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New preface to paperback of Messianic Speculation in Israel,  
1958, 1967.



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P R E F A C E

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Printer: Paperback

Messianic Speculation -

This book which I wrote a little more than 30 years ago carries the story of Messianic speculation in Israel through the 17th Century. This appeared a logical place to stop: for the Messianic movements of that century marked the climax of such movements in Jewish history since the rise of Christianity and their ~~most~~ catastrophic denouement.

The Shabbetian Movement, ~~which~~ swept through all the ranks of world Jewry, ~~had~~ excited the highest hopes and ~~had~~ led to a ~~most disastrous~~ spiritual debacle and to a vast national humiliation. It had shaken the Jewish Community to its very depths. The sober leaders of the people, once they had rediscovered their voice and their courage, ~~became~~ determined not to permit such a thing to happen again. They frowned upon all further speculation inasmuch as such speculation always contributed to the rise of Messianic pretenders. Nevertheless speculation persisted, for the Messianic hope itself persisted among the people. It glowed like a flaming star in the darkness of their lives. The tragic conditions of the times, especially as they affected Polish Jewry, lent desperate urgency to that hope. The study of the Zohar, and of Lurianic Kabbala generally, continued unabated. Such study always provided fertile soil for the Messianic complex. This was especially true among those circles which refused to abandon their belief in the Messianic role of Shabbetai Zebi even after his conversion to Islam in 1666 and his death in 1676.

Unlike all ~~previous~~ <sup>other</sup> Messianic movements since the time of Jesus, that of Shabbetai Zebi persisted even after his death, ~~and~~ his followers spread ~~his~~ <sup>Shabbetian</sup> doctrines, or those ~~which they~~ ascribed to him - some of them not ~~free from~~ <sup>without</sup> Trinitarian and Incarnation overtones - far and wide. Foremost among them was Abraham Miguel Cardoso (c. 1630-1706) a Morrano, from Spain or Portugal; Mordecai Mochiah, (c. 1650-1729); Daniel Bonafoux; (second half of 17 c.); Jacob Querido (d. 1690), brother-in-law of Shabbetai Zebi, and his son, Perechiah. In Poland, Hayyim Mal'ak, <sup>and</sup> Löbele Prossnitz (d. 1750) were active Shabbetian propagandists. Among these leading followers some claimed to be Messiahs themselves or the incarnations of Shabbetai Zebi or the Messiah ben Joseph, the forerunner of the Messiah ben David.



When the miracle year, 1666, failed to usher in the anticipated redemption, and, in fact, witnessed the conversion of the proclaimed Messiah to Islam, his baffled but undismayed followers turned to the year 1668 as the true year of deliverance. They saw in the apostasy of the Messiah only the necessary preliminary stage in fulfillment of his mission which was to descend into the lowest depths and bring up the souls lost among the kelipot, the shells of uncleanness - the demonic powers, and by his personal degradation atone for Israel's sins and save the generation from the birth pangs of the Messianic times. Calculations were soon forthcoming pointing to the year 1668 as the true year of redemption. When this year too disappointed the hopes of ~~the~~ believers, other calculations were ~~soon~~ discovered which pointed to the year 1673, 1674 or 1675. It might be noted, in passing, that the year 1674 witnessed a strong Messianic agitation in Morocco where Joseph ben Zur announced himself as the Messiah ben Joseph and prophesied that the actual redemption, through Shabbetai Zebi, would take place in the year 1675. (See Gershon Shalom, Shabbetai Zebi, Tel Aviv, 1957, Vol. II, page 770). Not even the death of Shabbetai Zebi put an end to the speculations. It was held that he would arise again and return to complete his work. In fact it was argued that the whole Jubilee period from 1640 to 1690 was the destined period of redemption. When the Jubilee ended in disappointment, the faithful continued to project <sup>still but</sup> other more remote dates.

One of the most colorful and dynamic of the Shabbetian apostles, whose activities in Amsterdam created a bitter controversy and a rift in that community, was Nehemiah Hiva Hayyun. He had wandered through Palestine, Egypt, Turkey and Italy and was an old man when he finally arrived in Amsterdam in 1713. His reputation as a Shabbetian had preceded him as well as the fact of his excommunication.

In his Kabbalistic commentary on the Pentateuch "Dibre Nehemiah" (Berlin, 1713) Hayyun calculates the time of the redemption. The exile has lasted through the Fifth Millennium (240-1240 C.E.). The first half of the Sixth Millennium (1240-1740 C.E.) also belongs to the exile and is called Night. The Night is divided into three watches during which God mourns over the destruction of His Temple and the dispersion



of His people (Ber. <sup>3a</sup>~~3A~~). This Night which is divided into three watches thus lasts 1500 years. During the first watch the Judgments prevail and the evil Kelipot waxed strong. During the second watch the Kelipot are divided and their strength begins to wane. It is during the third watch (1240-1740 C.E.) <sup>that</sup> the people of Israel will go forth from ~~this~~ exile. "In the morning behold the men were sent forth" (Genesis 44.3) -- that is, redeemed from exile -- (Dibre Nehemiah, p.60 a,b).

In 1699 Judah Hasid of Poland, himself not a Shabbetian, but a mystic and an ascetic, undertook a pilgrimage to Palestine with hundreds of followers who called themselves Hasidim -- pietists, believing that the year of Redemption was at hand. Many who accompanied him perished on the way. He himself died three days after he arrived in Jerusalem and his group of followers was ~~then~~ scattered, many of them returning to Europe, some abandoning their faith altogether. The Shabbetian, Hayyim Mal'ak joined this pilgrimage of Judah Hasid, and for a time remained in Palestine. He believed that the Messiah would come in the year 1706. The reason for it was that Moses kept the Jews in the wilderness for forty years before he led them to the Promised Land, so Shabbetai Zebi would arise from the dead and redeem the people in 1706 - forty years after his first appearance (1666).

The Shabbetai Zebi movement reached its lowest depths in the Messianic adventures of <sup>Jacob</sup>~~David~~ Frank and his followers. They were tainted with grossness and moral corruption, not unlike the Christian sect of the Carpocratians of the 2nd Century which plagued the early Church so grievously. One of their doctrines was that the way to purge one's soul from sin was through physical debauchery. The Frankists, of course, encountered the fierce opposition of the responsible leaders of Jewry, and they became bitter enemies of the rabbis as well as of the Talmud. They called themselves Zoharists out of their devotion to the "Zohar". They succeeded in forcing some of the rabbis of Poland into public disputations (1757; 1759) reminiscent of the disputations into which Spanish Jews were forced



in the 13th and 14th centuries. They even charged their fellow Jews with the dread blood accusation. As a result of their activities the Talmud was ordered publicly burned. The Frankists finally went over to Christianity en masse (1759), but not before they had brought much shame and confusion upon the household of Israel.

The disruptive consequences of the Shabbetai Zebi movement lasted far into the 18th Century. A disastrous controversy, continuing for more than six years, raged between Jacob Emden (1698-1776), doughty champion of anti-Shabbetianism, like his father before him, the Haham Zebi (1658-1718) -- and Jonathan Eibeschuetz (1690-1765), Chief Rabbi of the triple community -- Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck. Eibeschuetz, one of the foremost Rabbinic authorities of his day, was accused by Emden of Shabbetian heresies, and of having inserted the name of Shabbetai Zebi in certain amulets which he had distributed. The controversy soon spread "from Lorraine to Podolia, from the Elbe to the Po" (Graetz) and engulfed many of the foremost Rabbis of Europe. The bitter feud, in which both sides resorted to the most extreme measures and <sup>to</sup> unrestrained and abusive attack succeeded in nothing so much as in undermining, irreparably, the prestige and influence of the Rabbinate with the people. This ruinous controversy in Western Europe and the violent convulsions wrought in the East by the Frankist movement, may be said to have brought to a close the calamitous century-long Shabbetian complex in Jewish history.

Thereafter, while Messianic speculation continued, and occasionally a mystic visionary like Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1747) may have secretly harbored or may have been accused of harboring, Messianic pretensions, no Messianic movement of any consequence centered in a living personality, makes itself manifest among European Jewry.

In Yemen, however, there arose in 1861, a prophet, Judah bar Shalom, who claimed to be the messenger of Elijah, and announced the near advent of the Messiah. He is described by contemporaries as a poor, honest, middle-aged artisan much given to Kabbala and the study of the Zohar, and slightly unbalanced.



Rumors of his miracle-making powers spread far and wide. His Messianic prophecies must have aroused the suspicions of the ruler of the province, for at his command, he was way-laid in the mountain passes back of his village and assassinated. His head was sent to Sana and there exposed on the gates leading to the Jewish quarter.

But some three years later a man arose who claimed to be the resurrected Judah bar Shalom -- and men believed him.

On Passover, in 1867, he announced that at the end of the month he would attack the city of Sana with a large host of soldiers from the tribes of Gad and Reuben, and also with Arab soldiers. The Imam of Yemen threatened to destroy all the Jews. The Jews were thrown into utter despair. They fasted and prayed. The good offices of the ruler of the city of Sana were employed and for a very liberal consideration he interceded for them. They were spared.

The neo-Judah bar Shalom quoted Scripture to prove the authenticity of his mission. Gen. 49.1 reads: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days". ~~the end of days~~. The Gematria of אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֵלֹהֵינוּ is 621, or 1861, the year in which the Messianic vision came to Judah.

Arabia, Egypt and Palestine were profoundly stirred by this Messianic pretender. The repercussions were felt in Turkey, Babylon and Bombay. Jews in Alexandria assembled in the synagogues at midnight, prayed, chanted psalms and diligently studied the Zohar. The Yemenite Jews seem to have been completely bewitched. Those who dared to question Judah's claims were hounded and persecuted and compelled to flee the country. (See Jacob Saphir, -- Eben Saphir, Mainz, 1874, Vol. II. P. 149-152).

While the Hasidic movement of the 18th Century, founded by Israel Baal Shem Tov (c. 1700-1760) was not a by-product of the Messianic fervor of the 17th and early 18th centuries it undoubtedly reflected the mood and temper of that age, so steeped in Kabbalistic lore and so riven by the appalling tragedies of the Chmielnicki massacres.



Hasidism was not centered in Messianism, although the hopes of the coming of the Messiah were as strong among the Hasidim as among all other believing Jews. Occasionally one hears of a Hasidic leader like Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum (1759-1841), in Hungary, who so eagerly and confidently awaited the coming of the Messiah that he kept his holiday garb and his silver cane ready at hand at his bed-side so as not to lose any time when the Shofar of the Messiah would be blown. <sup>9</sup> But not many were so eager or so impatient. Occasionally too, one hears of a Hasidic wonder Rabbi, like Israel Ruzhyner (c. 1797-1850), of Sadagora, founder of the famed Friedmann dynasty, who may have harbored Messianic pretensions ~~but~~ which were of a rather non-active sort. That too is very rare. The Hasidic <sup>Kim</sup> ~~Zadikim~~ did not assume Messianic roles. They greatly loved and revered the Holy Land and many of their leaders settled there. The Baal Shem himself and his great disciple Rabbi Joseph Ha-Kohen (d.c. 1782) set out for Palestine but were forced to turn back. Rabbi Nahman of Brazlav (1777-1811), great grandson of the Baal Shem, lived for a time in Palestine. In 1777 a group of some three hundred Hasidim settled in Palestine under the leadership of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk.

Zadikim

We do not find, however, any extensive speculation as to the actual time of the advent of the Messiah in Hasidic literature, though much space, of course, is devoted to the concepts of Messiah and Redemption. A more spiritual and less activist approach to the subject is in evidence. The Baal Shem himself wrote of an encounter which he had with the Messiah in a vision. When he questioned him as to the time of his appearance on earth, the Messiah replied:

"It shall be a sign unto you when your doctrine shall become known and the fountains of your wisdom shall be poured forth; when all other men shall have the power of performing the same mysteries as yourself, then shall disappear all the hosts of impurity and the time of great favor and salvation shall arrive."



In a similar vein did Rabbi Hayyim of Czernowitz interpret the Messianic moment in history:

"After all the evil in the world shall have been overcome and goodness and holiness shall have ascended to power in the highest degree, and all the sparks and souls which are held captive in the Kelipot shall have been purified and released, then will our righteous Messiah most certainly come and set us free; for this is the essence of the redemption. When the good will be redeemed from the evil and all the souls and holy sparks will go forth purified from the exile of the Kelipot, then *their* ~~they~~ physical bodies too will go forth and will be redeemed in a perfect redemption after which there will never again be any exile."

(*"Be'er May'im Hayyim, Par. Toledot*) This is <sup>a</sup> ~~an old~~ recurrent theme in Hasidic literature.

In the closing half of the 18th and in the 19th centuries ~~The~~ Messianic movement in Judaism ceased to be a compelling historic actuality. The dogma, of course, remained. It was never rejected but progressively it receded into the background.

The consequences of attempting to concretize the Messianic idea had proved disastrous. It had lead to disillusionment, apostasy, moral chaos and danger. It had disrupted the peace of many communities.

But now new winds had begun to blow through the Jewish world. In Western Europe the age of Mendelssohn and of the Haskala was dawning. The Middle Ages were coming to a close. A new age was soon to be born. Secular studies would before long force the mystic lore of the Kabbalist and all Messianic romancing into the dim background. The French Revolution and the armies of Napoleon would soon batter down the ghetto walls and Jewish life would begin to move rapidly



into the mainstream of European life and culture.

Even in the East, where Medievalism would hold sway longer, and social and political emancipation would lag behind, a recoil from the Kabbalistic Messianic obsession was inevitable. The responsible leaders of Jewry, both lay and rabbinical, came to realize the dangers which threatened the integrity of their communal life and their very faith. They, accordingly, resorted to a number of drastic disciplinary measures, including formal ex-communication. They succeeded finally in checking the license of the Messianic adventurers and the mass hysteria which resulted from their activities. The study of Lurianic Kabbala was prohibited by the Council of the communities of Southern Poland which met in Brody in 1756 to all men under 40, and the study of the Zohar and the works of Cordevero to men under 30, and then only if the student had first made himself fully proficient in Talmudic studies.

This recalls similar though somewhat less drastic action which was taken by the leaders of Spanish Jewry in the 11th Century, when they found themselves confronted with situations similar, in many ways, to those of Polish Jewry in the 18th Century.

In the 19th Century there were certain years which were hopefully looked forward to as Messianic years by many for whom the dogma had not lost its force.

The year 1840 was counted on by many as the Messianic year. The deliverance of the Jews of Damascus, who were threatened by a blood accusation, was looked upon as the beginning of the Redemption. The Zohar names 1840 as one of the Messianic years. (See p. 91). A Gematria for the year is found in the SONG OF SONGS (2.12): "The time of singing is come and the voice of the turtle-dove 255 17 is heard in our land." The numerical value of 255 is 5600 or 1840.

Judah Alkalai (1788-1878), the precursor of political Zionism, whose writings and activities may be said to represent the transition from the purely religious Messianic hope of Restoration to a practical program of action on the part of the people themselves to rebuild Zion, regarded the year 1840 as the year of the Messiah b. Joseph, soon to be followed by the Messiah b. David. (See Minhag



Yehudah, Vienna, 1843.)

The year 1860 was another such year. Many Jews neglected their business activities in confident anticipation of the advent of the Messiah. The letters of the Hebrew word meaning "Crown" 4533 add up to 1860.

Ahad Ha-Am records that among the Hasidim of Sadagora -- his own father was a Sadagora Hasid -- the year 1866 was looked to as the Messianic year. They had for their authority their Rabbi who based his calculation on the numerical value of the initials as well as of the final letters of the Biblical phrase (Lev. 16.30).

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"For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you, from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord". ("Reshumot"-VI p.553).

The Zionist movement, secular and political in the main though it was, nevertheless attracted many who saw in it the preparatory stage for the Messianic Ingathering and Restoration. On the other hand it was attacked by some orthodox religionists as an unwarranted act of "crowding the End" -- and as an attempt to accomplish with human hands that which could only be achieved by divine intervention.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 has been viewed by many as Messianic fulfillment -- by others only as a partial fulfillment. The complete Messianic hope is the spiritual redemption of the whole of mankind, <sup>when</sup> the world will be perfected in justice, brotherhood and peace under the kingdom of the Almighty -- "when the Lord shall be One, and His name shall be One".

The Messianic hope sustained the Jewish people through centuries of darkness and tragedy, of homelessness and persecution. In its prophetic expression as the beckoning vision of a redeemed humanity, it continues to guide, inspire and sustain men of good-will everywhere.

~~Date?~~  
August 15-1958





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March 20, 1967

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver  
The Temple  
University Circle at Silver Park  
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Dear Rabbi Silver:

Thank you for your letter of March 17. Inasmuch as A HISTORY OF THE MESSIANIC SPECULATION IN ISRAEL is a reprint, Beacon has only the MS for the preface to the paperback edition. I am enclosing this MS with my letter.

Very truly yours,

*John R. Likins*  
John R. Likins

