

# FOUR STARTLING FACTS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF THE MESSIAH

by Susan Perlman

**“W**hy does the Messiah tarry? When will He come?” These were questions which continually agitated the young Rabbi’s mind. [Rabbi Leopold Cohn] According to Talmudical reckoning the Messiah should long since have come; yet, there was the exile, still the bitterest fact of Jewish life, to be accounted for. Can it be the coming of the Messiah has passed and the promise has not been fulfilled? Sorely perplexed, the rabbi decided to begin a study of the original predictions of the Prophets, but the mere contemplation of the act filled him with fear, for according to the teaching of the Rabbis, “Cursed are the bones of him who calculates the time of the end.”

Continued  
on page 2

# ISSUES

A MESSIANIC JEWISH PERSPECTIVE



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**And so it was that with trembling hands, expecting at any moment to be struck by a bolt from heaven, but with an eagerness irresistible, he opened the book of the prophet Daniel and began to read.<sup>1</sup>**

**T**oday some might wonder, why so much angst over the Messiah? After all, we have managed thus far without him. Do we really need a Messiah? Perhaps the longing seems to express a childlike hope in a hero on whom most of our people have long since given up. For many, the Messiah seems like little more than an ancient Jewish version of Santa or Superman. But don't miss the deeper emotion this "sorely perplexed" young rabbi felt. His cold fear was simply stated in the sentence, "Can it be the coming of the Messiah has passed and the promise has not been fulfilled?"

What else would drive the young man to push past his fears of the curse the rabbis had laid upon whomever would dare to calculate the timing of such things? Perhaps a greater fear of not knowing, of always wondering if God had made a promise—and broken it. For if the Holy Writings indeed predicted that the Anointed One would come within certain time parameters, and if he had not come, what other conclusion could one reach? A Messiah who never comes is maybe not such a big deal. But a God who spells out his promises in great detail and is then framed by those very details as a promise-breaker, is frightening, if not tragic, whether or not a person is religious.

The God who is described in the Jewish Bible is by definition all-knowing, all-powerful, just, good and deserving of trust. But what if God is not all these things? What if God is real but a liar and a fraud? It would take a brave person to explore such a shocking possibility. And that is exactly what Rabbi Leopold Cohn was willing to

do more than 100 years ago.

Cohn was not the only one who realized the implications of a prophecy as exact as Daniel 9. Another young Jew, Rachmiel Frydland, grappled with the meaning of the passage and the ramifications of the timetable. Frydland, well versed in Talmud and Mishnah, also recognized that it would take some courage to study it:

The Jewish people rarely study the Book of Daniel because many rabbinic Jews were misled attempting to interpret Daniel's cryptic "times." Some were led so far astray that they came to believe in false messiahs, and therefore talmudic Jews frowned on students who studied Daniel with a view of finding out the time of the Messiah. However, religious Jews knew that this book revealed more about Messiah than any other book.<sup>2</sup>

Frydland, like Cohn, overcame his fears and uncertainties and looked into the interpretation of this mysterious passage. What did the two men discover?

**FACT ONE: the Messiah's appearance was locked into a fixed time**

**FACT TWO: that fixed time was while the Second Temple was still standing**

**FACT THREE: the Messiah had to come from a specific lineage that was only verifiable through the Temple records**

**And the FOURTH STARTLING FACT is that the Messiah had to die a violent death. The details of these facts together present some of the strongest evidence that he has in fact already come.**

# 1 **FACT ONE: THE MESSIAH'S APPEARANCE WAS LOCKED INTO A FIXED TIME.**

Ever hear the parental refrain, “You’ll get your answer when the Messiah comes”? And to the response, “When will the Messiah come, Dad?” the answer is, “Who knows?”

But we *can* know the answer, in detail. It is in the book of Daniel. This prophet who lived during the time of our exile in Babylon received a vision that the Messiah would come 483 years after the command to restore Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple:

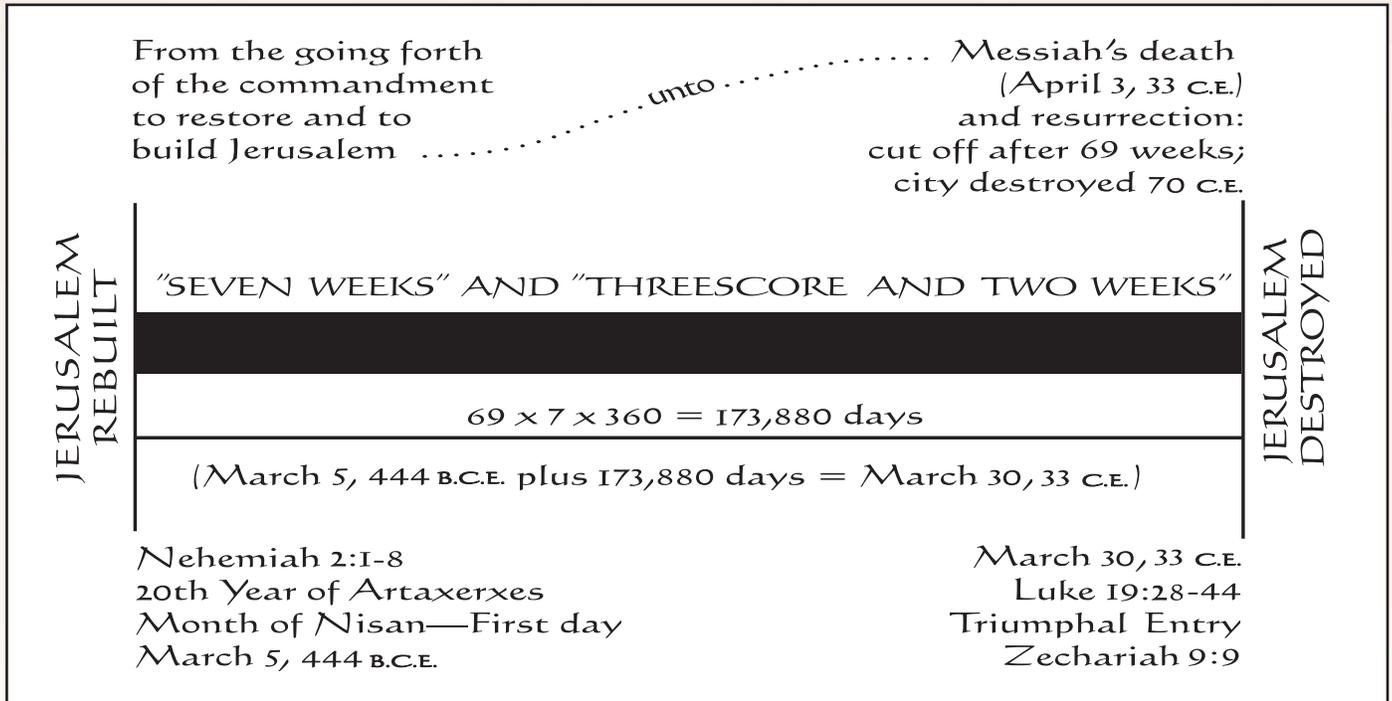
... that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street

shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. (Daniel 9:25)

The “clock” on these 69 “weeks” (units of seven years) began ticking when Artaxerxes issued a decree to Nehemiah to rebuild the Temple and restore the holy city of Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 2:1-8). While other decrees went forth, this was the only one that involved both the Temple and Jerusalem. History records this took place in Nisan (March/April) of 444 B.C.E. (see sidebar on this timeline). That would mean the Messiah would appear by 33 C.E. History does not record anyone, other than Y’shua (Jesus), who was from that time period and claimed to be the Messiah.



*Continued on page 4*



*Adapted from a chart prepared by Dr. Harold Hoehner for the book futureHOPE by David Brickner, 1999.*

## 2 **FACT TWO: THE SECOND TEMPLE WOULD STILL BE STANDING WHEN MESSIAH CAME.**

Daniel predicted that after the appearance of Messiah, “. . . the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary”(v.26). We know that occurred when Titus’ Roman legions marched on Jerusalem in 70 C.E., destroying both the city and the Temple. The Talmud teaches that at that time people believed that the Messiah had already come. But His appearance was concealed from the Jews until they were rendered more worthy of His appearance.<sup>3</sup>

Other passages support the understanding that Messiah would come while the Temple was still standing. For example, the rabbis recognized that Psalm 118 would be sung to the Messiah when he arrived.<sup>4</sup>

Hoshienu—Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you *from the house of the LORD* [italics mine]. (vv. 25,26)

The only way that they could bless the Messiah **from** the house of the Lord was if the Temple was still standing!

Haggai, who was in Jerusalem as the Second Temple was being built, made the messianic prediction that the “glory of this last temple is to be greater than that of the first” (2:9).<sup>5</sup> And Malachi confirmed it: “Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his Temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come” (3:1). Twelfth century Jewish scholar, Rabbi David Kimchi, referred to the Malachi verse, saying, “The Lord, the angel of the covenant, is the Messiah.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Daniel, the Temple would not only be standing at Messiah’s appearance, but it would then soon be



destroyed. That Temple, the Second Temple which was originally built by Ezra and beautified by Herod, was where Y’shua did most of his teaching and made startling claims for himself. The New Testament records the painful words of Jesus to those who spoke of how beautiful the Temple looked after its refurbishing under Herod: “These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down.”<sup>7</sup> Was Jesus pointing to Daniel’s prophecy being fulfilled? Less than 40 years later the destruction of the Temple was so thorough that, to this day, the exact location of the sanctuary is unknown.

## 3 **FACT THREE: THE MESSIAH’S LINEAGE COULD ONLY BE IDENTIFIABLE WHILE THE TEMPLE STOOD.**

The coming of the Messiah had another time constraint: it was connected to his descent from the tribe of Judah. Genesis 49:10, a well-recognized messianic prophecy,<sup>8</sup> indicated that Judah was to retain its identity until Shiloh (one of the names for the Messiah) was to come.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, *until Shiloh comes*; [emphasis mine] and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. (Genesis 49:10)

According to the book of Ezra (1:5-8), Judah's position was maintained throughout the 70 years' captivity in Babylon. It was also intact back in the Land, until the Romans made the kingdom of Judah a Roman province.<sup>9</sup> At that time the Sanhedrin was stripped of its authority and, according to Josephus, they [the members of the Sanhedrin] "covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming, 'Woe unto us, for the sceptre has departed from Judah and the Messiah has not come.'"<sup>10</sup> While there was a provincial government in place, about 50 years later (in 70 C.E.) that too ended.

Not only was the Messiah to be from the lineage of Judah, but more specifically from the house of David:

"I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations."<sup>11</sup>

This messianic prophecy clearly refers to a descendent

of David. Proof of such lineage was destroyed when the Temple was sacked. And while we do not have the Temple records, we do have the record of Y'shua's family tree in the accounts of his life by both Luke and Matthew. They both identify that he is from the house of David. We don't know anyone else who lived at that time and claimed to be the Messiah, who is descended from the tribe of Judah and the house of David, apart from Y'shua.



## 4 **FACT FOUR: THE MESSIAH WAS TO BE "CUT OFF."**

The Daniel prophecy (v.26) says that after the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, the Messiah would be cut off, but not for himself. This phrase "cut off"

meant to be killed or die a violent death. Some of the Talmudic rabbis understood this: "In Daniel is delivered to us the end [the time of His appearance and death—Rabbi Jarchi] of the Messiah."<sup>12</sup>



The idea that the Messiah would die was not new to Judaism. Isaiah wrote of one who would suffer and die for the sins of the people: "... For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken."<sup>13</sup> Psalm 22 graphically portrays death by crucifixion, a method of execution not known to the psalmist writing 1000 years before Y'shua was crucified.

Could it have happened just as Daniel so carefully predicted? Counting 483 years after Artaxerxes' decree would bring us to 33 C.E. The Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. That leaves a window of 37 years in which the Messiah from the tribe of Judah and the house of David could come. Not only that, but he was to die a violent death at that time.

### **POSTSCRIPT ON THE RABBI**

After studying these Scriptures, Rabbi Cohn was brave enough to open up a copy of the New Testament in Hebrew. He started at the beginning in Matthew and began reading the genealogy of Jesus: "This is the book of the generation of Y'shua the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham."<sup>14</sup> He read for some 13 hours and later wrote down his reflections:

I could at last see that the Messiah's name was Y'shua, that he was born in Bethlehem of Judah, that he had lived in Jerusalem and communicated with my people, and that he came just at the time predicted in the prophecy of Daniel.<sup>15</sup>

*Continued on page 8*

## THE GIFTS OF THE JEWS: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels

Thomas Cahill  
Nan A. Talese  
Anchor Books  
291 pp.

When considering the contribution of the Jewish people to modern society, people are apt to reflect on obvious features: monotheism; our system of jurisprudence; the Ten Commandments; a vaccine for polio or even Barbra Streisand. But Thomas Cahill authored a national bestseller showing the gifts of the Jews even much more subtle and far-reaching. His rather sweeping subhead indicates just *how* far-reaching!

Cahill, a master storyteller, lucidly traces the history of the Jewish people primarily using the text of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, as his guide. He also tries to explain the

societies of the surrounding ancient peoples in order to contrast those cultures with the development of Jewish society. As such, the focus of his writing is the seminal, formative aspects of Jewish history, not the whole sweep of Jewish life and contribution to the present day. The book is not historical *per se*, but rather, Cahill uses the Bible narrative to identify a few key ideas that he believes have changed the way we “moderns” think about life and about ourselves.

Cahill considers the main and overarching Jewish contribution a “processive worldview” as opposed to a “cyclical worldview.” The ancient Mesopotamians perceived life as a wheel. Events were considered part of the cycle of life and death, with no real beginning or end. The lifecycle on earth reflected the same pattern among the gods. There was nothing new or different to encounter; everything was part of the same repetitive

pattern. Cahill maintains that Avram and his descendants broke that pattern. They purportedly began to see life as a progression of time and events; a process that enables people to make and shape the future rather than living passively as cogs in the endless wheel of life. In essence, Cahill argues, the Jews gave the world the enduring concept of history.

Emanating from this sense of history is the concept of self-identity; the importance, indeed, the emancipation of the individual. Avram, Moses and David asserted their individuality and participated in shaping their own destinies. They interacted with God. In fact, they were friends with God; they spoke to God and they heard him speak to them. Spirituality—religion—was not an impersonal exercise of humans appeasing the wrath of the gods. Instead, individuals could have a relationship with the one true God rather than being mere

pawns of the many gods.

Acknowledging the importance of the individual gives birth to the greatest of human hopes for justice and righteousness as articulated in the Hebrew prophets' writings. The poor and the oppressed are also important because they are individuals with a destiny and a connection to God. Therefore, we must work for their emancipation, too.

Cahill's approach is fresh, insightful and worth reading, but his book is ultimately flawed by prejudice. While Cahill is not the first skeptic to write about the biblical narrative, the problem is that he presents his views as initially sympathetic, but in the end he treats the Bible with cynicism. His thin veneer of respect for the Bible accounts' historicity is shattered by his all-too-apparent anti-supernatural bias.

Cahill attempts to maintain sympathy for a belief in God but cannot bring himself

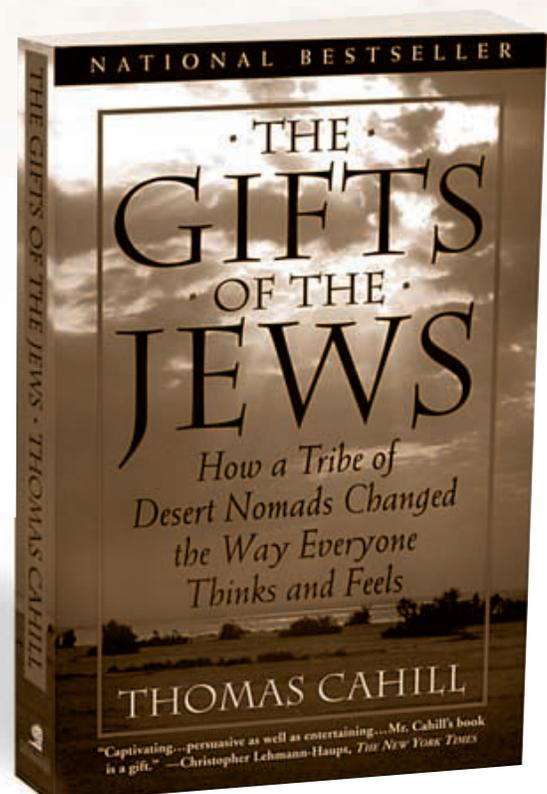
to assert that the God of the Bible can truly speak or truly act. The Bible, as he sees it, is not God's revelation. God can do no miracles. Cahill does some fancy footwork to explain away miracles in the Bible such as the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, etc. His explanations sometimes sink to absurd levels as in his assessment of the miracle of manna in the wilderness. Cahill describes the Sinai as the most remote and barren place in the world; a desert region with very little vegetation. He goes on to say that the manna, which fed the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years, was most likely edible insect excrement found on certain vegetation in the Sinai desert.

Cahill's cynicism is most apparent in the closing chapter of the book: "It is no longer possible to believe that every word of the Bible was inspired by God. Fundamentalists still do, but they can keep up such self-

delusion only by scrupulously avoiding all forms of scientific inquiry." Such is the arrogance of skeptics. He wants us to choose those parts of the Bible we find acceptable and discard those we find unacceptable. In fact, he would like to do that job for us! As such, Cahill's biblical rewrite would begin in Genesis 1 to read something like, "In the beginning man created God in his own image . . ." Indeed, Cahill has found a way to welcome some of the greatest gifts given to

humanity without acknowledging the True Giver. It is not the Jews, but rather the God of the Jews who has revealed his truth to Israel and to the world in the Bible. The greatest gift of the Jews is the one we have received along with everyone else. That is the gift of truth; of God speaking and revealing himself to humanity; it is the gift of salvation and forgiveness that he still gives to all who will listen and truly believe.

—David Brickner,  
Reviewer



Cohn's conflict was not over at that point. Like most Jews, the idea of believing in the same Messiah that the gentiles worshiped was very unsettling. But he went back into the Hebrew Scriptures, reading the Isaiah 53 passage about the Messiah who was to die for his people. Then as he began to pray, he accidentally dropped the Bible he was holding and it fell open to the third chapter of Malachi, which begins with the prophecy of the angel of the covenant who comes to the Temple. The passage ends with the words, "Behold he has already come, saith the Lord of Hosts."<sup>16</sup>

The rabbi could no longer deny that Y'shua (Jesus) was that one who had already come. He met all the criteria in Daniel's prophecy. He met all the criteria in the Isaiah 53 prophecy and in Malachi as well. Cohn's search was over.

**f Daniel is right and the Messiah came before the destruction of the Second Temple, that means that our rabbis have been wrong for 2000 years.**

## SOME FINAL QUESTIONS

God promised the Jewish people a Messiah. And he gave us a precise way of computing the time of Messiah's coming. Why are so many reluctant to find out where those computations lead? Are we more comfortable with ambiguity? Think about it. If Daniel is right and the Messiah came before the destruction of the Second Temple, that means that our rabbis have been wrong for 2000 years. If Daniel is right and the Messiah came before 70 C.E., that means we have to admit that Messiah has already come. And if he's already come, then we will have to deal with him as the one who has come. That leaves very little wiggle room—an uneasy state of being for most of us.

Maybe that's why some might choose to be agnostics. Maybe that's why some might not want to know that God exists, because such knowledge would make a claim on their lives. Could that be why many people are satisfied to allow the notion of God to remain a vague feeling until such time as they see a need for him?

However, our vague feelings about God do not mean that God is a vague being. What if he really has communicated to us in very specific ways? Leopold Cohn and Rachmiel Frydland believed God did communicate specifically. They ventured to follow the biblical clues to their logical conclusion. And once they did, they couldn't turn back. How many are brave enough today to consider such choices?

## Endnotes

1. Dr. Henry Einspruch, *When Jews Face Christ*
2. Rachmiel Frydland, *When Being Jewish Was a Crime* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1978) p.72.
3. John Ankerberg, *The Case For Jesus The Messiah*, c.1989 Chattanooga, as cited in Franz Delitzsch and Paton Gloag, *The Messiahship of Christ*, Part Two, p.226.
4. Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament In Light of Rabbinical Writings* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 1992), p.103.
5. Haggai 2:6 is applied to the Messiah in Deb. R. 1 (ed. Warsh. P. 4b, line 15 from the top) according to Alfred Edersheim, *List of Old Testament Passages Messianically Applied in Rabbinic Writings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) p.735.
6. Santala, p.102,103.
7. Luke 21:6
8. Ber. R. 98, ed. Warsh. P.174b; Sanhedrin 98b
9. Josephus' *Antiquities* 17, chapter 13:1-5.
10. Ibid.
11. Psalm 89:3,4
12. Ibid. Ankerberg, p.226.
13. Isaiah 53:8
14. Matthew 1:1
15. ISSUES, What One Rabbi Discovered, vol. 5:1.
16. Ibid p.8.