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When is the Messiah Coming?

["Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Balak 5769 – translated by R. Blumberg]

If someone tells me that the Messiah is coming on a particular day, I won't believe him. Rather, today, like every other day, I will wait for him, because, "I firmly believe in the coming of the Messiah, and although he may tarry, I daily wait for his coming" (Number 12 of Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith).

And if today passes without his coming, I will then know that this was not the day, and I will wait for him tomorrow, and every other day. The Rabbis said, "Come and listen: If someone says, 'I hereby declare myself a Nazirite on the day that the son of David arrives,' he is then allowed to drink wine on Shabbat and festivals, and he is forbidden to drink wine on weekdays" (Eruvin 43a-b; Rambam, Hilchot Nezirut 4:11).

If by ten years from now, the Messiah has not yet arrived, I will continue to put on tefillin, to eat kosher food and to keep the Sabbath. I will continue to wait for his arrival, and I won't engage in calculations. "Believing in the Messiah means believing and saying that he is going to come, and not thinking that he is going to delay. 'If he delays, wait for him' (Habakuk 2:3). One should not set a time for him to arrive nor seek logical Biblical proofs of when that will occur. The Rabbis said, 'blast the spirit of those who calculate the end.'" (Sanhedrin 92b, Rambam's introduction to Perek Chelek, 12th foundation).

And if in thirty years he has not yet arrived, I will continue to send my children to religious elementary schools, and I will still go to services and learn Torah. I will continue to wait, with absolute faith, for “Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Blast the bones of those who calculate the end, for they would say: ‘Since that deadline has passed without the Messiah coming, he is not going to come any more.’ Rather, we must wait for him, as it says, ‘If he tarries, wait for him.’ Now one might ask, ‘We are waiting for him, but is G-d not waiting for him?’ It therefore says, ‘And therefore will the L-rd wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have compassion upon you’ (Yeshayahu 30:18). Now, since we are waiting and He is waiting, what is holding it up? Strict Justice is holding it up. Yet since it is being held up, why should we wait? To receive reward, as it says, ‘Happy are all those who wait for him’ (ibid.)” (Sanhedrin 97b).

And if by eighty years from now the Messiah is not yet here, I will continue to build Eretz Yisrael, the State of Israel, the army of Israel, and I will know that there is much more I must do for all these, and then the Messiah will come. “A king once got angry at his sheep, and he dismantled the pen and removed the sheep and the shepherd. Sometime later he restored the sheep and rebuilt the pen, but he did nothing regarding the shepherd. The shepherd said, ‘The sheep are restored and the pen is rebuilt, but I have not been recalled.’ The same applies in our case. It says, ‘For G-d will save Zion and build the cities of Judah, and they shall abide there and have it in possession. The seed also of His servants shall inherit it, and they that love His name shall dwell therein’ (Tehillim 69:36-37). Surely the pen is rebuilt and the flocks are back, but the shepherd (David) has not been recalled. Tehillim therefore continues, ‘[A Psalm] of David; to make memorial. O G-d, to deliver me’ (70:1).” (Rashi, ad. loc.). The Messiah comes at the end.

And if in 130 years he has not yet arrived, I will continue to arouse the Jews to move quickly to Israel. And if they say, “We are waiting for the Messiah, and then we will

move to Jerusalem,” I will answer, “You sin and make others sin out of malice, and you do enormous damage, for in the meantime Jews assimilate or are murdered. For ‘it won’t be time for the Messiah’s arrival until the Jews pine for him and say, ‘He’s near!’ or ‘he’s far!’ (Rambam’s Igerot Kiddush Hashem, Mossad HaRav Kook 66-67). We wait for the Messiah every day, so come today!”

And if he has not yet arrived by 230 years from now (the Hebrew year 5999), they will say to me, “Be ready for the Messiah’s arrival, for he will come in the year 6000, as our Sages said, ‘The world shall last for six thousand years, consisting of two thousand years of chaos, two thousand years of Torah and two thousand years of the Messiah’ (Sanhedrin 97a-b), and unfortunately the results were what they were.” Then I will answer them, ‘I am preparing myself for the Messiah’s arrival now, and not in the year 6000. I recall what happened in the Hebrew date of 5600 (called “tav resh”, i.e., 1840) when rumors spread throughout the Jewish People that the Messiah was coming, based on the verse, “The sound of the dove [tor – tav-vav-resh] is heard in our land” (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:12). At that time, the rabbi of the Warsaw Jewish Community, Rabbi Yaakov Gezundheit, ascended the dais on Rosh Hashanah with a sefer Torah in his hands, and he swore that the Messiah would not come that year. Apparently he feared that people would once more go crazy as they had in 1648 when it was prophesied that the Messiah would come. What followed instead were the pogroms of the wicked Bogdan Chmielnicki in 1648 and 1649, and the episode of Shabtai Zvi, who filled the breach and gained many adherents. You will certainly ask, “And what would the rabbi have done had the Messiah indeed arrived that year?” Have no fear! Questions of that sort our Rabbis know how to answer... If the Messiah does not come by 6001, I will not despair. I will remember that Rambam did not rule that 6000 is the deadline for the Messiah’s arrival (Hilchot Melachim 12:2). Perhaps he holds that that source is just a parable or the opinion of only one rabbi, and not the majority view, and I will continue to wait for the Messiah every day.

And if the Messiah has not yet arrived by 6100, that will not wear me down. Rather, I will devote all my physical and mental energies to serving G-d, and that is what is

most important. Rambam wrote, "One should not dwell too much on midrashim dealing with the Messiah. One should not treat them as the essence, for they lead neither to increased love or fear of G-d. Neither should one calculate the end of days. Our Sages said, 'Blast the minds of those who calculate the end.' Rather, one should wait and believe in the principle of there being a Messiah" (Rambam, Melachim 12:2). "I daily wait for his coming."

And if by 6200 the Messiah has not yet arrived, I will continue to keep Torah and mitzvoth, to love the people of Israel and the State of Israel, to build a family and to go to the army. If I have waited so long for the Messiah, I will continue to wait daily for his arrival.

And when he finally comes, in the year 6999... I will greet him with tears, and I will recite a blessing, "Blessed be G-d, who bestowed His glory on flesh and blood. Blessed be He who bestowed His glory on those who fear Him, blessed is the Wise Knower of Secrets, blessed be He who has sustained us and brought us to this time." And I will immediately set out for my army unit, without waiting for the orders (see Rambam, *ibid.*, 11:4).

At last! The Messiah's arrival! We waited so long! Yet it actually feels like a short time. So much do I crave his coming that the wait feels like just a few days. I can hear the sound of the great Shofar. I see Elijah the Prophet. He will say, "Thank you for the generations you waited daily. His arrival is thanks to you." "Happy are all those who wait for him."



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