Jewish Messianic Thoughts in an Age of Despair

Belief in the coming of a Messiah poses a genuine dilemma. From a Jewish perspective, the historical record is overwhelmingly against it. If, despite all the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, no legitimate Messiah has come forward, has the belief not been shown to be groundless? Yet for all the problems associated with messianism, the historical record also shows that it is an idea with enormous staying power. The prayer book mentions it on page after page. The great Jewish philosophers all wrote about it. Secular thinkers in the twentieth century returned to it and reformulated it. And victims of the Holocaust invoked it in the last few minutes of their life. This book examines the staying power of messianism and formulates it in a way that retains its redemptive force without succumbing to mythology.

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To the memory of Gail Paula Seeskin
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Abbreviations

For full information, see Bibliography.

C1 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

C2 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*

C3 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

CH Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”

DF Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*

EM Hermann Cohen, *Ethics of Maimonides*

G Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

GP Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*

MIJ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*

MT Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*

MW Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*

PI Steven S. Schwarzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal,*

PP Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*

PR Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*

R Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*

RH Hegel, *Reason in History*

RR Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*

SR Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*