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978-1-107-01792-4 - Jewish Messianic Thoughts in an Age of Despair

Kenneth Seeskin

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## 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.

Kenneth Seeskin received his BA from Northwestern in 1968 and his PhD from Yale in 1972. He joined the faculty of Northwestern in 1972 and has taught there ever since. He is the author of seven books and numerous articles; editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*; and coeditor of *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Culture, and Religion*. In 2001, he won the Koret Jewish Book Award for *Searching for a Distant God*, and in 2011, the National Jewish Book Award for *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Culture, and Religion*. In 2009, Seeskin was named Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Professor of Jewish Civilization.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA  
[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107017924](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107017924)

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First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Seeskin, Kenneth, 1947–

Jewish messianic thoughts in an age of despair / Kenneth Seeskin.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01792-4

1. Messiah – Judaism. 2. Redemption – Judaism. 3. Despair – Religious aspects – Judaism. I. Title.

BM615.S395 2012

296.3'36-dc23 2011030485

ISBN 978-1-107-01792-4 Hardback

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*To the memory of Gail Paula Seeskin*

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## Abbreviations

For full information, see Bibliography.

<i>C1</i>	Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<i>C2</i>	Kant, <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
<i>C3</i>	Kant, <i>Critique of the Power of Judgment</i>
<i>CH</i>	Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”
<i>DF</i>	Emmanuel Levinas, <i>Difficult Freedom</i>
<i>EM</i>	Hermann Cohen, <i>Ethics of Maimonides</i>
<i>G</i>	Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<i>GP</i>	Maimonides, <i>Guide of the Perplexed</i>
<i>MIJ</i>	Gershom Scholem, <i>The Messianic Idea in Judaism</i>
<i>MT</i>	Maimonides, <i>Mishneh Torah</i>
<i>MW</i>	Emil Fackenheim, <i>To Mend the World</i>
<i>PI</i>	Steven S. Schwarzschild, <i>The Pursuit of the Ideal</i> ,
<i>PP</i>	Kant, <i>Perpetual Peace and Other Essays</i>
<i>PR</i>	Hegel, <i>The Philosophy of Right</i>
<i>R</i>	Kant, <i>Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason</i>
<i>RH</i>	Hegel, <i>Reason in History</i>
<i>RR</i>	Hermann Cohen, <i>Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism</i>
<i>SR</i>	Franz Rosenzweig, <i>The Star of Redemption</i>

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