appear to indicate the Qumran-derived “suffering servant” dying and rising messiah template was not only known to Jesus and his followers, but that this was the messianic template Jesus assumed and projected. The data on the other two successful Jewish Messiahs, Sabbatai Sevi and Schneerson, reveals that their Messiah templates resemble the Qumran-derived, “suffering servant” dying and rising messiah template. And, that these two groups also believe that their Messiahs, will, like Jesus, rise again, and return to initiate the redemption in the near future.

There is however an important difference between the Christians, and the Sabbatians and Chabad who both still regard themselves as Jews (albeit that the Sabbatians are crypto-Jews), consequently, with the Sabbatians who mainly reside in the Ottoman Empire and in the rest of the Diaspora, as do the Chabad/Lubavitchers, the focus falls more on a Messiah who will lead them out of exile, as opposed to the subsequent development of the Christian Messiah, who brings personal salvation alone.

The marked similarity in the messianic beliefs and messiah templates of these three movements would, therefore, appear to be more than simple coincidence. The similarity in all three Messiahs’ templates suggests that the concept of the “suffering servant” messiah may be a significant part of these Jewish Messiahs and their movements’ appeal and success.

This thesis therefore proposes that the powerful appeal and success of these Jewish Messiahs and the posthumous success of their movements, is related to their “suffering servant” messiah template. That followers are also drawn to the “suffering servant” messiahs’ offer of vicarious atonement, which is perceived as an act that will not only redeem Israel (in the corporate sense) and lead the Jews out of exile, but, as an act that can also provide these messianists with the deeply ingrained and familiar longing for individual vicarious atonement. These messiahs’ thus provide personal salvation, as
described and understood in Leviticus 16, and as practiced in the present day ritual of *kapparot*.

This thesis therefore argues that human belief in, the need for, and the fervent embrace of a “suffering servant”, dying, and rising Messiah, who provides them with vicarious atonement, is

- an ancient and deeply ingrained aspect of the human psyche, that Judaism recognises and acknowledges (as Leviticus 16 and the Book of Job confirm), and which current Judaism still accommodates, as is attested by the praxis of the present-day ritual of *kapparot* by certain Haredi communities;

- so appealing and desirable precisely because it allows people to absolve themselves of all personal accountability;

- linked to these messianists’ belief that their messiah’s promise of an imminent return will bring them redemption, salvation and the establishment of the ideal world, the creation of which will then absolve these messianists of their duty and responsibility to create socially just and universally compassionate societies in the present time.
CHAPTER 5: A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF THE CHRISTIAN EVANGELICALS, THEIR BELIEF IN RAPTURE AND THE RISE AND THREAT OF THE MILITANT CHRISTIAN RIGHT-WING

This chapter investigates the modern-day USA-based Christian Evangelicals and their belief in an imminent and militant rapture. This thesis looks, albeit very briefly, at popular evangelical rapture and prophecy literature and the way their literature fuels rapture beliefs, particularly the aggressive beliefs and ambitions of the militant Christian right-wing also known as the Christian Right, the “traditional evangelicals”, the Christian Dominionists and/or the Christian nationalists (also referred to in this chapter as the right-wing). Modern militant evangelical rapture beliefs are remarkably akin to those of Qumran in that the evangelicals also seek a well-organised military confrontation in their rapture narrative that will culminate in a major eschatological and messianic cataclysm, albeit that the modern rapture war scenario includes modern weapons and military hardware (and its proponents have access to lethal weapons like nuclear warheads) that can literally induce the end-times.

This chapter discusses the right-wing’s desire for power and dominion and the way in which it is steadily gaining a foothold in the USA government and the US Military. The thesis notes that the Christian Right’s access to nuclear warheads in the military grants credibility to the claim that they pose a threat to humanity’s well-being, as they could deliberately choose to hasten the “End Times” in a man-made nuclear holocaust should they perceive themselves to be under attack, or overwhelmed by evil and/or marginalised, as their belief in the Rapture permits them to do so (Harris 2007a:ix).

The chapter is also concerned with the evangelicals’ rapture-derived beliefs that are responsible for the dichotomy that exists between the evangelicals’ affection and supportive attitude towards the State of Israel and the Jews, both in Israel, and in the USA, and for the fact that the evangelicals’ rapture ensures that all Jews cease to exist once rapture is realised.

5.1 THE USA CHRISTIAN EVANGELICALS

There are approximately 70 million Christian Evangelicals in the United States (i.e., about 25 percent of the population), who attend more than 200,000 Evangelical
churches, and if we apply these statistics to the USA’s total population, then the number of believers would be in the order of 100 million people. Data from a Gallup poll reveals that “40 percent of respondents believe in the Bible as the ‘actual word of God’ and that it is ‘to be taken literally, word for word’” (Hedges 2006:18).

These same Gallup poll statistics also indicate that

- approximately 84 percent of Americans accept that Jesus is the Son of God;
- 80 percent of the respondents state that they believe that they will stand before God on the Day of Judgment;
- 80 percent of the respondents say that God works miracles;
- 50 percent of the respondents say that angels exist;
- 33.3 percent of all the respondents believe in the Rapture (Hedges 2006:18).

A poll commissioned in 2002 by Time Magazine and by CNN showed that nearly 60 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies in the Book of Revelation will literally come true, and (along with the Gallup poll, above) that 20 percent (that is more than fifty million people) believe that the apocalypse will occur in their lifetime (Guyat 2007:7).

As noted in the Introduction, the American Christian Evangelical Fundamentalist tradition, and understanding of the rapture and tribulation narrative, is derived from the Dispensationalist teachings of a travelling British preacher, John Nelson Darby, who travelled across the USA and Canada between 1862 and 1877 (Frykholm 2004:15). Darby preached a type of prophecy that was known as “dispensationalism”. Dispensationalism was based on the belief that human history was divided into periods of time called “dispensations” that would culminate in the thousand year reign of Christ on earth (Frykholm 2004:15). Thus, for believers in dispensationalism, the current age was the Church Age, and when this age ended, it would usher in the final dispensation and the end of human history. Although these beliefs were common

---

knowledge in North America and Britain in the 19th century, Darby’s particular interpretation was unique. What set Darby apart was that he believed that at the end of the Church age, Jesus Christ would call all true believers and they would rise through the clouds and literally be taken up to heaven, in what he described as a “secret rapture”. The rest of humanity would, however, be left behind in a world that would soon sink into anarchy (Frykholm 2004:15).

Darby’s ideas only become popular towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century, due to the efforts of itinerant preachers and the work of lay people as opposed to the efforts of the clergy, church groups and/or biblical scholars (Frykholm 2004:17). The unexpected success and spread of the Dispensationalist movement in the twentieth century was also largely due to the production and successful publication and distribution of the Scofield Reference Bible\(^\text{208}\).

5.2 CARL HENRY AND MODERN EVANGELISM

By 1947, Carl Henry’s criticism of fundamentalism’s anti-intellectual and separatist position, in his book The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism (1947) encouraged the emergence of a new form of conservative Protestantism, which is now termed Evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is a form of conservative Protestantism, which has a new openness towards Charismatics, Pentecostals, Holiness and other conservative Protestant developments. Henry sought to temper dispensationalism’s rhetoric of alienation and recommended that the Protestants make the gospel more relevant to a contemporary world (Frykholm 2004:20).

Henry’s desire to temper the concept of dispensationalism was, however, unsuccessful, and it did not fade away as Henry had hoped. The rapture and tribulation narrative was instead subtly redesigned for each successive generation, drawing on contemporary social and political realities, which gave the narrative more credibility. Through this

---

\(^{208}\) The ‘Scofield Reference Bible’ was a King James Bible that contained detailed footnotes by Darbyite Cyrus I. Scofield. These footnotes explained the passages of the Bible by drawing primarily on Darby’s understanding of Biblical prophecy (Frykholm 2004:17).
process, the rapture narrative gained a new significance and worth that enabled it to maintain its firm grasp on Protestant Christian imagination (Frykholm 2004:21).

## 5.3 THE NEW PROPHECY AND RAPTURE AND TRIBULATION LITERATURE

The rise of the new prophecy literature genre that began in the 1970s, is usually credited to Hal Lindsey, the author of the most popular and bestselling prophecy book in North America, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), and to John Walvoord\(^\text{209}\), Christian theologian, educator and author of books such as *The Rapture question* (1979), *Prophecy in the New Millennium: a fresh look at future events* (2001), and along with Mark Hitchcock, *Armageddon, Oil and Terror* (2007). Other notable authors include John Hagee, author of *Jerusalem Countdown* (2006) which had sold more than 600,000 copies by May 2006, and had reached number 14 on the *USA Today* bestseller list in the same year (Guyat 2007:11,12), Joel Rosenberg, the author of a genre known as “prophecy thrillers”, and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, the authors of the spectacularly successful *Left Behind* series of books about the Rapture, which has sold more than 60 million copies since 1995 (Guyat 2007:1).

During the 1980s, the evangelicals’ belief in the Rapture was ignited by these popular authors and their evangelical prophecy literature and the Rapture concept gradually become part of mainstream American Christian culture (Frykholm 2004:13). These evangelical authors also managed to convince most American Christians that they are literally living at the threshold of the “End Times” (Guyat 2007:1).

### 5.3.1 LaHaye and Jenkins and the LEFT BEHIND series

Tim LaHaye, an evangelical prophecy writer, and Jerry Jenkins, an evangelical fiction writer, collaborated on a series of evangelical novels called *Left Behind* (Guyat 2007:1; Frykholm 2004:3). The *Left Behind* series are, in essence, the evangelical popular-fiction version of the Book of Revelation (and to some degree the Book of

---

\(^{209}\) John Walvoord, long-time president of Dallas Theological Seminary and well known evangelical scholar and interpreter of biblical prophecy, is best known for his work, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* (1991) co-authored with Dr Mark Richardson. The book, which has sold over 2 million copies and has been printed in 16 languages, was, according to Walvoord’s website, requested by President George Bush’s White House Staff to assist them in their understanding of events in the Middle East. Information accessed on line at [http://www.walvoord.com/author_bio.php?author_id=1](http://www.walvoord.com/author_bio.php?author_id=1)
Daniel as well) and have come to express, for many, notably the Christian Right (also known and referred to as the right-wing), “the yearning they feel for the Rapture, the end of history, the end of time” (Hedges 2006:27,186). These books describe how, once Christ returns, all believers will be lifted into heaven, and the Earth will enter a period known as the tribulation. The period of tribulation leads to the final horrific battle between the forces of the Antichrist and Christ. According to these novels, the bodies of the people who are the Antichrist’s forces, will literally explode, “bursting open from head to toe at every word that proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord as he spoke to the captives within Jerusalem” (Hedges 2006:187).

The politics of these books are clearly right-wing, in that the books are openly pro-life, anti-feminist and anti-Semitic. The books also reveal chauvinism and racism, as the leaders (i.e., the “natural” leaders of the Tribulation Force in the novels), are all white Christian American men, while all the “others” (i.e., the “African Americans, Arabs, Asians, people from many nations, and converts to Christianity from many faiths”), are depicted as submitting to the novel’s white male leadership, in “scenes of disturbing capitulation” (Frykholm 2004:178). These books have also been made into films and video games where teenagers “can blow away non-believers and the army of the Antichrist on the streets of New York” (Hedges 2006:186).

LaHaye and Jenkins had to distort the Bible to accommodate their account of the Rapture in the Left Behind series, with all its gruesome details of the end times, as well as their extraordinary time line, which is never expressed in the Bible. LaHaye and Jenkins, nevertheless, overcome this hurdle by choosing lesser-known, highly figurative and ambiguous biblical passages and use allegory to fashion these passages until they accommodate the apocalyptic visions depicted in the series (Hedges 2006:187).

LaHaye, and many like-minded Americans, do not believe that God has a special plan for the United States, and believe instead that America’s end is near. LaHaye, along with most Biblical prophecy followers in the United States of America, also believes that current world systems (that is, governments, economies, cultures and religions) are all about to implode. The prophecy authors and their faithful followers, all believe

210 The excerpts in this paragraph are all from LaHaye and Jenkins’ book, Glorious appearing: the End of Days (2004:273, 286).
that the warning signs are clearly evident, and that God will soon intervene and swiftly rapture the true Christians in a type of “massive spiritual airlift” (Guyat 2007:2).

Although the American interest in the apocalypse did precede the publication of LaHaye and Jenkins’ earlier books, interest in their *Left Behind* series rose sharply after two events. They are the 9/11 incident which seemed to confirm the apocalyptic-minded Christians’ belief that they were living in the “End Times”, as the 9/11 incidents were precisely the type of incidents that the *Left Behind* series described (Guyat 2007:7); and the contentious presidential election in December 2000, when Christian right-wing voters helped to secure George Bush the presidency. This event was also linked to the fact that George Bush is himself a staunch evangelical who has often spoken about the way Jesus had “changed his heart”, during his presidential campaign.

The *Left Behind* series does, however, have its critics. They include:

- Tom Sine, the evangelical writer, who finds the series guilty of “fear-mongering”;
- Dr. Marva Dawn, theologian and Teaching Fellow in Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, who expressed the view that the series encourages “sadism, indifference to suffering, and … lust for power”;
- Craig Hill, the biblical scholar, who takes umbrage at the manner in which “the rapture belief suppresses social action, particularly on issues of social justice, because of the passivity of such beliefs [which it] cultivates in its believers” (Frykholm 2004:176-177). Hill also raises another alarming aspect about popular rapture books, which is directly linked to Sam Harris’ concern and this thesis’ proposal, that the evangelicals’ messianic-focused rapture belief is dangerous because of the fact that rapture-oriented evangelicals, who have access to nuclear weapons, may choose to hasten the End Times at will. Hill explains that his concern is based on the fact that popular rapture literature, especially the *Left Behind* series (Frykholm 2004:176-177) “teach us that ‘nuclear war is inevitable, that the pursuit of peace is pointless, and that the planet’s woes are unstoppable’” (Frykholm 2004:177).
Craig Hill argues that such beliefs are not only dangerous, but untenable with the Christian faith “which requires active response to suffering” (Frykholm 2004:177).

Yet, despite their belief in the “End Times”, the apocalyptic-centred evangelical Christians, especially the Christian right-wing, continue to immerse and involve themselves in American politics. The rise of the right-wing became so pronounced after 2000 that many moderate Republicans and other non-evangelical Christians began to view its rapid ascendency with concern. The conservative political commentator and former Republican Party strategist, Kevin Phillips, expressed his concern about the Christian evangelicals’ rise in American politics and government in his book American Theocracy (2006). Phillips identifies the right-wing’s swift rise to power as one of the three key factors that threaten America’s future, along with America’s dependency on oil, and America’s national and personal debt (2006).

5.3.2 John Hagee

The Christian Evangelical double-sided interest in the apocalypse and in current politics is clearly identifiable in the best-selling books of John Hagee, founder and pastor of Cornerstone Church, in San Antonio, Texas. Hagee is best known for his completely pro-Israel position and for his Dual Covenant Theology.

Because the Biblical apocalypse centres on Israel and on the fate of Jew and Christian alike, Hagee believes that Christians should pay special attention to Middle East politics so that they may recognise the “End Time” signs. Hagee has written many books with prophetic themes. They include: The Beginning and the End: Yitzhak Rabin and the Coming Antichrist (1996), Final Dawn over Jerusalem (1999), Attack on America New York, Jerusalem, and the role of terrorism in the Last Days (2001) and In Defense of Israel (2007). Hagee’s apocalyptic beliefs and his focus on Israel are clearly expressed in all his books, especially in the recent Jerusalem Countdown (2006) (Guyat 2007:20).

Guyat notes that, despite the mega-celebrity prophecy authors’ runaway success, and their firm belief that the Bible can foretell the future, they have all failed, to date, to predict anything at all about the future. That is, all except for the “prophecy” writing of one man, Joel Rosenberg (Guyat 2007:279).
5.3.3 Joel Rosenberg

Joel Rosenberg, a born and raised Jew who converted to evangelical Christianity, is the author of a genre known as “prophecy thrillers.” His began his career as a political consultant and only decided to write Bible prophecy thrillers in the second half of 2000. His first novel, *The Last Jihad*, was written in the beginning of 2001, before 9/11. Yet, Rosenberg’s first novel begins with an eerie description of a hijacked plane crashing into an American city in a deliberate terrorist attack, and it continues to describe how the United States responds to this attack by invading Iraq and removing Saddam Hussein (Guyat 2007:280-281). The plot line of Rosenberg’s book caught the attention of newspapers and TV stations and made Rosenberg a regular contributor on Fox and other news channels where he was introduced as “the Middle East expert” (Guyat 2007:280).

Rosenberg’s second novel, *The Last Days* (2003) (reprinted in 2006), was also remarkably uncanny as the novel described an American diplomatic convoy which came under fire in the Gaza strip. This event actually occurred two weeks before the book was launched nationwide in the USA. The actual death of the three American security guards who were killed while they were escorting a diplomatic convoy in Gaza, in 2006, was the catalyst that prompted *US News and World Report* to describe Rosenberg as the “modern Nostradamus” (Guyat 2007:283). By 2006, Rosenberg had penned four novels, which included *The Ezekiel Option* and *The Copper Scroll* and he had sold more than four million copies of these four novels.

5.4 THE PROFILE OF THE MODERN BELIEVER IN RAPTURE

Believers in rapture are not always easy to categorise as many are not only non-affiliated by choice, but they also come from different groups that include evangelical, fundamentalist, mainline, liberal Protestant, Catholic and Mormon religious positions. Consequently, the number of people who believe in the Rapture, particularly as defined in popular rapture literature such as the *Left Behind* series, includes men and

---

211 Although Rosenberg is a prophecy thriller writer, his main aim, like all other prophecy authors, is to win souls and to encourage people to embrace evangelical Christianity in the face of imminent End Times (Guyat 2007:294).
women who are members of mainline churches, people who do not attend church and those who do not consider themselves to be “saved” (Frykholm 2004:26).

Evangelical culture, its rapture belief and language, has also fused with American secular culture over time, and has become a substantial part of American popular culture. Scholars have identified between 10 and 15 million Americans who are “doctrinal believers” in dispensational premillennialism and another 10 to 15 million who are “narrative believers” as defined by Susan Harding212 (Frykholm 2004:25).

5.5 THE CHRISTIAN EVANGELICAL RIGHT-WING

American fundamentalists and evangelicals are divided into two groups. They are those who

- refuse to grant legitimacy to alternative views of the Christian tradition;

- concede that there are other legitimate ways to serve and worship Christ (Hedges 2006:18).

There are also other groups who also fall under the Christian evangelical umbrella, but who are not drawn to politics, and who choose to focus on totally different aspects from the evangelical right-wing. They include:

- the mega-churches, whose primary focus is the gospel of prosperity, which is based on the belief that God wants Christians to be rich and successful, and this group show little interest in politics;

- the strict Fundamentalists, who perceive the Charismatics who speak in tongues as Satan worshippers;

- the clusters of left-wing evangelicals who both believe that the bible is the literal word of God but embrace social activism and left wing politics such as: Jim Wallis’s Sojourner movement and Ron Sider’s Evangelicals for Social Action (Hedges 2006:21).

---

212 Frykholm has taken this definition from Susan Harding’s book *The book of Jerry Falwell: fundamentalist language and politics* (2000:232), meaning those who believe in the narrative of the rapture as opposed to those who subscribe to the doctrine of dispensationalism and who believe in the narrative of the rapture and tribulation.
While the majority of Christian Americans embrace a literal interpretation of the Bible, only a tiny minority, which includes the subset known as the Christian right-wing (or Dominionists\(^{213}\)) “are comfortable with the concept of an intolerant, theocratic America” (Hedges 2006:19).

The Christian right-wing’s *modus operandi* is unique and is seen in the way it utilises the disconnectedness, despair, fear and isolation of the American people to coerce them into embracing right-wing beliefs and doctrine (Hedges 2006:21). The right-wing currently forms approximately 12.6 percent of the American population. They are also predominantly Republican, reject pluralism, and support totalitarian policies, such as amending the Constitution to make America a “Christian nation” and deny homosexuals the same rights as other Americans (Hedges 2006:19; Goldberg 2007:9).

Although the Christian right-wing is only approximately 12.6 percent of the total evangelical following\(^{214}\), the extent of the right-wing’s power and its reach greatly exceeds the actual size of the group (Hedges 2006:19). This observation becomes especially pertinent when we consider the observations of the American historian, Crane Brinton. In his seminal work, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (1938. Rev. ed. 1965), Brinton demonstrates that radical social movements (as in this instance, the Christian evangelical right-wing/Dominionists) are inevitably small, but that they all know how to utilise the media and various propaganda tools to create the illusion of mass followings (Hedges 2006:19). It is therefore worth noting that the Christian right-wing controls approximately six of the national television networks that reach millions of homes, and the majority of the nation’s more than 2,000 religious radio stations, as well as denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention in the USA (Hedges 2006:10).

The Christian right-wing and its aims to redefine traditional Christian terms and concepts to fit an ideology that calls on the radical church to take political power,

\(^{213}\) The right-wing Dominionists take their name from Genesis 1:26-31, in which God gives human beings “dominion” over all creation. Dominionism, is a “theocratic sect with its roots in radical Calvinism. It looks to the theocracy of John Calvin implanted in Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1500s as its political model, and it teaches that American Christians have been mandated by God to make America a Christian state” (Hedges 2006:10,11).

\(^{214}\) The total number of Christian evangelicals in the USA, in 2006, was between 70 million and a 100 million, who attended more than 200,000 evangelical churches. This is ±25 percent of the USA population (Hedges 2006:18).
shares many key traits with classical fascist movements (Hedges 2006:10,11). The right-wing, like all fascist movements, also has a vague and contradictory set of beliefs, believes in magic, idolises its leaders and calls for the moral and physical supremacy of a master race, who in this instance, consists of the American Christian evangelicals (Hedges 2006:11). It also advocates that Jesus has called on Christians to build the kingdom of God in the present, as opposed to the belief that Christians have to wait for it. This type of militant biblicism makes America an agent of God, and it allows the right-wing to view all the political and intellectual opponents of America’s Christian leaders as the agents of Satan (Hedges 2006:12).

5.6 THE RIGHT-WING’S “CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW”

The perceptual reality described above is also called the “Christian worldview”. It is based on the certainty that true Christianity must rule all aspects of public and private life, and that all government, science, history, culture, and relationships must be understood according to the decree of scripture (Goldberg 2007:5-6). The result is that right-wing Christians believe that there are biblically correct positions on every situation and/or issue, and that only people like them – with the right “worldview” – are able to recognise the biblically correct position (Goldberg 2007:6).

This total Christian ideology supports and drives the majority of disagreements over religion, science, sex and pluralism that divide communities all over the USA. This ideology is also a conscious denial of Enlightenment rationalism, and it is an ideology that people like Ryun215 and Farris216 want to see as the blueprint that guides every decision that the government makes (Goldberg 2007:6). What sets the Christian nationalists/right-wing even further apart from previous religious revivals in the USA is that the Christian nationalists not only claim that the Bible is the literal word of God, but that they use it as their basis for designing political programs for their political party (Goldberg 2007:6), which this thesis would like to note is, in essence, a return to theocracy, which other religious extremists, like the Taliban, practice in countries like Afghanistan.

---

215 Ned Ryun is the former speechwriter for George W. Bush and the homeschooled son of Kansas congressman Jim Ryun. He is also the director of Generation Joshua (Goldberg 2007:3).

216 Michael Farris is a veteran right-wing activist and the nation’s premier advocate of homeschooling. He is also the founder and president of the evangelical Patrick Henry College (Goldberg 2007:1).
Besides noting that the right-wing’s principal dream is the restoration of an imagined Christian nation, this thesis would like to reiterate that it must be understood that the definitive objective of Christian nationalists (with regard to realising their dream) is not fairness. The movement is based on a theology that declares the Christians’ right to rule, thus all non-believers will simply have to learn “their place” (Goldberg 2007:7).

5.7 THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT-WING: ITS INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN SOCIETY

Although traditional fundamentalists share many of the darker traits of these new right-wing evangelicals, such as total obedience to a male hierarchy that claims to speak on God’s behalf, zero tolerance for non-believers and contempt for rational and intellectual enquiry and endeavour, they have never attempted to change the government and other secular institutes into extensions of the church (Hedges 2006:13).

The Christian right-wing is, however, very different from the mainline Christian Evangelicals, and its true ambitions can even be seen in the way it uses language, especially words such as: truth, wisdom, death, liberty, life, and love, which do not have the same meanings in their world as they do in the secular world, for example:

*Life and death* means “life in Christ or death to Christ, and are used to signal belief or unbelief in the risen Lord” (Hedges 2006:14);

*Wisdom* “has little to do with human wisdom but refers to the level of commitment and obedience to the system of belief” (Hedges 2006:14);

*Liberty* “is not about freedom, but the ‘liberty’ found when one accepts Jesus Christ and is liberated from the world to obey Him”. It is also used to define the extent to which America obeys Christian law, hence when “America is a Christian nation, liberty becomes, in this view, liberation from Satan” (Hedges 2006:14,16);

*Love* is “the word used to lure many into the movement, who seek a warm, loving community to counter their isolation and alienation. But, in the Christian worldview the word ‘love’ is ‘distorted to mean an unquestioned obedience to those who claim to speak for God in return for the promise of everlasting life’ – whereas ‘blind, human love’, the acceptance of the
other, is attacked as inferior love, dangerous and untrustworthy” (Hedges 2006:14).

Christian right-wing nationalism is therefore not only an ideology that millions of Americans believe and practice, but it is also an ideology that has enabled the movement to move from the edge of society into the mainstream areas of government institutions in the USA. The movement’s success could already be seen in 2004 and 2005, when the Christian right-wing seized control of the Republican Party in the USA. This enabled it to secure a majority of seats in 36 percent of all Republican Party committees, which is 18 out of 50 states, along with large minorities in the remaining states.

Many current right-wing believers are also powerful people and it is therefore hardly surprising that a very public figure like Sarah Palin, the Republican Party nominee for vice president in the 2008 USA elections, should spring from them. An article by Sam Harris in *Newsweek* (2008a) notes that Sarah Palin, in keeping with the Christian right-wing trend, believes and is convinced that

- the Biblical God consciously directs world events;
- biblical prophecy is to be used as guide to the future as seen in her words to her congregation, “God’s going to tell you what is going on, and what is going to go on, and you guys are going to have that within you”;
- we are all living in “end times”, meaning that rapture is imminent.

Believers, like Palin, use their Christian nationalism as ammunition in all their fights, country wide, over issues such as abortion and education, where they strive to replace Darwin’s scientifically-backed work on evolution with their mythic-derived fiction of creationism.

### 5.8 THE EVANGELICAL HOME SCHOOL MOVEMENT

Christian nationalists are also the leading proponents of home schooling. The move to home school is led by Michael Farris, the home-schooled founder and president of evangelical Patrick Henry College, who denounces the public school system as “godless”, and refers to the children who are home-schooled as the “Moses
generation”, as these children have escaped what they see as the bondage of public schools (Goldberg 2007:1).

There are approximately 1.1 to 2.1 million, mainly evangelical, children who are currently being home-schooled in the USA. The home-schooled children’s school curriculum contains no ideas or views that clash with their biblically-derived Christian worldview. These children are taught creationism as opposed to evolution, and that America was founded as a Christian nation, but that secular humanists are bent on destroying it. They are also taught to obey and are “discouraged from critical analysis, questioning and independent thought”. By the time their home-schooled education is complete, these children readily accept and believe “a host of myths designed to destroy the open, pluralistic society” (Hedges 2006:26).

Farris and the Christian nationalists are actively grooming this home-schooled generation (whom they called the “Generation Joshua”), untainted by secularism, to be the new Christian leaders. The prime aim of the creation of “Generation Joshua” is to revise everything – entertainment, politics, education and government – so that it all functions within the confines and dictates of its “Christian worldview” once the children of this generation attain positions of power (Goldberg 2007:2).

Statistics reveal that many of the present generation of the Christian home-schooled who attended Farris’s right-wing college, have already attained positions of power in US state and government institutions. Farris’s college in rural Virginia opened in 2000 and although it only accepts approximately 100 mainly home-schooled evangelical students, it had already provided more than 7 percent of the White House’s interns by spring 2004. The statistics also reveal that 22 conservative congressmen have employed at least one or more of the interns who graduated from Farris’s college, and that one graduate, Patrick Henry, worked for Karl Rove (Goldberg 2007:3).

5.9 THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT-WING, THE PARAMILITARY FORCE, BLACKWATER AND THE USA MILITARY

I believe that in all men’s lives at certain periods, and in many men’s lives at all periods between infancy and extreme old age, one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local ring and the terror of being left out … of all the passions the passion for the inner ring is the most skilful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things.
5.9.1 Right-wing apocalyptic violence and the paramilitary force, Blackwater

Although the right-wing movement’s obsession with magic, conspiracy theories, paranoia, death and sexual repression are, at best, disturbing, it is its infatuation with apocalyptic violence and military force, which is its most dangerous and ominous trait (Hedges 2006:28). The movement has not only given rise to random groups of secret, extreme militias who see themselves as messianic warriors ready to die for Christ, but they are also presently involved in the building of America’s first private defence force, known as Blackwater, with its recognisable black uniforms (Hedges 2006:29).

The Christian right-wing, secretive, mega-millionaire founder of Blackwater, Erik Prince, has transformed a private security company into a powerful, well-armed mercenary force. Prince promotes his company, Blackwater, as “a patriotic extension of the U.S. military”. His employees take an oath of loyalty to the constitution, which is an act that Hedges describes as “as cynical as it is dishonest” (Hedges 2006:29).

Blackwater is presently deployed in Iraq. Although there are no official statistics, it is estimated that there are approximately 20,000 to 30,000 armed security contractors working in Iraq (security contractors are not counted as part of the coalition forces) (Hedges 2006:29). The Christian Right’s apocalyptic rhetoric empowers and underlies the formation of Blackwater, which is giving rise to a modern Praetorian Guard that is similar to the Praetorian Guard of ancient Rome. Like its Roman counterpart, Blackwater in Iraq is already operating beyond military and civilian law, and is

---

217 These groups include:
- the Texas based, American Veterans in Domestic Defense, who foster a perpetual state of crisis paranoia, fear and persecution, which makes it easier for any call for violence to seem like an act of self defense instead;
- the Christian Identity, an obscure military group who believe that they will soon fight a religious war;
- the Faith Force Multiplier, whose “members apply military principles to evangelism in a manifesto summoning warriors ‘to the spiritual warfare for the souls’” (Hedges 2006:28-29);
- also refer to Barton Gellman’s ‘Locked and Loaded: The Secret World of Extreme Militias’ in TIME (October 11, 2010:12-21) for the most recent expose of this phenomena.

218 See Appendix no 5: Blackwater said to pursue bribes to Iraq after 17 died for an example of Blackwater’s unethical conduct in Iraq.

219 The Roman Praetorian Guard was “a paramilitary force that defied legal constraints, made violence part of the political discourse and eventually plunged the Empire into tyranny and despotism” (Hedges 2006:30).
protected by a 2005 ruling passed by the American occupation authorities in Iraq that safeguards all civilian contractors in Iraq, in this instance Blackwater members, from prosecution (Hedges 2006:30).

Blackwater has not only been paid with government money, but it also operates without any constitutional restraint. The US State Department has paid Blackwater $750 million to date for its work in Iraq. This money and its other income for its highly lucrative contracts in Iraq, has enabled it to acquire a fleet of more than 20 aircraft, that includes helicopter gunships. It has also built the world’s largest private military facility (a 7,000 acre compound in North Carolina in the USA), as well as a facility in Illinois, and it has set up a private intelligence branch, known as “Total Intelligence” (Hedges 2006:31).

The US government also recently deployed Blackwater in New Orleans, at the cost of $240,000 a day, after Hurricane Katrina, to patrol the streets, where it was allowed to move around in vehicles without any registration plates (Hedges 2006:31). Blackwater mercenary forces are not like police officers as they are not trained in protecting constitutional rights, nor do they have a system of accountability, either within or without their organisation Blackwater is therefore very similar to the Nazi Party brownshirts, in that Blackwater also functions as an extrajudicial enforcement group that can, and does, operate outside the law. This makes Blackwater an extremely dangerous threat to people’s rights (Hedges 2006:31).

The formation, in March 2006, of “The Military Religious Freedom Foundation” in the USA by Michael L. “Mikey” Weinstein, which is “dedicated to ensuring that all members of the United States Armed Forces fully receive the Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom to which they and all Americans are entitled by virtue of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment”220, reveals the extent to which the right-wing has succeeded in insidiously infiltrating and gaining power in the US military and its academies.

220 The quote is taken from the Mission Statement of “The Military Religious Freedom Foundation” which was accessed online at their website. http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/about.html
5.9.2 The right-wing: Its infiltration and attempt to transform the USA military into a “Christian defense force”

“The Christian Taliban is running the Department of Defense”

Michael L. Weinstein

The evangelical right-wing’s deliberate move to abolish religious freedom in the US military and its desire to establish evangelical Christianity as the only religion in the US military, had reached intolerable levels by 2006. The USA military and its academy’s evangelicals practised blatant anti-Semitism, harsh discrimination and unfair treatment of other non-Christians in the military and the academies. Knowledge of its forced proselytising in the military and its production of the video “Christian Embassy” reached mainstream media by 2006, and galvanised Weinstein to set up the Religious Freedom Foundation in response to its agenda. Weinstein’s foundation aims to enable people affected by the proselytising tactics and ambitions of the military evangelicals to address their problems. Prior to the establishment of the Foundation in 2006, Weinstein had already sued the United States Air Force in October 2005, for permitting proselytisation by evangelical officers in the military (Military Religious Freedom Foundation).

Since the formation of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, the Foundation has literally been inundated with hundred of thousands of calls for help from active duty and retired soldiers, many who served or are still serving in Iraq, who want the Foundation’s help to prevent being coerced by their commanding officers to convert to

221 Ibid.

222 This is a promotional video, made by the radical Washington-based organisation, Christian Embassy that is dedicated to building a “Christian America”. The video contains footage of evangelical Christian Air Force and Army generals and colonels who were filmed in uniform at the Pentagon. It contains clips of men like Major Jack Catton, who is filmed saying “being an adviser to the Joint Chiefs of Staff is a wonderful opportunity to evangelize men and women setting defense policy. My first priority is my faith” he says. “I think it’s a huge impact … You have many men and women who are seeking God’s counsel and wisdom as they advise the chairman [of the Joint Chief’s council] and the secretary of defense” (Hedges 2006:32). The Christian Embassy video can be viewed online at http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/urgent_issues.html

223 Michael L. “Mikey” Weinstein, is an attorney, businessman, former Air Force officer and author of With God on our side: one man’s war against an evangelical coup in America’s military (2006). He graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1977 and served as a Judge Advocate General (JAG) for ten years (Information accessed online at Wikipedia.org).


264
Christianity, or “face other consequences” (Proctor 2007). The number of complaints continues to grow daily, as does the Foundation’s legal briefs, which include landmark lawsuits such as the 2007 Federal litigation lawsuit filed against the United States Department of Defense secretary Robert Gates, and Major Freddy J. Welborn. Weinstein, on filing this particular lawsuit went on record as saying:

Today, we are boldly stabbing back against the evil heart of unconstitutional darkness, a contagion of fundamentalist religious supremacy and triumphalism noxiously dominating the command and control of the technologically most lethal organization ever created by humankind: our honorable and noble United States armed forces (Proctor 2007).

Robert Koehler has also been very critical of the evangelicals’ infiltration into the military and their attempt to transform the military into a “Christian defense force”. In an article posted on May 3, 2007, in the Huffington Post, he explains why he views Weinstein’s Foundation and what it is striving for with respect:

Weinstein, a 1977 graduate of the Academy and former assistant general counsel in the Reagan administration, and a lifelong Republican, has devoted the last several years of his life to battling what he has come to regard as a fundamentalist takeover of the Academy, turning it, in effect, into a taxpayer-supported Evangelical institution. He charges that the separation of church and state is rapidly vanishing at the school, which routinely promotes sectarian religious events, tolerates the proselytizing of uniquely vulnerable new recruits and, basically, conflates evangelical interests and the national interest.

Koehler expresses concern and warns people that Weinstein’s fight for religious freedom in the military is not just a fight over some abstract principle, with ramifications only for atheist, Jewish, Buddhist and other cadets who may be offended by fundamentalist God talk … The whole U.S. military, up and down the chain of command, is coming to be dominated by members of a small, characteristically intolerant sliver of Christianity who truly regard themselves as Christian soldiers, on a God-appointed mission to harvest souls and battle evil … Can you imagine a contingent of religious zealots, with their contempt for secular values (and such manifestations of secular order as the U.S. Constitution) — and with their zest for holy war — in control of the most potent fighting force and weaponry in human history? Is this possible?

225 A list of the Foundation’s legal briefs and correspondence to date, can be accessed online at http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/about.html

226 The case (no. 07-244-JWL) details can be accessed online at http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/urgent_issues.html

227 Robert Koehler is an award winning, Chicago-based journalist, nationally syndicated writer and the editor of Tribune Media Services.
Well, said Weinstein, consider the 523rd Fighter Squadron, based at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., which calls itself The Crusaders, and whose emblem consists of a sword, four crosses and a medieval knight’s helmet. Check ‘em out at globalsecurity.org, which reports that the payload on the F-16s they fly consists of “a wide variety of conventional, precision guided and nuclear weapons.”

And listen once again to Commander-in-Chief Bush, speaking in 2003 to Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz: “God told me to strike at al-Qaida and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East.”

If this is a religious war — a “clash of civilizations”, waged by competing agents of God’s will — victory may be indistinguishable from Armageddon.

God help the human race’ (Koehler 2007).

5.9.3 Three reasons why the Christian right-wing’s belief in the Rapture is a dangerous choice in the US military and its academies

There are three primary reasons why the adoption of the Christian right-wing’s belief in a hostile and militant rapture within the USA defence force, is a very dangerous option. They are:

- “Apocalyptic vision inspires genocidal killers who glorify violence as a mechanism that will lead to the end of history. Such visions encouraged the butchers who led the Inquisition and the Crusades, as well as the conquistadors who swept through the Americas hastily converting en masse native populations and then exterminating them. The Puritans, who hoped to create a theocratic state, believed that Satan ruled the wilderness surrounding their settlements. They believed that God had called them to cast Satan out of this wilderness to create a promised land. This hubris fed the deadly doctrine of Manifest destiny. Similar apocalyptic visions of a world cleansed through violence and extermination nourished the Nazis, the Stalinists who consigned tens of thousands of Ukrainians to starvation and death, torturers in the clandestine prisons in Argentina during the Dirty War, the Serbian thugs with heavy machine guns and wraparound sunglasses who stood over the bodies of the Muslims they had slain in the smoking ruins of Bosnian villages” (Hedges 2006:34-35);

- “The ecstatic belief in the cleansing power of apocalyptic violence does not recognize the right of the victims to self-preservation or self-defense.
It does not admit them into a moral universe where they have a criminal’s right to be punished and rehabilitated. They are seen instead through this poisonous lens as pollutants, viruses, mutations that must be eradicated to halt further infection and degeneration within society and usher in utopia. This sacred violence – whether it arises from the Bible, Serbian nationalism, the dream of a classless society, or the goal of a world where all ‘subhumans’ are eradicated – allows its perpetrators and henchmen to avoid all moral responsibility for their crimes. The brutality they carry out is sanctified, an expression not of human volition but divine wrath. The victims, in a final irony, are considered responsible for their suffering and destruction. They are to blame because in the eyes of the dominionists, they have defied God” (Hedges 2006:35).

- “Societies that embrace apocalyptic visions and seek through sacred violence to implement them commit collective suicide”. When Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell sanction (like they have in the past and continue to do in the present) pre-emptive nuclear strikes against those that “they condemn as the enemies of God, they fuel the passions of terrorists driven by the same vision of a world cleansed and purified through apocalyptic violence” (Hedges 2006:35-36). They (i.e., Robertson and Falwell) also “lead us closer and closer towards our own annihilation, in the delusion that once the dogs of war, even nuclear war, are unleashed, God will protect Christians; that hundreds of millions will die, but because Christians have been blessed they alone will rise in triumph from the ash heap. Those who seek to do us harm will soon have in their hands cruder versions of the apocalyptic weapons we possess: dirty bombs and chemical or biological agents. Those who fervently wish for, indeed, seek to hasten the apocalypse and the end of time, who believe they will be lifted up into the sky by a returning Jesus, force us to kneel before the god of death” (Hedges 2006:36).

Messianic and apocalyptic beliefs (let alone their actual implementation through the deployment of nuclear warheads), are therefore not only dangerous, but completely non-conducive to humanity’s peaceful co-existence, let alone its continued existence on earth.
5.10 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND THE SUBSEQUENT RECOMMENDATION

The possibility that the Christian right-wing may succeed in gaining dominion and establish a “Christian nation” due to its successful infiltration of the USA government and Military, raises the following two issues that the thesis has noted in the Introduction in liberal institutes and leaders, mainline churches and the media:

- **the lack of rational criticism and debate** in relation to hostile, militant beliefs and conduct of messianists, such as the Christian right-wing;

- **the limitless tolerance and deliberate reluctance** in addressing the questionable conduct and agendas of militant messianists whose present conduct and messianic-inspired aspirations pose serious threats to society’s liberty and well being.

Although Hedge lays the blame primarily on what appears to be these institutes’ excessive and limitless tolerance (which will be discussed below), this thesis has also noted the effect of debilitating silence that emanates from liberal institutions and leaders, from democratic government(s), and from mainstream clerics. This is the debilitating silence which, Dawkins notes (2004:185), springs the prevailing belief in “political correctness” especially when the issues at hand are related to religion and religious beliefs. In this instance, the religious beliefs referred to are the Christian evangelical’s hostile and militant rapture belief, which its right-wing’s current powerbase in the USA government and military could enable it to realise, should it choose to do so.

By reiterating the concept of political correctness, especially as defined by Doris Lessing (2007) in Chapter 1, as one of the main reasons for the incapacitating silence and subsequent lack of response from the institutions, churches, universities and governments, this thesis is not negating Hedges’ opinion. What this thesis is striving to do, by returning to the concept of “political correctness”, is to remind people (as Lessing reminded us in her article), that any praxis of “political correctness” should alert us to its true identity and intent, namely,

- **to shut down honesty and rational inquiry**;
to warn us to ignore “political correctness” which is a poorly disguised attempt to masquerade as a pre-requisite for multiculturalism (Lessing 2007).

Unfortunately liberal institutions have come to regard tolerance as the highest virtue, which stunts their anger and enables them to tolerate the intolerant. Consequently, liberal institutions’ positions on tolerance obliges them to tolerate and disregard hate speech from (any) religious groups that calls for the destruction of nonbelievers. The public has also adopted the liberal institutions’ position on tolerance and appears to believe that any type of religious beliefs, regardless of whether they are hostile and militant, are therefore permissible (Hedges 2006:36-37).

The whole issue of tolerance is also compounded by, what Hedges describes as, “the awful paradox of tolerance” in the sense that there are times “when those who would destroy the tolerance that makes an open society possible should no longer be tolerated” (Hedges 2006:36). He therefore argues that radical Christians must:

- “Be forced to include other points of view to counter the hate talk in their own broadcasts that are watched by millions of Americans” (Hedges 2006:36);
- “Be denied the right to demonize whole segments of American society, saying that they are manipulated by Satan and worthy only of conversion or eradication” (Hedges 2006:36);
- “Be made to treat their opponents with respect and acknowledge the right of a fair hearing even if they exercise their own freedom to disagree with their opponents” (Hedges 2006:36-37).

Although tolerance is a regarded as a virtue, tolerance coupled with passivity is a vice that threatens democracy. This is precisely what will occur when the right-wing begins to demolish democracy and all democratic institutions to enable it to establish its totalitarian New World theocracy (Hedges 2006:39).

Hedges nevertheless remains optimistic and quotes Augustine: “Hope has two beautiful daughters, their names are anger and courage, anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are” (Hedges 2006:37). The
recent formation of the Military Freedom Foundation is an example of a response to the right-wing’s aims, which is driven by Hope’s daughter, anger. In this instance, it was Michael Weinstein’s anger at the evangelical right-wing’s actions in the US Military that included its persistent proselytising, its shoddy and abusive treatment of non-Christians, and its blatant anti-Semitism. The constant anti-Semitism that Weinstein’s two sons had to endure at the hands of right-wing evangelicals in the military while they were cadets at the Air Force Academy was also a key catalyst that prompted Weinstein to take action (Koehler 2007).

Consequently, by coupling the concept and praxis of “political correctness” (as defined by Lessing), to limitless tolerance (as defined by Hedges), this thesis argues that both factors are equally responsible for inducing silence, and incapacitating liberal institutions and leaders and democratic societies from their duty and obligation, as representatives and guardians of tolerance and democracy, to deal with, and respond to, issues related to hostile militant religious beliefs that pose a threat to humanity’s peaceful co-existence and overall wellbeing.

5.11 THE RAPTURE BELIEF AND ITS AFFECT ON SOCIETY

5.11.1 The effect of the Rapture on compassion

The Axial Age (800-200 BCE) derived “Golden Rule” defines the essence of the Axial-derived concept of universal compassion, which is a central belief in all three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Armstrong 2006:396, 398). This rule was designed to remind people that they must value the lives of other people as much as they value their own and that they must show universal (not selective) compassion and reach out to assist their fellow human beings, including their enemies. The implementation of the Axial Age-derived “Golden Rule” enables people to find friends and allies when they need them, and allows people to help themselves and other people, which includes people who come from groups whose race, beliefs and culture are not affiliated to, or similar to, their own.

The evangelicals, however, are told, and believe, that people who suffer are responsible for their own suffering, and that they (i.e., those who are suffering) must not be right with God (Hedges 2006:48) This belief is derived from the evangelicals’ belief in the Rapture, where only the elect are redeemed and everyone else “suffers
unspeakable torments below” (Hedges 2006:48). This belief comforts people who have been ignored or marginalised in America and it

- allows them to look inward and replace universal compassion and social justice with contained compassion that is directed at members of their own church and entails much smaller, manageable acts of personal charity, like food parcels for families in their own congregation and their own communities and ignore the outside world;
- allows them to silently accept the cut-backs in federal assistance programs;
- enables them to ignore their own social responsibility for issues such as inadequate inner-city schools, the 18 percent of American children who go hungry each day and the mentally ill and the homeless (Hedges 2006:48).

The rapture-derived belief that misfortune is a punishment meted out by God is not only detrimental to the overall welfare of humanity, it also allows, people to criticise and rebuke unfortunate people. It also permits evangelicals to distance themselves from the disadvantaged and indigent and to ignore the intricate factors and imbalances that are responsible for social injustice and poverty in society (Hedges 2006:48).

5.11.2 The psychology of the Rapture belief and its use in evangelical society

The psychology of the Rapture promise is based on the belief that rapture will come without warning and that it will divide families and that only the good Christians will be lifted up into to heaven, while all the unsaved will be left behind to suffer a seven-year period of chaos and suffering known the Tribulation. The evangelicals utilise the fact that the exact time and date of the Rapture is unknown and use this “unknown factor” related to the coming of the rapture, to assure obedience and compliance from all their followers, including their children (Hedges 2006:91).

Popular rapture literature and films have been consciously designed to induce obedience in their followers and to condition them to fear non-conformity. Evangelical big-budget films such as “Apocalypse”, “Tribulation”, “Revelation”, and “Left Behind”, with well-known stars such as Corbin Bernsen, Margot Kidder and Gary Busey, achieve this by depicting the chaos and anarchy that comes in the wake of the Rapture. The films are designed to deliberately play on people’s base emotions as they
portray children coming home, only to discover that their parents have been raptured, while they have been left behind, or the parents have been left behind, while their children have been raptured.

The result is that the followers become fearful and subservient and depend upon the authority figures in their group(s), to make decisions for them, which in turn allows them to abdicate all individual responsibility related to making any moral choices and from accepting the reality that they, alone, are individually responsible for their own actions and lives (Hedges 2006:91).

These communities also allow their members to perceive themselves as being insulated from the world in a cocoon of divine protection, which not only protects them from their own and from other people’s human frailties, but also shields them from their fears as well as other people’s fears. This includes the fear of uncertainty, the fear that life has no purpose and the fear of death. These communities’ inward focus also teaches their members that everything in life revolves around their personal needs and requirements. This, in turn inhibits their ability to build mature, loving relationships, which leads to dysfunctional family relationships that break apart (Hedges 2006:91).

5.12 THE YOUNG EVANGELICALS: DO THEY OFFER A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE?

Although the current economic crisis and the USA involvement in Iraq, and in Afghanistan, after 9/11, continues to fuel belief in rapture, which negates social justice and universal compassion, there are new developments within evangelism, which have been observed and noted by scholars like Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick describes the new mindshift in evangelical thought which he regards as the result of a combination of factors, in an article aptly entitled “The Evangelical Crackup”\textsuperscript{228}. These factors include the Christian evangelicals’ change in leadership\textsuperscript{229}, the current domestic situation and


\textsuperscript{229} Two principal leaders of the evangelical movement died early in 2007, the Rev. Jerry Falwell, one of the founding generation of leaders, and D. James Kennedy, another well-known televangelist. Paul Weyrich, 65, who helped Falwell build his Moral Majority and much of the rest of the movement, are confined to wheelchairs, while “fire and brimstone” pastors like Terry Fox, from The Immanuel Baptist
their disappointment in Bush whose involvement in the Iraq war has caused great distress.

According to Kirkpatrick’s article, the new generation of younger evangelical leaders who are emerging within the evangelical movement are not as focused on saving souls as previous leaders were. These young leaders are directing their attention and efforts instead towards issues related to social justice and compassion which they are not only directing towards their own communities, but beyond them as well.

One of the main catalysts for the change appears to be the death of American soldiers in Iraq. An admission by the Rev David Welsh, senior pastor of Wichita’s large Central Christian Church, appears to echo the feelings of many evangelicals towards the repatriation of soldiers killed in the war:

   Even in evangelical circles, we are tired of the war, tired of the body bags … I think it is to the point where we they are saying: “O.K., we have done as much good as we can. Now lets just get out of there” (Kirkpatrick 2007:4).

The welcome change in the evangelical focus among the more moderate segment can also be seen in the words of Frank Page, of the First Baptist Church in Taylors, S.C. Page told the delegates at the Southern Baptist Convention, that they had become too well known for what they were against (namely, abortion, evolution, homosexuality) instead of being known for what they stand for, namely, the Gospel. “I believe in the word of God” Page said after the election, “I am just not mad about it’” (Kirkpatrick 2007:4).

The change in attitude towards social issues is also seen in the younger generation’s marked shift from fighting to keep traditional moral codes in place, to what they (i.e., the younger generation of evangelicals) perceive as the long-term focus of “spiritual formation” that involves applying [Jesus’] teachings in the here and now. They do not see society as a moribund vessel. They talk more about a biblical imperative to fix up the ship by contributing to the betterment of their communities and the world. They support traditional charities but also public policies that address health care, race, poverty and the environment (Kirkpatrick 2007:5).

---

Church in downtown Wichita, Kansas, have fallen out of favour, and have been pressurised by their congregants to step down (Kirkpatrick 2007:1-2). The two most notable socially active leaders are Rick Warren, of the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest California and Bill Hybels, who both focus on social issues such as AIDS and global poverty (Kirkpatrick 2007:6,7).
This change is significant as it not only reflects the Christian evangelicals’ altered context, but it also reveals their shift in perception, as well as their attempt to find their footing in a changed society. Sociologists point out that this type of change is inevitable as the gap in education and income between the evangelicals and the rest of society has narrowed dramatically over the past 40 years. Consequently, as John Green of the Pew Research Center observed, “The social-issues arguments are the first manifestation of a rural outlook transposed into a more urban or suburban setting … Now having been there for a while, that kind of hard-edged politics no longer appeals to them. They still care about abortion and gay marriage, but they are also interested in other, more middle-class arguments” (Green in Kirkpatrick 2007:5).

To illustrate what Kirkpatrick is describing, one of the new, younger generation of evangelical leaders, Richard Cizik230, who has served with the National Association of Evangelicals for 28 years as a moderate voice, said in a radio interview on “Fresh Air” with Terry Gross on Dec 2, 2008:

My generation cares more about the fact that 30,000 kids died today of hunger, poverty, preventable disease than about gay marriage amendments in California … We are pro life, but for us that definition is far broader than abortion. It includes poverty, AIDS, human trafficking and the war in Iraq (Cizik in James 2008).

Cizik also told Susan James from ABC News about his shifting attitude to gay marriage: “I would willingly say I believe in civil unions” (James 2008). The views of Cizik are echoed by young evangelicals like Jacki Waring and Chris LaTondresse, 26, the son of white evangelical missionaries. LaTondresse told James from ABC News that he, too, “favors civil unions for gay couples and takes a ‘pro-life’ stance, worrying more about what happens to the child ‘after the womb’ and how to help pregnant women in trouble” (James 2008).

Kirkpatrick points out that this shift in social consciousness among the younger evangelical generation is not to be read as an indication that the Christian right-wing has altered its social issue perspective, or that it is in decline. To the contrary, Kirkpatrick illustrates this observation by quoting the “fire and brimstone” right-wing pastor, Terry Fox. Fox told Kirkpatrick that the liberals should not “start gloating” as

230 Richard Cizik was also listed in the 2008 100 list, sharing the “scientist and thinker” slot with Nobel prize-winner Eric Chivian (James 2008).
the religious right-wing are similar to a snake in that, “We may be in our hole right now, but we can come out and bite anytime” (Fox in Kirkpatrick 2007:10).

Kirkpatrick’s article prompted a reply from Travis J. Scholl, the Master of Divinity at Yale Divinity School which reads as follows:

If you take the historical long view, the shifts we are now witnessing in evangelicalism reflect a central strand in its ideological DNA, namely its populist impulse. The populism that has always energized evangelicals is now making it more progressive, in much the same way that past evangelicals fuelled the movements that ended slavery and brought the vote to women. Ironically, in a previous century, those were ideals it shared with a progressively upstart political party called the G.O.P.


From the letter, it is clear that Scholl sees this evangelical “restructuring” as “a central strand in its ideological DNA, namely its populist impulse” in that “the populism that has energized evangelicals is now making progress, in much the same way that past evangelicals fuelled movements that ended slavery and brought women the vote”. This is an interesting assessment but, if we are to believe that the populist impulse is indeed a central strand in Evangelism’s ideological DNA, it raises an important question: why is no reference made to this impulse as the key reason for the evangelicals’ current and continuing obsession with saving souls, particularly in the US military, in the face of what many of the evangelicals (still) believe to be the imminent End Times?

The current perceptual framework change driven by the young evangelicals, whether it is a purely populist impulse that forms a part of the evangelicals’ ideological DNA (or not), is nevertheless a welcome and long overdue change. The thesis would also like to believe that the young evangelicals’ desire for change is driven by Hope’s other daughter, courage (as referred by Augustine: “Hope has two beautiful daughters, their names are anger and courage, anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are” (Hedges 2006:37)).

5.13 THE EVANGELICALS, THE RAPTURE AND THE JEWS

In Chapter 3, this thesis drew attention to the Chabad’s position in relation to the fate of the non-Jews/Gentiles and the end-of-time and in the “Future to Come” as elucidated by Rebbe Schneerson himself. Rebbe Schneerson’s position is benevolent and compassionate, and it not only stands in sharp contrast to the evangelicals’ intolerant fate mapped out for unrepentant Jews in the Rapture, but it also highlights the evangelicals’ dishonest and duplicitous reasons for their current support for Israel and the Jews, which is known as Christian Zionism.

Rebbe Schneerson, unlike the evangelicals, was positive and did not envision the physical destruction of Israel’s enemies, but foresaw, instead, a spiritual “nullification” of the gentile nations, so that they could “speak with a pure tongue and all serve God together”. According to Rebbe Schneerson, gentiles will not be forced to convert to Judaism, nor will they be killed, but they will be lifted up to heaven instead, where “they live morally and realize the divine in their lives” (Kohanzad 2006:16). Kohanzad points out that Rebbe Schneerson emphasised, along with the Talmud and Maimonides that “the tradition that a Gentile who keeps the seven Noahide laws is as holy as the High Priest in the Temple or Tabernacle” (Kohanzad 2006:16).

The Christian evangelical movement’s attitude towards non-believers is, however, far from benevolent. They openly teach their followers that Israel must rule the biblical land in order for Christ to return. Yet, their rapture belief also obliges them to teach that all non-believers, including the Jews, those who are not “sufficiently Christian” and those who do not convert to Christianity after the Rapture, are damned, and that Christ will purge the world at the end of Tribulation of all the unbelievers, including the unrepentant Jews (Guyat 2007:28; Hedges 2006:27, 145).

The evangelicals’ love for Israel is therefore based on Israel’s centrality and necessity to the realisation of their rapture belief and is the reason for the evangelicals’ affection and support of Israel and the Jews. Israel’s role in the realisation of evangelical belief, as depicted in their popular fiction where Israel always has a central role, will occur in the following manner:

1. Israel will be restored to the Middle East as a nation, after nearly two thousand years in which the Jews have been scattered throughout the
world. Hagee, along with other evangelicals, regard the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 as the principal catalyst that initiated the present-day interest in Bible prophecy and the Rapture (Guyat 2007:20).

2. The world will gravitate towards a single government, a single economy and a single religion. The current trend of “globalization” is seen as evidence that the satanic takeover of the world has begun. The evangelicals distrust institutes such as the IMF and the World Bank and their “fear of economic consolidation makes them wary of ATMs, credit cards and even barcodes”. They also believe that the UN “could be a vehicle for the Antichrist’s rise” (Guyat 2007:20,21).

3. All true believers will be “Raptured” by God. Faithful Christians will instantly vanish from earth, creating political and social chaos. This belief is based on a verse from a letter from St Paul to the Thessalonians (1Th 4:16-17) and is responsible for bumper stickers that read (Guyat 2007:21): “IN CASE OF RAPTURE THIS VEHICLE WILL BE UNMANNED”.

4. Russia, in alliance with Arab and/or Islamic nations, will attack Israel. Israel will be miraculously spared destruction and virtually all of the invading forces will be destroyed. Hagee concedes that the progression of events may differ in real time, but he is certain that the war, an integral part of the evangelical apocalyptic sequence, will involve Russia, Iran and Israel.

5. In the aftermath of this terrible war, the world will reach a peace brokered by a charismatic leader, probably from Europe. This leader is the Antichrist, and the peace treaty marks the beginning of the “Tribulation”, the seven year period in which he takes over the planet. He will unify the world under a single government and will purge Christians and anyone opposed to his reign. With the aid of his sidekick, the “false prophet”, the Antichrist will persuade or compel everyone to worship him. Guyat notes that the only people who will try to oppose the AntiChrist are the Jews and recent converts to Christianity, who will be brutally suppressed (Guyat 2007:23-24).

6. The Antichrist will be assassinated by two Jews who realise his true
identity, but then he will rise from the dead with Satan’s help – a trick which will only strengthen his control over the world. Everyone who refuses to worship him will be killed (Guyat 2007:25).

7. The Antichrist will be attacked by armies from Russia and China but will manage to persuade the Russians and Chinese to align themselves with him for the final battle against Jesus Christ, with his army of angels who will come down from heaven to confront the Antichrist on the plains of Armageddon\(^\text{232}\), in northern Israel (Guyat 2007:25).

8. The Antichrist and the false prophet will be chained to a lake of fire, condemned to perpetual torment. Christ will establish a new Kingdom on earth, which will last for a thousand years – this period is the “millennium” that is promised in the Bible. Satan will be locked away in hell throughout the millennium and the Christians who were raptured before the seven years of the Tribulation, will return to live on earth. Christ will then rule over the Christians that he raptured, as well as anyone who came to Christianity during the Tribulation. Hagee expects that he too will return to earth, with Christ, to resume his normal life at this stage. But, there will still be sin in the world, and this situation will only cease at the end of the millennium, when Satan is finally destroyed (Guyat 2007:26).

9. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released from hell and there will be the definitive battle between Satan and God at Jerusalem. Satan will finally be defeated and the earth will be completely destroyed, to allow a new earth to descend from heaven (Guyat 2007:27).

This rapture scenario not only reveals the fate that the evangelicals envision for the Jews at the End of Time, but it also provides the framework on which all evangelical support and affection for Israel is based. The evangelicals’ affection and supportive relationship towards the state of Israel and the Jews nevertheless stands in sharp

\(^{232}\) Megiddo is the place that Kings 23:29-30 tells us, where King Josiah was slain by Pharo Necho of Egypt. Since that incident, the site of Megiddo (“the mound of Megiddo”) has never been forgotten as the auspicious place where “the forces of good and evil would someday do battle to determine the fate of the world. That a righteous king from the lineage of David would some day return to the place where the last righteous Davidic King perished”. The name “Megiddo” was eventually translated many centuries later from the Hebrew into the Greek, as Armageddon (Finkelstein & Silberman 2006:207).
contrast to the Jews’ fate envisioned at the Rapture end-time, which is discussed below.

5.13.1 The Rapture, Israel and Dual Covenant theology

The evangelical support and affection for Israel was expressed by two speakers, Michael Medved and Kay Arthur, at a Sunday morning breakfast for seven hundred people in a ballroom at a Hilton Hotel hosted by the Israel Ministry of Tourism. Medved, a conservative radio talk show host explained that the alliance that the evangelicals were trying to forge with the Jews “is more than a religious alliance. It is a political alliance, it unites messianic Christians with right-wing messianic Jews, who believe that God has anointed them to expand their dominion throughout the Middle East at the expense of the Arab majority” (Hedges 2006:146). At the same event, Kay Arthur, the Christian author, declared that she loves Israel, and that if she had to choose between America and Israel that she “would stand with Israel, stand as a daughter of the King of Kings, stand according to the word of God” (Hedges 2006:147). It is pertinent that Arthur omits to mention the fate of the unreconstructed Jews at the end of time.

The evangelicals’ most passionate supporter of Israel is the Christian Zionist Pastor John Hagee, from Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, who became an ardent and devoted supporter of Israel after visiting Israel in April 1979. His support for the Jews is not only based on the common roots of Judaism and Christianity, but is also connected to his firm belief that the apocalypse of biblical prophecy will occur sooner rather than later (Guyat 2007:18).

In 1981, Hagee’s pro-Israel position led him to set up and direct an event known as “A Night to Honor Israel” that highlighted Christianity’s debt to Judaism. This event, and others like it, are part Judeo-Christian variety performance and part fundraising functions (Guyat 2007:18; Hein-Hudson 2009a). These events are hosted each year in San Antonio to raise money for Israeli charities, and have spread to other American cities as well (Guyat 2007:18). San Antonio’s Rabbi Scheinberg has built a relationship with Hagee on the condition that Hagee never tries to convert him or any other Jew, and has given both his blessing and support to Hagee’s functions. These events have become highly successful and have drawn the attention of many prominent American and Israeli politicians, including the former leader of the House
of Representatives, Tom DeLay, as well as Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu (Guyat 2007:19).

Hagee has met every Israeli Prime Minister since Menachem Begin and has donated more than $8.5 million to assist the Soviet Jews in their move from the Soviet Union to Israel. He also founded “Christians United for Israel”\(^{233}\) in March 2006 (also known by the acronym, CUFI) (Hein-Hudson 2009a; 2009c). He has been to Israel twenty-two times and constantly exhorts Christians to treat Jews with kindness because he is adamant that Christians will be damned for the sin of anti-Semitism. Hagee opposes and fights against anti-Semitism and acknowledges the tragedy of the Holocaust and the scandal of the Christian Church’s silence on the matter and he argues that anti-Semitism may well have prevented the Jews from hearing the Christian message.

Hagee’s tireless support of the Jews and of Israel has earned him the “Humanitarian of the Year” award from the San Antonio B’nai B’rith Council, as well as the “ZOA Israel Service Award” from the Zionist Organization in Dallas and he has been honoured with the Henrietta Szold Award by the Texas Southern region of Hadassah (Hein-Hudson 2009b).

Hagee has also, in his role as prime supporter and defender of the Jews, proposed a new theology to replace “supersessionism” or “replacement theology”, namely Dual Covenant Theology (Guyat 2007:29; Hein-Hudson 2009b). In an interview with The Jerusalem Post’s David Horowitz (March 20, 2006), Hagee described the fate of the Jews at the second coming under the conditions of the Dual Covenant, quoting from his book Jerusalem Countdown (2006):

> This is the biblical teaching of St. Paul. St. Paul in Romans 9, 10 and 11 presents what I call in my latest book, Jerusalem Countdown, “God’s position-paper on the Jewish people.”

> In Romans 9, Paul states that this three-chapter section is exclusively about the Jewish people. He continues that theme in the 10\(^{th}\) chapter, and in Chapter 11 writes in the first verse that “God has not cast away Israel.” This statement by St. Paul is the absolute death knell of “replacement theology.”

> Something that is cast away disappears forever. Israel is alive. Israel is thriving. Israel is growing. Israel and the Jewish people have not been cast away by God! Paul makes the statement that “God has not cast away Israel”

---

\(^{233}\) Christians United for Israel is “a national association through which every pro-Israel church, parachurch organization, ministry or individual in America can speak and act with one voice in support of Israel in matters related to Biblical issues” (Hein-Hudson 2009a).
twice. Romans is a post-Calvary document in which St. Paul states, in 11:5, “even so at this present time there is a remnant [a surviving group of Jewish people] according to the election of grace.” That means very simply that there are Jewish people right now who have favor with God by the election of grace.

What is going to happen when Jesus comes back? Every Christian believes that Jesus Christ is the messiah. The Jewish people do not believe that. In that regard we have to agree to disagree. I say to my rabbi friends: “You don’t believe it; I do believe it. When we’re standing in Jerusalem, and the messiah is coming down the street, one of us is going to have a very major theological adjustment to make. But until that time, let’s walk together in support of Israel and in defense of the Jewish people, because Israel needs our help” (Horowitz 2006:234).

Hagee claims that he has exchanged “replacement theology” with Dual Covenant Theology because he abhors replacement theology, which he denounces as the root cause of Christian anti-Semitism (Guyat 2007:30). The more doctrinally conservative Christian evangelicals do not agree with this theology, which is also known as Christian Zionism, as it allows the Jews salvation without conversion. In doing so, Dual Covenant Theology/Christian Zionism effectively sets up different salvation standards for Jews and Gentiles (Guyat 2007:30; Hein-Hudson 2009b).

Little (2000:2) explains that the claims of “replacement theology” are based on “the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ and, that ‘the old Israel’ was written off with the appearance of ‘the new Israel’”. This belief, which sees the New Testament as the legitimate successor to the Old Testament, is also known as supersessionism. It has led to the belief that “the Christian relationship with God had replaced or superseded the Jewish relationship with God” (Thompson 2000:385; Smith 2007). Smith235, however, points out that Franklin Little, one of the pioneers of post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian relations, rightly observed that “replacement theology” is, at best, highly questionable in our post-Holocaust era “when Christians speak of Jews being replaced as the people of God.” And, that to subscribe to this theology, is “to teach that a people’s mission in God’s providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications which murders in time will spell out” (Smith 2007).

---


235 The Rev. Robert O. Smith is Lutheran Campus Pastor at the University of Chicago. He is the Northern Illinois coordinator for Churches for Middle East Peace. With Charles P. Lutz, he is author of Christians and a land called Holy: how we can foster justice, peace, and hope (Fortress, 2006).
Thompson agrees and points out that the unspoken anti-Semitism of evolutionary schemes of salvation history that conclude with the Jesus narratives are not only a recognised theological distortion, but that this type of theology is also a calculated effort to portray a modern theological interpretation, such as replacement theology in this instance, as the truth of scripture (Thompson 2000:385,388).

Rev. Smith explains that the Christian Zionists drew from their system of biblical interpretation, known as premillennial dispensationalism, to support their claim that “the covenants made by God with the Jews, as people, are not only eternal, but that they are entirely separate from the covenant between God and Gentile believers”, hence the name, “dual covenant” theology (Smith 2007). They also stated that any other understanding of the relationship is a variation of supersessionism/replacement theology. And, they asserted that Christian Zionism allows them to “publicly disavow any effort to convert Jews” (Smith 2007). Smith, however, notes that this dual theology “is as innovative as their doctrine of the secret rapture of born-again Christians before the world descends into Armageddon” (Smith 2007).

Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak is another critic of Dual Covenant Theology. He explains that the Christian Zionism/Dual Theology that Hagee promotes is “a movement within Protestant fundamentalism that understands the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and thus deserving of political, financial, and religious support. Consequently, Christian Zionists believe that when all Jews are gathered in Israel that, Jesus will then reappear” (2006).

Wilson and Tabachnick also confirm that all the Christian evangelicals agree that every Jew needs to return to Israel, and that Rabbinic Judaism needs to be eliminated,

---

236 Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak is the Executive Director of HaMifgash: An On-Going Conversation Among Jewish Intellectuals. The most recent project of HaMifgash is the new web site: www.JewsOnFirst.org which confronts the “Christianization” movement’s attempt to nullify the First Amendment of the Constitution. Together with Jane Hunter, Haim co-founded The Coalitions for Justice in Hawaiian Gardens and Jerusalem. Beliak was born in a DP Camp in Munich, Germany and grew up in Mason City, Iowa and Phoenix, Arizona. In 1988-90, Beliak was a Jerusalem Fellow in Jerusalem, Israel. He is the rabbi of Beth Shalom of Whittier and serves as a Board member of the Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA) and also an active participant in Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/haim-dov-beliak-and-johhubers/#blogger_bio

237 Bruce Wilson is the co-founder of Talk2action.org and produced the nationally televised video clip on Hagee’s 2005 sermon series “Jerusalem: Countdown to Crisis”. Rachel Tabachnick also contributes to Talk2Action.org and is the author of “God’s Plan for Israel, The End Times Prophecy Narrative of Christian Zionism”, a free teaching resource on CD. Their article, “An Open Letter to Elie Wiesel: Please Don’t Legitimize John Hagee”, was printed on the website, Alternet.org and was accessed online.
to enable the fulfilment of the Rapture promise of Christ’s 1000 year reign (Wilson & Tabachnick 2009).

Beliak continues to further elucidate the concept of Christian Zionism when he explains that:

Christian Zionism is an extreme modern apocalyptic movement that shares with Nazi philosophy the paranoid idea that Jews and Judaism are the central actors in the world. Both movements seek the eventual dismantling of the Jewish people and Jewish faith – Nazism by death and Christian Zionism by conversion to Christianity of a remnant of Jews, who will finally learn their “lesson” from the death of most of the Jewish people at Armageddon (Ir Megiddo); then the “left-behind” remnant is expected to commit apostasy by converting to Jesus worship.

All the Christian Zionists’ expressions of love and friendship (for example, Pat Robertson saying “We love the Jewish people”) – all their farm aid (including red heifers to use in revived temple sacrifices) and help for Russian Jews to immigrate to Israel – are preparations for genocide by remote control (Beliak 2006).

Mendelsohn, writing for the website “Jews On First”238, agrees with Beliak and she explains that

[w]hile Christian Zionists’ support of Israel is real and unyielding; it is based on a fundamentalist foundation. John Hagee’s stated goal is to do whatever it takes to ensure that the biblically mandated geographical borders of the Holy Land be populated with “the Hebrews” in order to bring about the long-awaited Rapture, a prophecy believed by a subset of Christians who eagerly await the End-Times and the return of Jesus. Hagee’s and Parsley’s constant fear-mongering and pointed hatred for Muslims, their none-too-subtle push for nuclear confrontation with Iran combines with the political power they have quietly been accruing to create the recipe for a real world Armageddon (Mendelsohn 2008).

Beliak also draws attention to the fact that:

Christian Zionism entirely ignores Jewish/Zionist aspirations for normalcy. Zionism was to be a new start for Judaism and the Jewish people living enlightened lives in peace. Instead Christian Zionism encourages the Israeli government and the US Jewish organizational leadership on a path toward enmity with the Palestinians and disrespect for Islam … Virtually the entire

http://www.alternet.org/blogs/peek/143497/an_open_letter_to_elie_wiesel:_please_don’t_legitimize_john_hagee/

238 “Jews On First” is a website that was founded and launched by Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak and Jane Hunter, in October 2005, to oppose the growing strength of the Christian right and the accelerating pace of its theocratic agenda. “Jews On First” view the establishment of their website as “The Jewish Response to attacks on the First Amendment (i.e., Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof) by the Religious Right”. “The purpose of the site is to mobilize Jews to oppose Christian fundamentalist efforts to make their religious dogma into federal, state and local law, thus replacing our democratic system with a theocracy” (Jews On First)

http://www.jewsonfirst.org/originalfront.html
pantheon of Zionist thinkers from Theodore Herzl to David Grossman and Amos Elon saw peace with Arab neighbors as the culmination of the Zionist dream, not as an impossibility (Beliak 2006).

The true reality behind Hagee’s passionate pro-Israel and pro-Jewish approach, and Hagee’s position and his attacks on anti-Semitism are not based on compassion for another belief system or viewpoint, nor are they based on the concept of tolerance. What Hagee has effectively done, by insisting that God will ultimately redeem the Jews after binding them to Jesus for two thousand years, “is to make Jews into past and future Christians: the roots of Hagee’s own faith lie in Judaism, since Jesus was himself a Jew, and the future of Christianity will see the reconciliation of Israel and the Christians worldwide”. Consequently, in John Hagee’s world, “if you’re not a Jew or a real Christian you’re in big trouble” (Guyat 2007:32-33).

5.14 SUMMARY

An examination of the modern-day, USA-based Christian Evangelicals and their belief in an imminent, militant and blood soaked rapture, revealed that the evangelicals’ militant rapture resembles the violent apocalyptic dreams of Qumran. Both groups seek a well organised military confrontation in their rapture narrative that will culminate in a major eschatological and messianic cataclysm, albeit that the evangelicals’ modern rapture war scenario not only includes modern weapons and military hardware, but that the Christian right-wing does have access to them as well. The modern-day, militant messianist’s dreams of violent apocalyptic end-times has therefore moved from the realm of religious dreams and longing for violent and militant apocalyptic redemption from oppression, into the modern world where these militant apocalyptic dreams can be realised (and are on a fairly regular basis with lethal results in the instance of extreme Islam’s holy war/jihad), should militant messianists, like the Christian right-wing choose to do so. And, it is this disconcerting reality that primarily underlies the recommendations in this thesis.

The number of modern-day believers of the Rapture is also far greater than that of the angry militant Qumranites, and unlike the Qumranites (or any other previous militant messianic movement of the past), many of the modern-day evangelical messianists are also powerful and influential people who have infiltrated the USA government and the US Military and Armed Forces intentionally. This reality has already allowed them to
impose certain aspects of their Christian worldview, which is essentially Christian evangelical theocracy, on society in the USA. The Christian worldview influence can be seen in their home schooling program (approximately 2.1 million are currently being home schooled), their establishment of their own right-wing colleges, their success in the inclusion of mythic-derived creationism (as opposed to scientific-based evolution) in certain school curriculums, as well as discriminatory legislation related to gay rights and abortion that they are responsible for passing in certain states in the USA. The evangelicals’ aim to establish a Christian theocracy in the USA would mean the end of democracy and all democratic institutions as well, which is another important consideration that underlies the recommendations in the thesis.

Although the right-wing evangelicals are only approximately 12.6 percent of the total evangelical following, they are nevertheless a sect whose reach greatly exceeds the actual size of the group. Besides the right-wing’s obsession with magic, conspiracy theories, paranoia, death and sexual repression, they are, as discussed in this chapter, obsessed with apocalyptic violence and military force, which is their most dangerous and ominous trait. This obsession is directly linked to their belief in a brutal and militant rapture, and it not only underlies their intentional infiltration of the US Military and Armed Forces, but it has also given rise to random groups of secret, extreme militias, as well as the Christian right-wing’s own powerful paramilitary force, Blackwater. The thesis has drawn attention to Blackwater, due to the fact that it functions in the same manner as an extrajudicial enforcement group (like the Nazi Party brown shirts did), in that it can, and does, operate outside the law, which makes Blackwater an extremely dangerous threat to people’s human rights. The right-wing’s ongoing efforts to transform the USA Armed Forces into a Christian evangelical Armed Force also stems from its infatuation with apocalyptic violence and military force. The silence and seemingly unlimited tolerance in the face of hostile militant messianists’ military agendas becomes even more disconcerting when we realise that unlike the Qumranites, who only had impressive and detailed battle plans and fiery rhetoric when they described their final and bloody apocalyptic battles, the right-wing’s infiltration of the US Armed Forces has already given it access to all US military hardware, including nuclear warheads.

The debilitating affect of the evangelicals’ rapture belief on the social conduct of their followers is noted, due to the fact that the evangelicals’ rapture belief allows them to
believe that misfortune is a punishment meted out by God. This belief is clearly seen in the evangelicals’ attitude towards the disadvantaged and the indigent, who they ignore. Consequently, their messianic-derived beliefs, like those of the other modern-day messianists from Chabad, also curtail their capacity to assume responsibility for their own actions and lives, and severely restricts their ability to act with compassion towards those who are less fortunate than they are. The evangelicals’ messianic beliefs are therefore, just like the messianic beliefs of Chabad, in that they are detrimental to the overall welfare of humanity, and in the instance of the evangelical framework, their beliefs also allow the evangelicals to ignore the complex factors and imbalances that are responsible for poverty and social injustice in modern societies.

The dichotomy between the evangelicals’ rapture-derived belief related to the Jews’ fate at their rapture end-times and the evangelicals’ affection and supportive relationship with the state of Israel and the Jews is so glaring and uncomfortable that it has led the Christian Zionist evangelical pastor, John Hagee, a prime supporter and defender of the Jews, to propose a new theology to replace “supersessionism” or “replacement theology”, namely Dual Covenant Theology. Dual Covenant Theology has, however, met with much opposition as it sets up different salvation standards for Jews and Gentiles.

Critics of Dual Covenant Theology are not confined to the evangelicals either. Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak compares the evangelical belief in the Rapture, which revolves around the Jews, to Nazi philosophy’s paranoid belief that Jews and Judaism are the central actors on the world stage. Consequently, both the evangelicals and the Nazi’s aim was to terminate the Jewish people and their religion – Nazism attempted to this through death, while the Christian Zionists are preparing to do this by conversion and apostasy. The Christian Zionists aim to convert the Jews who they hope will have learnt their “lesson” from the death of their fellow Jews’ death at the final apocalyptic battle at Armageddon, while those Jews who will be part of the “left-behind” group (when rapture occurs) are expected to commit apostasy by converting to Christianity. There is also another troubling aspect of the Christian Zionists’ conduct and that is that their rapture belief also allows them to deliberately ignore all Jewish Zionist aspirations for normalcy. This can be seen in the manner in which the Christian Zionists encourage the Israeli government and the US Jewish organisational leadership to remain antagonistic towards the Palestinians and foster a continuing disrespect for
Islam. The thesis recommends that the media, liberal institutes and their leaders, and democratic government(s), as the proponents and custodians of tolerance, freedom, liberty and democracy, break their silence (regardless of whether their silence is due to political correctness, or/and limitless tolerance, or the “hands off” religion approach) and not only speak out, but act to curb the detrimental and pernicious conduct that springs from any militant messianic group’s hostile beliefs, be they Armageddon focused evangelicals or Islamic extremists who focus on jihad/holy war. The thesis considers this to be an urgent issue, particularly in light of the ongoing and current diplomatic negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis’ interest in modern, militant messianism, most notably, the USA based Christian evangelicals with their belief in an imminent, exclusive, blood-soaked rapture, and the two successful Jewish Messiahs who followed after Jesus, namely, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Mendel Menachem Schneerson, forms the central strand of the thesis’ focus and research. These Jewish Messiahs’ related commonalities, problematic issues, and the beliefs and conduct of these messiahs and their followers, as well these Jewish Messiahs’ similar messiah templates, underlies the two proposals in the thesis. The problematic aspects and inherent dangers of modern militant messianism and society’s reluctance to address any issues related to religion provide the impetus for the recommendations outlined in the thesis.

The thesis has been fortunate that the existence of a flourishing, modern day, Jewish messianic group, Chabad, and its Jewish Messiah, Rebbe Schneerson, has allowed the thesis to follow the beliefs and conduct of a modern day Jewish messiah and his followers in real time since the 1980s. This situation has not only enabled the thesis to literally observe the emergence of another Jewish messiah and his followers, but it also allowed the thesis recourse to, and the inclusion of, current (and well documented) information pertaining to Rebbe Schneerson’s messianic beliefs and his, (and his followers’) claim to messiahship, as well as Chabad’s beliefs and conduct both during the Rebbe’s lifetime and in the period immediately after his death. The information gleaned from this examination, as well as the data obtained from the thesis’ study of the previous, well-documented, successful Jewish Messiah, Sabbatai Sevi, and his followers, the Sabbatians, also provided the support required to argue the main proposal of the thesis, namely, that Chabad’s belief in Rebbe Schneerson’s messiahship as well as its deification of the Rebbe, which is considered heretical by mainstream Orthodox Judaism, could lead to Chabad becoming another new religion that is removed from Judaism, but whose messianic beliefs resemble Christianity.

The thesis’ desire to understand the enduring appeal and ultimate success of the three Jewish Messiahs led it to the “‘suffering-servant’ dying and rising messiah” template. The “‘suffering-servant’ dying and rising messiah” template is the messiah template that Knohl traces back to a Jewish messiah from Qumran, who preceded Jesus. Israel Knohl’s messiah hypothesis contained in his work The Messiah before Jesus: the
Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls (2000), is drawn from specific Dead Sea Scroll hymns, and is linked to the text on the Dead Sea Scroll Stone (also known as the Gabriel Stone, which was deciphered and published after Knohl’s messiah hypothesis), that appears to support Knohl’s hypothesis.

The “‘suffering-servant’ dying and rising messiah” template, which Knohl posits for Jesus, resembles the messiah template of the two successful Jewish messiahs, Sabbatai Sevi and Rebbe Schneerson, who came after Jesus. Both the Sabbatians and Chabad are also on record as perceiving their Messiahs as “suffering-servant” dying and rising messiahs. The thesis therefore argues that it is the option of vicarious atonement, be it personal and/or corporate salvation that this “suffering servant” messiah template provides, which is intrinsically related to these three Jewish Messiahs’ ultimate success and eternal appeal.

The thesis’ interest in violent, retributive, and well-planned, militant messianism, which was initially aroused by the contents of the War Scroll from Qumran, underlies the thesis’ examination of hostile, present day, militant messianic groups. The existence of the present day, USA Christian evangelicals (especially the evangelical right-wing), and their belief in an imminent, hostile and detailed militant rapture, enabled the thesis to examine the beliefs and conduct of an existing militant messianic movement in real time. The thesis also noted how popular Rapture literature, most notably LaHaye and Jenkins’ Left Behind series, began to generate widespread belief in messianism and an imminent rapture in the USA in 1980s. The thesis draws attention to and discusses the consequences and affects of the evangelicals’ rapture determined conduct, agendas and worldview on their followers and society at large. The thesis also notes and examines the evangelical right-wing’s fascination with extreme apocalyptic violence, as well as the right-wing’s intentional and successful infiltration of the US Armed Forces and the formation of their own powerful paramilitary force, Blackwater.

The pervasive and widespread apathy, silence and limitless tolerance (with the exception of the small and highly distinguished group of vocal and visible “new atheists”, such as Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennet and Harris, and people in the entertainment field such as Bill Maher and Michael Moore), from liberal institutes and leaders, the media and democratic government(s), to boldly address religious beliefs
that are detrimental to the overall welfare of humanity, along with the thesis’ examination of the effects of the evangelicals’ rapture belief on its followers’ conduct, forms the core of the thesis’ two recommendations. They are, firstly, the abolition of the “politically correct” approach to the discussion and criticism of religion, particularly hostile, modern day, militant apocalyptic beliefs and conduct. And, secondly, the recommendation that liberal institutes and scholars, and democratic leaders, are obliged, as the proponents and guardians of tolerance and liberty, the hallmarks of a democratic society, to breach the walls of “political correctness” that currently impede and thwart any rational, cogent discussions, let alone criticisms, related to problematic issues pertaining to religion.

The thesis therefore agrees with Doris Lessing’s observation that “political correctness”, which severely curtails any rational examination and criticism of subject matter such as race, religion and culture, is a part of the outdated and anachronistic legacy of communism, and that this approach and belief has no place in any modern, democratic society. The thesis also agrees with Chris Hedges and Karl Popper’s view on the issue of unlimited tolerance. Hedges rightly notes that although tolerance is a virtue, tolerance coupled with passivity is, however, a vice (2006:211), while Popper expresses his opinion on unlimited tolerance by saying:

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them (Popper 1971:1:263).

The thesis’ study has taken cognisance of Richard Dawkins, Michael Shermer, Christopher Hitchens, Doris Lessing, Chris Hedges and Karl Popper’s arguments that political correctness, unlimited tolerance and the “hands off” religion approach stifles rational discussion and criticism of religion. The thesis has therefore strived to be as forthright and candid as possible in its examination and evaluation of the present day, Jewish Messiah, Rebbe Schneerson and Chabad, and in its assessment of the present day Christian evangelicals and their agendas and conduct which is engendered by their belief in an imminent, exclusive and militant rapture.
APPENDIX NO 1: THE DEFINITION OF ATZMUS

(In relation to the way Chabad perceives the Rebbe as being the ‘literal essence of God’)

‘All these principles apply generally to Etzem. However, when used to define Atzmus, the Essence of God, they gain added meaning and significance.

The term Etzem and Atzmus in Chasidus and Dirah Betachtonim appear associated with the set of ideas generally denoted by the term Etzem (Atzmus denoting that part of the Godhead which has the nature of Etzem).

In contrast to the word Etzem which seems to be used primarily as a common noun, the word Atzmus is predominately understood as a proper noun. It is, in effect, a name for the one God. Atzmus, as distinct from Etzem, does not point to a hidden Essence in contrast to revealed accidents. Rather it stresses the actual existence of the Essence. Atzmus is ‘the Essence itself’, and not ‘the Essence of’. As a theological term, in contrast to the multitude of kabbalistic terms or biblical names which symbolically express attributes of God, Atzmus expresses nothing about the divine, but denotes or is the divine in and of itself. It seems to correspond broadly to the Zoharic concept of Ein Sof. The actual usage of the term, however, is extremely problematic. There are examples where Atzmus is not used to describe God Himself, but rather an Essence. In such cases, I would argue, it is chosen to highlight the actual being of the Essence, as a concrete reality, or the existence of the Essence as it exists for itself and not in relation to anything other than itself.

Examples where the term is used to describe the Essence of God (the normal meaning of Atzmus) are understood in two ways. Firstly Atzmus is used as a common noun, and this, I would suggest, is what we find in the second section of Tanya; Shaar Yichud VeEmuna, where the Alter Rebbe talks of the Essence of God. And, secondly it is used as a proper noun, in effect as a name for God. In Ranut, one of the seminal writings of the Rebbe Rashab, and also predominately in the Rebbe’s own works, Atzmus is understood to be the essential-actual God-Being as it exists independently, rather than the Essence of God, that is concealed, so to speak, within the ‘phenomenon’ of God. These two meanings of the term Atzmus, viz., Essence Itself and Essence of, could be seen as reflecting two particular world views known in Hassidism as Yechudi Ailo and Yechudi Tata, or Daas Elyon and Daas Tachton, that is, the higher, supernatural
standpoint and the lower, terrestrial standpoint. The former is, so to speak, from God’s omnipresent, objective perspective, and the latter from Man’s finite, subjective perspective.

Atzmus from God’s perspective, is singular in nature, and simply is, without the dualism implied in being in relation to. As Levin explains: ‘Atzmus denotes God as He is in Himself, not as He is when in relation to other entities ... God in Himself not God in relation’. Therefore Atzmus does not lend itself to revelation, since that would bring it by definition into relation, and introduce a duality between the revealer and the recipient of the revelation, and between the state of concealment and the state of disclosure. Atzmus, from Man’s perspective, denotes ‘the Essence of’, and inevitably implies a duality between the ‘essence’ or ‘core’ of the entity and that which is unessential or accidental. This dualism, which emerges when Atzmus is viewed from the human standpoint, and which sets Atzmus over against a world of ‘otherness’, demonstrates the limiting and distorting effect of the human perspective, from which it is difficult to grasp the truly singular nature of Atzmus, and to see it as ‘Essence in Itself’.

Atzmus is also used to express God’s ‘ultimate transcendence,’ or ‘radical otherness’. However, this usage, while acknowledging the fundamental difficulty Man faces in relating to, and understanding the nature of, Atzmus, still creates the sort of dualism mentioned above. Even though Atzmus is relegated to the furthest reaches of the transcendent realm, it still stands in relationship to Man. This is presumably why the Rebbe states that it is beyond all cognition and definition, and cannot be talked of even in terms of ‘transcendence’:

... the blessed Mahusso and Atzusso ... it is impossible to say about it that it is the aspect of transcendence, or even the aspect of distant transcendence and other such terms. Because the blessed Mahusso and Atzusso isn’t within the boundaries of ideas at all.

The Revelation of Atzmus (Gilluy Atzmus)

Atzmus, then, designates the unknowable God, who stands beyond the reach of human cognition and description, and even beyond concealment and revelation. Yet — and here we come to another typical Chabad theological paradox — we find references to the ‘revelation’ (gilluy) or ‘drawing down’ (hamshacha) of Atzmus in the writings of Chabad, including those of the Rebbe. How can this make any sense? If Etzem, let
alone *Atzmus*, by definition does not disclose itself, how can one talk of the ‘revelation’ or ‘drawing down’ of *Atzmus*? How can there be *degrees* of its manifestation? How can *Atzmus*, be understood as a proper noun, undergo the change implied in the act of revelation? How can it appear at one place rather than another, when its presence is constant and uniform? How can it enter into relation, and become known? The solution offered to this conundrum is to argue that we can talk only of revelation with regards to Man and human perception. It is only from the human perspective that degrees of disclosure make any sense, or that the concepts of *hamshacha* and *gilluy* can be used. These make no sense from the side of God. There is no movement within God towards revelation; *Atzmus* is already ‘there’, equally in all places and at all times. The revelation of *Atzmus* occurs only in the mind of Man, as the veil is to a greater or lesser degree lifted, so that Man grasps what is already there. It is the varying degrees of Man’s awareness of God, to which the ‘revelation’ terminology refers, not to an ‘objective’ movement within the being of God, or a fundamental change in his relationship to the world. As Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsberg, a renowned Chabad kabbalist, explains (my emphasis):

Of G-d’s Absolute Essence it is said: ‘no thought can grasp You at all ...’ Even when we refer to this and other related phenomena with regard to G-d as His being ‘the Paradox of paradoxes,’ this phrase itself is not meant to *define* G-d but only to describe the nature of man’s experience of Him.

A profound implication of the doctrine of *Atzmus* appears to be that its ‘revelation’ annihilates the distinction and the hierarchy that traditional theology postulates as existing between matter and spirit. The dualism of matter and spirit, and the privileging of the latter over the former, is almost as deeply embedded in traditional Jewish theology as it is in Christian. At its most extreme this dualism defines matter as intrinsically evil and spirit as intrinsically good. If, however, *Atzmus* exists in equal measure in all places and at all times, and if it is beyond all categories of human thought, if ‘for the Blessed *Atzmus Mahus* it is not possible to compare or to make distinctions and differences between higher and lower,’ then it follows that the revelation of *Atzmus* implies the transcending, indeed, the negation of the dualism between spirit and matter, between good and evil. *Atzmus* is ultimate reality, but ultimate reality is beyond these distinctions. The implications of this are profound, and potentially ‘heretical’. The reason why such theologies engender remarkably little theological opposition and debate within traditional Judaism is not just because they
are expressed in highly obscure, technical language, and Judaism is much less interested in dogma than is Christianity, but also because the realization of these theologies is put off till the messianic age. This gap between the theory and its implementation allows room for potentially antinomian and heretical theologies to be expounded, provided their implementation is firmly and safely relegated to a distant future. (Kohanzad 2006:131-134)

The Messianic Doctrine of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

(1902-1994)

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Humanities
APPENDIX NO 2: LIST OF SCHNEERSON’S WORK

An annotated list of Rebbe Schneerson’s vast collection of textual material from Kohanzad, that includes sources such as his lectures, discourses, note books, letters and responsa, as well as records of his private audiences, personal writings and audio and video recordings.

‘It should be noted that, with the exception of a small series of note books, letters and responsa, the primary textual material that we have to date comes from the Rebbe’s orally delivered lectures and discourses. These were originally said in Yiddish and Hebrew, often with lengthy quotes in Aramaic, or usually an amalgam of all three languages, and were written down by his followers and secretariat. Many of these discourses were eventually proofread and edited by the Rebbe himself and are, therefore, the most valuable and legitimate primary source material. There are some books that attempt to collect and translate these texts into thematic collections on different subjects. There are those that I believe attempt to remain authentic to the original and there are others, which are so remote from the original that it is often difficult to see the connection between the Rebbe’s original discourse and the translator’s version. I have therefore felt it necessary to divide this material into two different categories, the first being Primary and the latter Primary-Secondary.

There were things said in private audiences called Yechidus, and other personal accounts and stories that are more difficult to objectively verify and would also have to be considered Primary-Secondary.

There are seven possible categories of primary Hebrew and Yiddish textual source material that one comes across when looking holistically at the philosophy of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

*These are:


Which have also been republished under the title *Torahs Menachem Hisva ‘adiyos*:

The majority of the texts that we have are a mixture of edited and unedited talks, stories and personal accounts, some of which were not captured on tape, owing to them having taken place on Shabbat or other religious festivals (when the use of electrical equipment is prohibited), but were written down by a group of individuals with superb aural memory. Each would remember an hour or so, possibly more, and then at the conclusion of the Shabbat or festival would repeat what they had heard. These would later be transcribed, whether lectures Sichos or inspired discourses Maamorim, thereby capturing the majority of the Rebbe’s talks, much of which were later to be edited by the Rebbe or his editorial staff.

These fifty or so volumes include many talks that were said during these gatherings, and remain unedited by the Rebbe’s hand, and provide a written version of events, and of what was actually said, prior to any further editorial processes.

Out of the unedited conglomeration of ‘inspired’ discourses and talks, which are found in the Sefer Hitvadiyos, there are another set of books called Sichos Kodesh:


These books are gleaned from Sefer Hitvadiyos and arranged into a thematic and systematic collection of talks and discourses or Sichos, for that particular week or gathering. Once again these remain largely unedited, that is, they did not undergo the Rebbe’s rigorous editorial process.

The next genre called Maamorim are the ‘inspired’ oral discourses, usually only said by a ‘Rebbe’ in his role as spiritual leader and figurehead. Many of these were eventually edited by the Rebbe and published in a series of six books called Sefer Ha Maamorim Meluket.


But as mentioned these works are said to be inspired and are held in a different light from the next category, which are Sichos.


These are the general talks and discussions, whether around a specifically Hassidic topic or more general Rabbinic, Biblical or even political one. These are said to be the works of the Rebbe himself, that is of his personality but they are not considered specifically ‘inspired’.

The next series of the same genre are categorised chronologically from the years 1987-1992, and are almost identical to the Likkutei Sichos but within each book they alternate between Hebrew and Yiddish and are called Sefer HaSichos, the following are just two examples:


There are also approximately fifty volumes of the Rebbe’s letters to people and organisations throughout the world, over the forty-two years he was able to write or dictate them. These are called Igros Kodesh.


As mentioned earlier this large set of chronologically and thematically collected letters and responsa reveal a fascinating world of ideas and expose some underlying beliefs and aspects of the Rebbe’s personality that would otherwise be lost in a reading of his more traditional lectures or discourses.

His personal notebooks or Reshimos have recently been published in book form called Reshimos.


This set of personal writings appeared almost immediately after the Rebbe’s passing in a series of small pamphlets and were released every few weeks. The executers of the Rebbe’s estate claim that these notes were purposefully left by the Rebbe in the drawer of his writing desk to be found and published, after his passing.

Other primary sources that are equally valid are audio and video recordings.

This book, and the other volumes that followed it, collect the Rebbe’s main and most famous Maamarim concerning Redemption and Moshiach, into what can be considered a relatively authentic English translation. Overall, these appeared just before the Rebbe’s passing in response to growing interest in the subject, which came from the Rebbe’s instruction to learn more about these issues.


This is an almost verbatim translation of the Hebrew and Yiddish volume that shares its name (originally printed in 1993), which is an edited and ‘sound bite’ synopsis of a variety of Messianic Sichos and Maamorim from 1990-1992.


These are selected excerpts from many different Sichos and Maamorim that deal with some of the issues raised with regard to the Messianic idea within Lubavitch philosophy in general, and the Rebbe in particular. The collection deals with ideas thematically and gathers together some very surprising teachings on the subject. Nonetheless, in discussion with Rabbi Uri Kaploun, he agreed that the even more controversial material had been purposefully left out.


This is said to be ‘the definitive explanation of the idea of Hassidic philosophy ... in intellectual and systematic terms ...’, and although it is thoroughly interesting, it is a beautiful example of the Rebbe’s complicated use of circular logic. It is also possible that the Rebbe personally assisted in the editing and publishing of this English volume.

Schneerson, Rabbi Menachem. M. Proceeding Together, The Earliest Talks of the

This appeared almost directly after the Rebbe’s passing and was an attempt by the authors to console the followers, and to redirect their attention from the more messianic publications to the earlier and less messianic discourses. This book is the first in a series of the Rebbe’s early lectures 1950-51, and discusses the passing of the previous Rebbe. I feel this was meant to provide acceptable language of grief, as well as re-legitimising the belief in a posthumous messiah in a language which the Rebbe had himself used.


This is an English translation of both the previous Rebbe’s last discourse and the Rebbe’s first and inaugural discourse that he spoke, then edited and published with additions in 1951. This discourse is of major significance and is an important resource when examining the Rebbe’s messianism.


This book was perhaps one of the first to discuss the Rebbe’s teachings in a relatively academic fashion. However, its style and content is rather dull. There seems to be an over emphasis on statistics, e.g. how many times the Rebbe may have mentioned an idea over a particular period. This book includes graphs and pie charts.


Explores some of the Rebbe’s more interesting and intriguing discourses. Here, Rabbi Touger has attempted to be authentic and true to the Rebbe’s original discourses. In doing so however, it still retains the problem of being a difficult read for those not familiar with its format. (Kohanzad 2006:337-341).
APPENDIX NO 3: ISRAEL KNOHL’S ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF “GABRIEL’S REVELATION” ON THE GABRIEL STONE

Column 1

1. [ ] .......
2. [ ] Lord
3. [ ] . [ ] .
4. [ f]or th[us sa]id the Lo[rd] I have betr[oth]ed you to me, garden
5. [ ]... ...
6. and I will talk .... .... [ 
7. [ ] children of Israel .... [?][]...[ ] ...[ ] ....
8. son of David [?] ......[
9. [ ] the word of the Lor[d]
10. [ ] .... ..... ..... you have asked ... [?]
11. [?] Lord you have asked me, so said the God of Hosts
12. [ ] .. from my house Israel and I will talk about the greatness of Jerusalem
13. [Thus] said the Lord, God of Israel, now all the nations
14. ... enc[amp] on Jerusalem and from it are exi[led]
15. one two three forty Prophets and the elders
16. and the Hassidim. My servant David, ask of Ephraim
17. [that he] place the sign; (this) I ask of you. For thus said
18. the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, my gardens are ripe,
19. My holy thing for Israel. By three days you shall know, for thus said
20. the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, the evil has been broken
21. before righteousness. Ask me, and I shall tell you, what is this
22. wicked branch, plastered white. You are standing, the angel
23. is supporting you. Do not fear. Blessed is the glory of the Lord God from
24. his seat. In a little while, I will shake
25. .. the heavens and the earth. Here is the glory of the Lord God
26. of Hosts, the God of Israel, These are the seven chariots
27. at the gate of Jerusalem and the gates of Judea they will re[st] for
28. my three angels, Michael and all the others, look for
29. for Israel. One two three four five six
30. [se]ven for my angels..... what is this? He said, the frontlet
31. .... [ ] .... ....... and the second chief
32. watches on. Jerusalem ...... three in the greatness
33. ................ three [ ] ....
34. [ ] .... . that he saw a man ... works [ 
35. that he .... [ ] that a sign from Jerusalem
36. I on ...[ ] ashes and a sign of exile ..
37. [s]ign of exile ...... God sin ... and see
38. .... ... [ ] Jerusalem said the Lord
39. ........... ....... That his mist will fill most of the moon
40. [ ] blood that the northerner would become maggoty
41. [ ] abhorrence the diseased spot . in all
42. [ ] . God [ 
43. [ ] . [?] 

Column 2

(There are no legible words before line 51)

51 with you (or: your nation) ....

52. .. the angels [ ] from ... on [ ] ..

53. ... and tomorrow to ... they will rest ... big .. .. ..

54. [by] three days this is what [I have] said He
55. these are [ 
56. please see the north[ern] enca[mps] [ 
57. Seal up the blood of the slaughtered of Jerusalem. For thus said the Lord of Hos[ts] 
58. the God of Israel, So said the Lord of Hosts the God of Israel [ 
59. Israel [ 
60. ... He will have pity .. His mercy are ne[ar] 
61. [ ] blessed ? ... 
62. daughter ? ... 
63. ... 
64. [ ] ...[ ] beloved ? 
65. Three holy ones of the world from.... [ ] 
66. [ ] shalom he said, in you we trust ... [?] 
67. Announce him of blood, this is their chariot. 
68. Many are those who love the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel 
69. Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel ....[?] 
70. prophets. I sent to my people my three shepherds. I will say (?) 
71. that I have seen bless[ing]... ..... Go say(?) 
72. The place for David the servant of the Lord [ ]...[ ] .. [ ] 
73. The heaven and the earth, blessed ...... [ ] 
74. men. Showing steadfast love to thousands .... steadfast love. [ ] 
75. Three shepherds went out for Israel ... [ ]...
76. If there is a priest, if there are sons of holy ones ....[ ] 
77. Who am I? I am Gabriel ........ [ ] 
78. You will rescue them.............. for two [ ] ...[ ] 
79. from before of you the three si[g]ns three .. [ ] 
80. In three days, live, I Gabriel com[mand] yo[u],
81. prince of the princes, the dung of the rocky crevices [ ]... ...[ ]
82. to the visions (?) ... their tongue (?) [ ] ... those who love me
83. to me, from the three, the small one that I took, I Gabriel
84. Lord of Hosts God of Is[rael] [
85. then you will stand ... 
86. ... /
87. ... world ?

APPENDIX NO 4: THE FIFTH LUBAVITCHER’S REBBE’S INFAMOUS LETTER ON ANTI-ZIONISM

The text of the Rashab, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe’s infamous letter on anti-Zionism, written about 1900, that reveals Chabad’s anti-Zionist position.

In answer to your questions concerning the Zionists and their group (which they propose to found) I will state, in short, the following:

1. Even if the Zionists were G-d fearing Torah true Jews, and even if we had reason to believe that their goal is feasible, we are nevertheless not permitted to join them in bringing our redemption with our own strength. We are not even permitted to force a premature redemption by showering the Almighty with insistent entreaties (As Rashi comments on the Gemara Kesuvos 111A discussing G-d’s adjuring the Jewish people not to force the redemption), and certainly not by means of physical force and devices; We may not end our exile by main force: we will not thereby, achieve the spiritual redemption for which we are waiting. The Zionist notion contradicts our hope and yearning that G-d himself will not bring about our Redemption.

The past redemptions which were wrought by human beings were therefore incomplete. The redemption through Moshe and Aharon after which further exiles followed, and the redemption through Chananyoh, Michoel, and Azaryoh, although they acted in accordance with the prophecy of Yirmeyohu and other prophets are cases in point.

To insure a permanent Redemption from our present exile, we must hope and wait for a deliverance by the Almighty Himself, and not through the hands of one of flesh and blood. Thus only will our redemption be complete.

2. All their plans are built upon fantasies. They will not materialize, for there will never be an agreement to them. And besides our natural characteristics are not suited for it. Their leaders are blinded and bribed by their wish for freedom and power, and the ignorant masses follow them blindly.

3. The main point: The leaders of this project are totally hostile to G-d and His Torah. Their desire and interest is to cast off the yoke of Torah and Mitzvos, substituting nationalism for Judaism. Recently one of their leaders circulated a statement publicly blaspheming Judaism and boldly stating that a Jew is not
necessarily someone who observes the Torah and mitzvos, etc. They state that many mitzvos of the Torah are – may their mouth be shut – a disgrace to the Jewish people. They plan to instil these ideas in the young by controlling the school system. Their purpose is to inculcate them with negative attitudes toward G-d given Torah and mitzvos and substitute the banner of nationalism as their guiding force. One of their leaders “reformed” the Torah, omitting those verses, passages and laws that did not please him. He is ready to print this “new Torah”, and this is what will be taught in the Zionistic schools.

One of the activities of the protected group will be to help finance schools of the above-described type. Although the goals of the bank are said to be to rebuild and repair destroyed roads, and so on, as their program depicts, it, will in fact direct its forces primarily toward the youth and the culture and implant in the children and adolescents poisonous roots. Their emissaries, the Zionist preachers malign Hashem’s Prophets including Moshe, the master of all Prophets at will.

Woe to us that we must witness these tragic events in our time.

The Zionists true desire is to sever the hearts of the Jewish people from the Torah and mitzvos, G-d forbid, and to debase in their eyes whatever is regarded as holy by our nation.

This is their leaders’ goal, and “the body follows the head.”

If the Zionist plan to take possession of the land will G-d forbid materialize, they will defile it and disgrace it with their abominations and misdeeds, causing our exile to be lengthened, chas vesholom.

After considering these points, dear brothers, do judge whether G-d desires their actions and whether these people will bring about the salvation of K’Lal Yisroel. No!

We will not accept their promises. Even if they have some good to offer, we must throw it back to their faces. We do not want their good. We accept only the good from Hashem that results from the fulfilment of Torah and mitzvos. The Torah promises, “If you shall guard my statues I will give rain in its season and material abundance.”

It is this good we want. And that is our only cherished hope. Those who aid the Zionists will in the future be held accountable, for they support those who cause
the community to sin.

Therefore, anyone who belongs to Hashem’s camp shall not join the evildoers, but on the contrary, he must oppose them as much as he is able to do. Until it shall be G-d’s will to redeem us, we must accept the yoke of exile upon ourselves, since the exile expiates our sins. We must strengthen ourselves to withstand every new wave by fulfilling Torah and mitzvos, as G-d requires of us, hoping that Hashem will soon bring our redemption and send Moshia. If he tarries let us wait for him; his arrival is dependent upon our teshuvoh (repentance), May G-d have pity upon us and speed our Redemption.

As to the Zionists’ argument that Torah-true Jews should become leaders of their movement, I will answer as follows:

1. How can a G-d fearing Jew stand at the head of a movement that contradicts the fundamentals of our belief in the Redemption?

2. Torah Jews may not participate in this movement because Zionists will not accept the option of the G-d fearing Jews in the realms of religion and education. Rather, they will continue to follow their own course, and thereafter claim that the G-d fearing Jews, as part of the movement, ratify their views and decisions. Once G-d fearing Jews join the Zionists, many sincere simple Jews will begin to believe that the Zionists’ deeds are approved by the G-d fearing Jews. Even if these G-d fearing Jews later break with the Zionist party and denounce it (provided their protests will be published in the Zionist press), the effects of their protest will be far weaker than if they have never joined the Zionists in the first place.

3. No matter what the Zionists claim, in truth they are not interested in G-d fearing Jews joining them, since they do not intend to change their chosen course (of totally abandoning Torah and mitzvos, making nationalism their entire Judaism). When Rabbonim at the Warsaw assemblies demanded the establishment of an exclusive council of Rabbonim, the Zionists would not agree. Their journalists ridiculed and blasphemed the Rabbonim, mocking them for having dared suggest such an idea. This clearly shows that the Zionists do not wish Torah Jews to interfere with their evil plans; may G-d foil their council and elevate the position of K’lal Yisroel.
Furthermore, let us evaluate their argument that they strive and make others strive for the benefit their people, while G-d fearing Jews sit idly by. What have they done “for the benefit of our people?”

I will only mention in passing the great, good deed accomplished by the Zionists in the last three years to benefit their Jewish brothers: Their closing of the shores of the Holy Land to Jews and the ban of property sales unless they are made by Jews who hold Turkish citizenship. Since the beginning of the establishment of the Chovovei Zion they managed to close the shores of the Holy Land to Jews of Russia and Rumania, and they prevented Jews from all countries from buying property and houses (except from the Turkish). Jews suffered because of this and how they lost money through it. With the founding of the Zionist movement, entry was refused to all Jews, and acquisition was forbidden even to the old-established Jews in the land. This created a barrier between the Jews and the land that had never existed before and humiliated the Jews in the eyes of the non-Jewish inhabitants.

These worthy goals necessitated huge expenditures which were funded by the collection of half shekel coins and by selling shares. They crave our trust in them and their promises. Yet their personal actions on behalf of their Jewish brethren, other than fund raising, is of little movement.

But let us see whether the Chovovai Zion group, founded ten years ago in Odessa, did anything for the benefit of our Jewish brothers.

One of their accomplishments was founding the settlement Kastina. I have been informed by a reliable source who is well acquainted with its inhabitants that there are only a few families who do not have adequate dwellings. Their daily wage for farm labor is a frank and a half, (i.e., a ridiculously small amount, mere pocket money) and they are bitterly poor. Any profit that might be reaped goes to the party. A few families have been placed in “Petach Tikvah”. This is the extent of their benevolence. Any Rav or ordinary Jew does more for the poverty-stricken in his town, extending financial aid and endeavoring to make them independent. (These settlers in Eretz Yisroel) need constant support. Even the settlers who were set up with farm land and all the necessary implements by Baron Hirsch, and for whom he spent more than 10,000 Rubles per person, need constant support, although these settlements
were founded twenty years ago. Only individual settlers are self-sufficient, and this also only by the Baron’s generosity).

The Rabbonim and individual Jews who support the poor in their town do so without publicity, so that, in fact, the public may not be informed of their good deeds. In reality even in the less generous towns, many more paupers are supported than are helped by the Chovovai Zion.

On the contrary, we must demand that they do much more, considering the great commotion they create and considering that they collect more than 40,000 Rubles annually.

No measurable gains for our brothers can be disclosed – their actions have been confined to oral and written plans, all blown out of proportion to reality. They pounce upon any hint of opposition like lions on the rampage, hoping to silence him with invective.

Their speeches cannot create new realities, and they do not blind the eyes of the intelligent people. We are aware that there they do not produce actual results. Do they benefit K’lal Yisroel with their above-mentioned relatively small contribution? Yet they boast that they themselves do and cause others to do deeds for the good of their fellow Jews. How are they not ashamed to speak in this manner, accusing others of lack of good deeds, although in truth the accused do far more than they do, each one in his own city and place. Among us, people take care of the needs of the community and improve the financial lot of their fellow Jew without arousing any public attention.

May Hashem elevate the position of our brothers B’nai Yisroel and speed our redemption soon in our days.

Your true friend who desires and waits for G-d’s salvation,

Sholem Dov Ber

(Accessed online at Failedmessiah.com ‘Chabad’s Anti-Zionism: The Rebbe Rashab’s Letter.’

Blackwater Said to Pursue Bribes to Iraq

After 17 Died

By MARK MAZZETTI and JAMES RISEN

Published: November 10, 2009

Barclay Walsh contributed research from Washington, and Mohammed Hussein from Baghdad.

WASHINGTON — Top executives at Blackwater Worldwide authorized secret payments of about $1 million to Iraqi officials that were intended to silence their criticism and buy their support after a September 2007 episode in which Blackwater security guards fatally shot 17 Iraqi civilians in Baghdad, according to former company officials.

Blackwater approved the cash payments in December 2007, the officials said, as protests over the deadly shootings in Nisour Square stoked long-simmering anger inside Iraq about reckless practices by the security company’s employees. American and Iraqi investigators had already concluded that the shootings were unjustified, top Iraqi officials were calling for Blackwater’s ousting from the country, and company officials feared that Blackwater might be refused an operating license it would need to retain its contracts with the State Department and private clients, worth hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Four former executives said in interviews that Gary Jackson, who was then Blackwater’s president, had approved the bribes and that the money was sent from Amman, Jordan, where the company maintains an operations hub, to a top manager in Iraq. The executives, though, said they did not know whether the cash was delivered to Iraqi officials or the identities of the potential recipients.

Blackwater’s strategy of buying off the government officials, which would have been illegal under American law, created a deep rift inside the company, according to the former executives. They said that Cofer Black, who was then the company’s vice chairman and a former top C.I.A. and State Department official, learned of the plan
from another Blackwater manager while he was in Baghdad discussing compensation for families of the shooting victims with United States Embassy officials.

Alarmed about the secret payments, Mr. Black cut short his talks and left Iraq. Soon after returning to the United States, he confronted Erik Prince, the company’s chairman and founder, who did not dispute that there was a bribery plan, according to a former Blackwater executive familiar with the meeting. Mr. Black resigned the following year.

Stacy DeLuke, a spokeswoman for the company, now called Xe Services, dismissed the allegations as “baseless” and said the company would not comment about former employees. Mr. Black did not respond to telephone calls and e-mail messages seeking comment.

Reached by phone, Mr. Jackson, who resigned as president early this year, criticized The New York Times and said, “I don’t care what you write.”

The four former Blackwater executives, who had held high-ranking posts at the company, would speak only on condition of anonymity. Two of them said they took part in talks about the payments; the two others said they had been told by several Blackwater officials about the discussions. In agreeing to describe those conversations, the four officials said that they were troubled by a pattern of questionable conduct by Blackwater, which had led them to leave the company.

A senior State Department official said that American diplomats were not aware of any payoffs to Iraqi officials.

Blackwater continued operating as the prime contractor providing security for the United States Embassy in Baghdad until spring, when the Iraqi government said it would deny the company an operating license. The State Department replaced Blackwater with a rival in May, but the company still does some work for the department in Iraq on a temporary basis.

Five Blackwater guards involved in the shooting are facing federal manslaughter charges, and their trial is scheduled to start in February in Washington. A sixth guard pleaded guilty in December. The company has never faced criminal charges in the case, although the Iraqi victims brought a civil lawsuit in federal court against Blackwater and Mr. Prince.
Separately, a federal grand jury in North Carolina, where the company has its headquarters, has been conducting a lengthy investigation into it. One of the former executives said that he had told federal prosecutors there about the plan to pay Iraqi officials to drop their inquiries into the Nisour Square case. If Blackwater followed through, the company or its officials could face charges of obstruction of justice and violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which bans bribes to foreign officials.

Officials at the United States Attorney’s Office in Raleigh declined to comment on their investigation, and it is not clear whether the payment scheme is a focus of the grand jury.

Federal prosecutors in North Carolina have interviewed a number of former Blackwater employees about a variety of issues, including allegations of weapons smuggling, according to several former employees who say they have testified before the grand jury or been interviewed by prosecutors, as well as lawyers familiar with the matter. Two former employees have pleaded guilty to weapons charges and are believed to be cooperating with prosecutors.

Since 2001, Blackwater has undergone explosive growth, not only from security contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also from classified work for the Central Intelligence Agency that included taking part in a now defunct program to assassinate leaders of Al Qaeda and to load missiles on Predator drones.

The Nisour Square shooting was the bloodiest and most controversial episode involving Blackwater in the Iraq war. At midday on Sept. 16, 2007, a Blackwater convoy opened fire on Iraqi civilians in the crowded intersection, spraying automatic weapons fire in ways that investigators later claimed was indiscriminate, and even launching grenades into a nearby school. Seventeen Iraqis were killed and dozens more were wounded.

The matter set off an international outcry and intense debates in Iraq and the United States over the role of private contractors in war zones. Many Iraqis condemned Blackwater, which they had long seen as an arrogant rogue operation, and Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki declared that the Blackwater shooting was a challenge to his nation’s sovereignty. His government opened investigations into the episode and previous fatal shootings by Blackwater guards, and threatened to bar the company from operating in the country.
Those responses deeply worried Blackwater officials. Before the Nisour Square shootings, the company had operated in Iraq without a license largely because the Iraqi government had never enforced the rules. Being blocked from the country would have been costly — the State Department deal was Blackwater’s single biggest contract. From 2004 through today, the company has collected more than $1.5 billion for its work protecting American diplomats and providing air transportation for them inside Iraq.

“It would hurt us,” Mr. Prince, the chairman, said in an interview in January about losing the diplomatic security contract. “It would not be a mortal blow, but it would hurt us.”

The former Blackwater executives said it was not clear who proposed paying off Iraqi officials. But after Mr. Jackson, the former company president approved the plan, the cash for the payoffs was taken from Amman and given to Rich Garner, then a top manager in Iraq, the former executives said. One of those executives said that officials in Iraq’s Interior Ministry, which is responsible for operating licenses, were the intended recipients.

Mr. Garner, who still works for the company, could not be reached for comment. The former executives said they did not know whether Mr. Garner was involved in decisions about the bribery scheme.

At that time, Mr. Black was in a series of discussions with Patricia A. Butenis, the deputy chief of mission at the American Embassy in Baghdad, about compensation payments to the Nisour Square victims. According to former Blackwater officials, Mr. Black was furious when he learned that the payoff money was being funnelled into Iraq, and he swiftly broke off the talks with Ms. Butenis.

“We are out of here,” Mr. Black told a colleague, one former executive said. After returning to the United States, Mr. Black and Robert Richer, who had also joined Blackwater after a C.I.A. career, separately confronted Mr. Prince with their concerns about the plan, one former Blackwater executive said.

Mr. Richer left Blackwater in February 2008, followed by Mr. Black several months later, amid a battle inside Blackwater between former C.I.A. officers working at the company’s office outside Washington and executives at Blackwater’s headquarters in North Carolina.
The former officials said that Mr. Black, Mr. Richer and others believed that Blackwater had cultivated a cowboy culture that was contemptuous of government rules and regulations, and that some of the company’s leaders — former members of the Navy Seals including Mr. Prince and Mr. Jackson — had pushed the boundaries of legality. Contacted by telephone, Mr. Richer would not discuss specifics of why he left the company.

Ms. Butenis, now the United States ambassador to Sri Lanka, declined to comment for this article. But other State Department officials confirmed that embassy officials had met with Blackwater executives to encourage them to compensate the victims of Nisour Square.

The United States military had a well-established program for paying families of civilian victims of American military operations, but at the time of the Nisour Square shooting, the State Department did not have a similar program, officials said.

In interviews, three Iraqis wounded in Nisour Square said that Blackwater had made payments of several thousand dollars to them and other victims. Still, some of them joined the civil lawsuit against Blackwater. Settlement talks collapsed Tuesday, according to Susan Burke, a lawyer for the victims.

Even after the furore that was set off by the shootings, State Department officials made it clear that they did not believe they could operate in Baghdad without Blackwater, and Iraqi officials eventually dropped their public demands for the company’s immediate ouster.

Raed Jarrar, the Iraq consultant to the American Friends Service Committee, said in a recent interview that the Maliki government had gone too easy on Blackwater. “They had two different messages,” he said. “The Iraqi public, and even the Iraqi Parliament, was told that all private contractors would be pulled out of the country, while the contractors and the State Department were told the opposite.”

In late 2008, the Bush administration and the Iraqi government hammered out an agreement governing the role of security contractors in Iraq. Under the new rules, security contractors lost their immunity from Iraqi laws, which had been granted in 2004 by L. Paul Bremer III, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, which ran the country after the start of the American-led war. The Iraqi government also made it mandatory for security contractors to obtain licenses to operate in the country.
In March 2009, the Iraqis said that the company would not be awarded a license. Two months later, the State Department replaced it with a competing security contractor, Triple Canopy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


http://abcnews.go.com/US/Story?id=6491162&page=1


http://books.google.com/books?id=kSawg1bFsNc&dq=the%27suffering+servant%27+messiah&printsec=frontcover

http://judaism.about.com/od/denominationsofjudaism/a/haredi.htm


http://members.bib-arch.org/search.asp

http://www.hartman.org.il/SHInews_View_Eng.asp?Article_Id=124


Lindsay, H. 1970. The Late Great Planet Earth. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.


Schneerson, M. 2004. Do not waste energy on any work which is not connected with fulfilling the mission of Lubavitch, in *Kfar Chabad Magazine*. 1079 (5 Shevat 5764) (January 8): 35.


http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=431597&contrassID=2&subContrassID=20&sbSubContrassID=0&listSrc=Y


Simmons, S. 2009. Ask Rabbi Simmons: Jesus as the Messiah, on website *About.com: Judaism.* Accessed online June 17, 2009 at

http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_o/bl_simmons_messiah3.htm


http://www.jewsonfirst.org/07a/robert_smith.html


http://www.alternet.org/blogs/peek/143497/an_open_letter_to_elie_wiesel:_please_don’t_legitimize_john_hagee/


http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?UserID=4091

http://www.hartmaninstitute.com/SHInews_View_Eng.asp?Article_Id=124

http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/about.html

http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/about.html


http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/urgent_issues.html