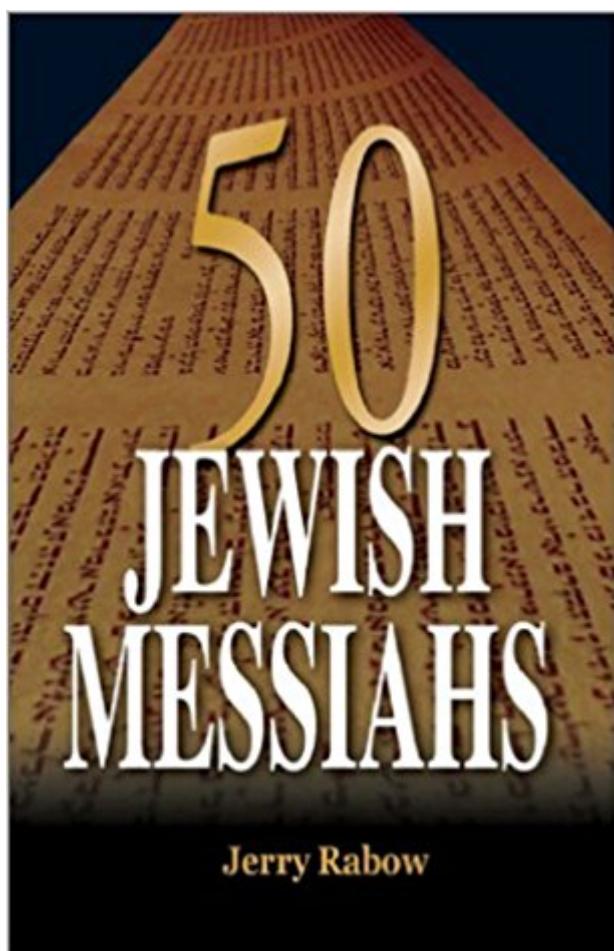


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50 Jewish Messiahs: The Untold Life Stories Of 50 Jewish Messiahs Since Jesus And How They Changed The Jewish, Christian, And Muslim Worlds



Synopsis

It is a little known fact that there have been more than fifty prominent Jewish Messiahs. These characters, though unrenowned today, inspired messianic fervour that at times seized the whole Jewish, Christian, Muslim and even secular worlds. The stories of these fifty Messiahs, both male and female, are unknown -- suppressed by Jewish religious authorities or ignored by historians of all religions. Until now. In this book, these Jewish Messiahs are remembered, and now their forgotten stories -- whether humorous, bizarre, tragic or solemn -- are finally told. The Messiah who killed the Pope; The Messiah who was saved from the Inquisition when the Pope hid him in the Vatican; The Messiah who demanded that his head be cut off in order to prove his immortality The Messiah who defied the Holy Roman Emperor; The 17th century Messiah whose followers continued their secret society into the 20th century. And to contemporary times and the story of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, and how he inspired a passionate and devoted following. Above all, Fifty Jewish Messiahs examines humanity, not divinity, and history rather than theology. Taken together, these intriguing stories paint a vivid portrait of the universal and timeless human need for optimism, and hope in a better future.

Book Information

Hardcover: 216 pages

Publisher: Gefen Publishing House; First Edition edition (October 1, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9652292885

ISBN-13: 978-9652292889

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.7 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #553,986 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #143 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Messianic Judaism #654 in Books > History > World > Religious > Judaism #1901 in Books > History > World > Jewish

Customer Reviews

A beautifully told series of stories, which traces a major mythic thread in the tapestry of Judaism.

--Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., author *My Grandfather's Blessings* An exciting spiritual adventure...It is a subject matter particularly pertinent in our times of religious ferment. --Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, author *For Those Who Can't Believe and Finding Each Other in Judaism* As well

as being serious Jewish History, this book is rollicking with fun. --Judy Carr, The Jewish Post & Opinion

Jerry Rabow, a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, practiced law for 35 years in Los Angeles, where he lectured and wrote extensively on estate planning and probate. He has been active for thirty years in various lay leadership positions with Valley Beth Shalom Synagogue in Encino, California. Jerry is the author of a nationally distributed booklet, Guide to Jewish Mourning and Condolence; and currently attends lectures and classes in Judaica at UCLA and the University of Judaism. His hobbies include Jewish papercutting and digital photography.

This is an amazing quick read for a book on somewhat obscure points of Jewish religion and history. While this is not as rigorous as say a Gershom Sholem treatise of an academic monograph, it is surprisingly well-documented for a more or less breezily paced introduction to Jewish Messianism. Ranging from Bar Kokhba to Chabad, Rabow shows the ups and downs of Jewish messianism in a way that is sometimes humorous, often insightful, and very entertaining. What to know the origins of the myth that Native Americans are the lost tribe of Israel? Well, it has to do with Cromwell and a Rabbi interpreting Messianic history. What does Messianism have to do with converting to Islam? Why where conversos often awaiting the lost tribe of Israel to defeat the Muslim empires? Why did the Pope try to support a Jewish messiah claimant? Which messiah figure is said to have killed a Pope? These stories build up in the book. Yet there is lots to learn about about the evolution of Jewish religion, and comparative belief systems. From Rabow's work, we can see that the Donmeh practiced rituals that resembled the Christian Brethren of the Free Spirit. We can learn that occultation and reincarnation played a strong role in Jewish messianic belief, the former in ways that seemed to mirror Shia Islam. One can also see why Maimonides warned against careless belief in messianic claimants as these stories in tragedy or fraud (and often both), over and over again. An excellent introduction to the complications and history of Jewish eschatological beliefs, both in sophisticated and folk theological forms.

As impartial and comprehensive analysis of the subject as one could hope for. Presents an honest mix of historic fact, legend, and reasonable analysis. Impossible to avoid any bias at all in such a discussion, but author does not allow his perception that the biblical promise of the Messiah is a "myth" to sway his analysis (or even respectful reverence for some figures) and he concludes that even as a myth, this longing for the Messiah has been a sustaining influence (contrasting with all

other peoples) over two thousand years of suffering and disappointment.

Surprises me on how many Jews attempt to replace Christ. As they are all false, they violate their 10 commandments, though Christ never did.

More than I expected. Great research and an easy read. I highly recommend this book to anyone searching for truth.

Presenting the author of the Shulchan Aruch and the Arizal not to mention the Baal Shem Tov and other Torah giants alongside and insinuating their the same as the "false messiahs" that the book paints with a broad brush, is not only dishonest, but essentially paramount to heresy.

This is an instructive popular work that tells the story of fifty different Jewish Messiahs. In doing so it shows how the Messianic idea has caused great havoc and suffering in Jewish history. The climax of this is of course Shabbtai Zvi and the untold suffering his deception and betrayal cost the Jewish people.

Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), who understood Judaism better than anyone, explains in his Code of Jewish Laws, Laws of Kings 11:3 that the messiah is not a miraculous figure: "Do not think that the messianic king must perform miracles and wonders, bring new things into being, revive the dead, or perform similar feats as foolish people believe." He continues in 12:1, "Do not think that in the messianic age, things will be different, or the laws of nature will change. Rather, the world will continue in familiar ways." Thus if people listen to Maimonides, they will not cry out or even pray for the messiah in times of trouble. Sensible people would realize that their future lies in their own hands, not in some miracle or outsider. And they would not wait for difficulty times before they act. But the multitude of the people are, unfortunately, not sensible, especially in stressful times. Instead of acting and resolving their difficulties, they rely on prayer, certain that if they pray enough, God will send them a messiah. And so, some sixty years after the destruction of the Temple, in 132 CE, when the Jews were suffering because of the horrid six decade persecutions of the Romans, many Jews, including the famous Rabbi Akiva, decided to rebel against the Romans. Rabbi Akiva assured the people that their military leader, Bar Kokhba, was the long awaited messiah who would deliver them. Rabow tells about the failure of this first messiah and the tens of thousands of people who died relying on his false dream. He also tells of some four dozen other messiahs that followed

because the people did not learn from this first experience. The stories that Rabow relates are real history, tragic and pathetic periods when people relied on the supernatural instead of reality. Beside Bar Kokhba, the most famous messiah was Shabbatai Zevi who persuaded millions, including many rabbis, to believe in him, sell their property for cheap prices, and be ready to leave with him to live in peace in Israel. Shabbatai Zevi failed and was forced to convert to Islam in 1666, but many of his followers were convinced that it was a fake conversion and he would fulfill his promise. When he died, many thought he would return from the grave. Today, many Chabad Chassidim are similarly convinced that Chabad's last rabbi, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) is the messiah and, although dead, will return and bring them salvation. Rabow's stories are interesting and well-written. They are important because they recall a tragic segment of Jewish history that should prompt people, as Maimonides tried to do, to assume their human responsibilities to improve themselves and society and thereby produce a better world.

This is a time when understanding the deep beliefs of fanatics and fundamentals is more important than ever. Jerry Rabow's wonderful account of 50 characters held by their followers as messiahs is perfectly timed and beautifully written. Each story is rich with history, humor, and well-researched detail. "Fifty Jewish Messiahs" is an entertaining exploration of the tradition of making messiahs that makes it clear that dearly-held beliefs can lead to everything from trite silliness to stupendous tragedy.

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