

THE IDEA OF THE MESSIAH IN THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS HOBBS

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Hobbes elaborates a conception of the Messiah in his political treatises that is unusual because it seems to combine Jewish and Christian elements. He asserts that Jesus is the Messiah in the sense of being the earthly king of the Jews as well as the Son of God and king of heaven. To clarify Hobbes's position and to highlight its strangeness, it is compared with the views of Moses Maimonides and Blaise Pascal. Hobbes emerges from this comparison as a spokesman for a kind of "Jewish Christianity," whose purpose is not to return to the early Jewish sects that embraced Jesus as a new Moses but to humanize the Messiah and to redefine Christianity for a new age of secular happiness. Hobbes thereby inaugurates a new kind of biblical criticism which the Deists of the enlightenment era developed and which continues today.

Who and what is the Messiah? This question has preoccupied Jews and Christians for centuries. For the Jews of the Old Testament, the idea of the Messiah was hardly a settled doctrine or fixed belief. For many it was a vague promise of an ideal king, like King David, who would save the Jewish nation from its enemies; while for others it included prophetic visions of a new age of peace and harmony in which the natural order would be transformed. For Jews of later periods, the Messiah and messianism were connected with a variety of phenomena, such as the political rebellion against Roman domination led by Bar Kokhba in the second century A.D., or the bizarre cult movements of Sabbatai Zevi in the seventeenth century, or with modern Zionism and the restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

The question of who and what is the Messiah was, of course, the central issue that separated (and still separates) Jews from Christians. When Jesus Christ appeared, he claimed to fulfill the promise of the Old Testament about the Messiah but in a new and unheard of way, as the Son of God who would be the savior and redeemer of all mankind. Christians would later dispute the meaning of the messianic age in various millennialist movements seeking to establish the Kingdom of God and in controversies about the Trinity and the Second Coming. Such controversies among and between Jews and Christians are

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reminders that the Judaeo-Christian tradition has at its core a notion of redemption that involves or requires the figure of a messiah.

When the rational mind confronts these claims and controversies, it cannot fail to be astonished. Are these ideas simply beyond reason, or can they be comprehended and explained rationally in some fashion? The degree to which messianic claims can be clearly articulated and rationally explained is an issue of utmost difficulty for theologians, philosophers, and scientists. A spectrum of views exists, ranging from those who see the Messiah in fairly rational terms — as an earthly king and warrior, a mortal man whose actions are heroic but not supernatural — to those who see the Messiah in mystical fashion — as a divine being in human form, transcending mortality and acting in supernatural ways that have not merely human but cosmic significance. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this spectrum of views, focusing primarily on the curious and generally misunderstood view of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and clarifying his idea of the Messiah by way of comparison with the great Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) and with one of Hobbes's contemporaries, the great mathematician and Christian theologian Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). The thesis presented here is that Hobbes's position is an unusual kind of "Jewish Christianity" — a half-way house, as it were, between the ultra-rationalist view of Maimonides and the mystical view of Pascal — and that Hobbes adopted his position primarily for political reasons.

Hobbes's Curious View of the Messiah

Hobbes jumps into the thick of things with his claims about the Messiah by asserting repeatedly in all of his political treatises that the whole of the Christian faith can be reduced to one article, that "Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the Christ." Now, in one sense, what Hobbes says is non-controversial for his Christian audience. For, as he makes clear, what he has uttered is a tautology: the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah literally means that he "is God's anointed; for that is signified by the word Christ" (*Elements of Law*, II, 6.6). On the simplest level, in other words, all Hobbes is doing is asserting that "messiah" and "christ" mean the same thing — the anointed one or the Lord's anointed.

This assertion is true as it stands; and although Hobbes makes it seem obvious, the etymologies of these words deserve a bit more attention than he gives to them. What he might have said is that in a variety of places in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *mashiah* — anointed — is used to describe people who are specially designated by God for important tasks of leadership: the "anointed priests" in *Leviticus* who perform ritual sacrifice and atonement; the kings

anointed by Samuel, such as Saul and David, who were coronated or consecrated by pouring oil on their heads and then called the "Lord's anointed"; and even Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, the only non-Jew in the Hebrew Bible referred to as *mashiah* for his role in returning the Israelites from exile and captivity in Babylon.¹ When the Old Testament was translated into Greek by Jewish scholars (the Septuagint) and later when the New Testament was written in Greek by the Evangelists, the specific Hebrew word *mashiah* was transliterated phonetically into Greek as *messias* (and eventually into Latin as *messias* and into English as *messiah*).² In addition to transliterating, the writers of the Gospels found a word to translate the Hebrew *mashiah* into Greek — namely, *christos*, which means "anointed" in Greek (from the verb *chrío*, to pour or rub with oil).³ So, when Hobbes asserts that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, he has simply uttered a tautology which few readers could find objectionable (even if they were unaware of the precise etymologies).

Nor would most readers object to the assertion that this statement is the central article of the Christian faith. After all, Christianity is the faith in Jesus Christ — faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one of the Lord. Hobbes emphasizes this point precisely because it should be non-controversial: it is a core doctrine which all Christian denominations can accept. Hobbes's intention is to end the doctrinal disputes among Christians by distinguishing necessary from unnecessary beliefs and reducing the beliefs necessary for salvation to the simplest basis for achieving consensus — the belief in Jesus's messiahship and a few direct inferences from this fact. Although Hobbes is aware that some may object to calling this the *only* belief necessary for salvation (see *De Cive*, 18.6,n), there is nothing unusual in the centrality Hobbes assigns to the belief in Jesus as the Messiah or Christ.

The difficulties arise when we inquire into the precise definition and mission that Hobbes assigns to Jesus the Messiah and Christ. For Hobbes seems to combine in the person and mission of Jesus both the Jewish idea of the Messiah — an earthly king of the Jews — and the Christian notion of the Messiah — the son of God and savior of all mankind. Let us examine several textual references from the three political treatises to see in detail the difficulty of Hobbes's position.

First, in the *Elements of Law*, Hobbes says the following (continuing the quote above): "that Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the Christ; which proposition is explicated in sundry sorts, but still the same in effect; as, that he is God's anointed; for that is signified by the word Christ: that he was the true and lawful king of Israel, the son of David, the Savior of the world, the redeemer of Israel, the salvation of God, he that should come into the world, the son of God" (II, 6.6). This statement is typical of Hobbes in explaining the idea of Jesus as

Messiah because it combines Jewish and Christian conceptions: it includes both titles for Jesus, king of Israel and Son of God.

Not only does Hobbes attempt to blur the distinction between the two titles or missions; he provides corroborating evidence in the *Elements* for both views. Thus, in some places, Hobbes comes close to endorsing the shocking view that Jesus really was the king of the Jews as many claimed: "This was the title of his cross, *Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews*; this was the occasion of the crown of thorns...this was the title, by which our Savior...bade them say, *The Lord hath need*; and by this title he purged the temple of the profane market kept there. Nor did the apostles themselves believe any more than that *Jesus was the Messiah*, nor understand so much; for they understood the Messiah to be no more than a temporal king, till after our Savior's resurrection" (II, 6.7, Hobbes's emphasis). Here Hobbes blends together the views of Jesus's detractors, with Jesus's own self-understanding of some of his dramatic actions (such as, expelling the money-changers from the temple), and even with the views of the apostles up to the time of the resurrection — that Jesus was an earthly king of the Jews.

But Hobbes also includes passages in the *Elements* emphasizing the more orthodox Christian view of Jesus as the Son of God and king of heaven. He quotes many passages from John's Gospel, such as 20:31, "'these things are written, that ye might believe, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God'" (II, 6.7). He acknowledges the mission of the apostles in spreading the doctrine of the Incarnation — the "mystery of Christ come in the flesh, that is to say, to unfold unto them at large the office of the Messiah" (II, 7.8). On balance, it appears that the *Elements* presents as many passages implying that Jesus is the king of the Jews or a ruler like Moses as it presents passages implying he is the Son of God who sought no temporal power. Hobbes simply leaves the issue unresolved, as in statements like, "Our Savior Christ, as he was the rightful king of the Jews in particular, as well as the king of the kingdom of Heaven, in the ordaining of magistrates, received that form of policy which was used by Moses" (II, 7.4). In other words, Jesus is Moses incarnate as well as God incarnate.

Turning to *De Cive*, we find a similar pattern, with perhaps a shade more emphasis on Jesus as temporal king and a diminution of Trinitarian doctrine about Jesus as co-equal Son of the Father. Here is a typical statement:

In the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Jesus our Savior, a Galilean, began to preach;...declaring to the people of the Jews, that the kingdom of God expected by them was now come, and that he himself was a *king*, that is to say, the Christ;...this man, hated of the Pharisees,...[and] accused of unlawful seeking for the kingdom, and

crucified; was the true *Christ* and *king* promised by God (17.3, Hobbes's emphasis).

In accordance with this emphasis on Christ as the expected king of the Jews, Hobbes modifies Trinitarian doctrine — the Christian doctrine that God is Three in One, three co-equal persons in one being (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). Hobbes states that "though Christ were equal to his Father according to his nature, yet was inferior according to the right of the kingdom. For this office, to speak properly, was not that of a king, but of a viceroy; such as Moses's government was; for the kingdom was not his but his Father's" (17.4). This statement seems to be a diminution of Christ's status within the Trinity of three co-equal persons in God. Christ is brought down a notch, so to speak, and made comparable to Moses because Christ's kingdom was more earthly than heavenly.

The shocking character of this position is dulled by the fact that Hobbes continues to cite numerous New Testament passages according to which Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (18.5, 18.6, 18.10). Yet, carefully placed between these citations are statements or insinuations to the contrary: that Jesus understood himself to be the very king of the Jews that his detractors and enemies said or claimed he was when they mocked and scorned and crucified him. For example, when summarizing Matthew's Gospel in seemingly innocuous fashion, Hobbes says: "St. Matthew, chap. i., beginning at his genealogy, shows that Jesus was of the lineage of David, born of a virgin: chap. ii., that he was adored by the wise men as king of the Jews;...that he was saluted with the title of king, when he entered into Jerusalem: chaps. xxii-xxv., that he showed in parables what manner of kingdom his should be: chaps. xxvi., xxvii., that he was taken and accused for this reason, *because he said he was a king*; and that a title was written on his cross, 'this is Jesus the king of the Jews'" (18.6, emphasis added). What is shocking about his statement is that Hobbes cites the chapters of Matthew's Gospel where the accusation that Jesus is king of the Jews is discussed; yet, in none of these chapters does Jesus say he was a king. The claim is either posed as a question by Pilate which Jesus refuses to answer, or it is made as a form of mockery by enemies and detractors.⁴ Yet, Hobbes takes the title seriously and incorporates it into his interpretation of Jesus's messiahship.

In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes asserts even more boldly the idea that Jesus is the king of the Jews and, correspondingly, further downplays Jesus's divine nature. Thus, in discussing the marks which distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet, Hobbes states that "in the New Testament there was but one only mark; and that was the preaching of this doctrine, *that Jesus is the Christ*, that is, the king of the Jews, promised in the Old Testament" (ch. 36, p. 316, Hobbes's emphasis).

And in his chapter on the beliefs necessary for attaining salvation, Hobbes says: "The only article of faith, which the Scripture maketh simply necessary to salvation, is this, that *JESUS IS THE CHRIST*. By the name of Christ is understood the king, which God had before promised by the prophets of the Old Testament, to send into the world, to reign (over the Jews, and over such of other nations as should believe in him)" (ch. 43, p. 428, Hobbes's capitalization). As justification, Hobbes cites Matthew's Gospel again, which he summarizes as follows:

The sum of St. Matthew's Gospel is this, that Jesus was of the stock of David, born of a Virgin; which are marks of the true Christ: that the Magi came to worship him as king of the Jews;...*that he preached by himself and his apostles that he was that king;... that he was taken, accused, and put to death, for saying he was king: that the cause of his condemnation written on the cross was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS*. All which tend to no other end than this, that men should believe that Jesus is the Christ (ch. 43, p. 429, Hobbes's capitalization; my emphasis added).

These statements make sufficiently clear that *Leviathan* is the boldest of Hobbes's treatises in equating Jesus with the king of the Jews.

Yet, this teaching is combined with a very complicated view of Jesus's mission as king of the Jews. For Hobbes never denies that Jesus is also the Son of God; and he insists that "Christ's kingdom is not of this world" (ch. 41, p. 353). So, we have the paradox that Jesus is both the king of the Jews and the Son of God, who shall rule over a kingdom that is both earthly and not of this world, a kingdom that includes both Jews in particular as well as the "elect" of all mankind.

Hobbes attempts to resolve this paradox with an interpretation of the Bible which makes the unfolding drama of the Kingdom of God — its ups and downs, as it were — the dominant theme (ch. 33, p. 283). According to this interpretation, the first Kingdom of God existed from the time of Abraham to Moses and continued through the Judges. This period, especially the Mosaic rule, was the high-point of the Old Testament. For at that time, "God alone was king"; that is to say, no man claimed to be a king but only a mediator or viceroy for God and a representative of the people (ch. 35, p. 299). Moses's rule and after him that of the high-priests were the models of a "sacerdotal kingdom" in which sovereignty was unified (ch. 40, pp. 343-344). Thereafter, it was downhill for the Jews. Under the prophet Samuel, the Jews rejected God as king and made Saul, a mere man, a king, which was an act of rebellion against God. Yet, all of the prophets, from Samuel to Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Micah spoke against kingship, believing that "the Lord

shall reign over them" (Micah, 4:7; quoted ch. 35, p. 300) — which Hobbes takes to mean a restoration of God's kingship and the end of human kingship. The longing for the Messiah among the Jews was precisely the longing for such a restoration. His task would be to restore the original Kingdom of God under Moses, which had been interrupted by Saul and the whole line of kings after him and remained in abeyance even after the Babylonian Exile when kingship ceased and foreign domination ensued until the time of Christ (ch. 40, p. 351).

Here is where Hobbes's curious view of Jesus fits in. Jesus was the Messiah or Christ because he came to restore the original Kingdom of God that existed at the time of Moses. Jesus was thus the earthly King of the Jews promised by the Old Testament prophets. Even though many of the Jews themselves rejected Jesus's claim, the apostles did not; and they began Christianity by worshipping Jesus as the Jewish king, until his resurrection (ch. 35, p. 300). Thus, Jesus was accurately described as the king of the Jews when crucified, but was recognized as the Son of God after he rose from the dead. He will restore the Kingdom of God but not until his Second Coming, after the general resurrection of the dead and the last judgement.

Hence, Jesus's kingdom is "not of this world" until the last judgement, at which time Jesus will return to establish a literal, earthly kingdom, beginning in Jerusalem with the Jews but then extending to his elect among all nations. The "elect" or saved will then live on earth like angels, with "spiritual bodies" without eating, drinking, or copulating; this is Heaven-on-Earth, after the resurrection. By contrast, the "reprobate" or damned will be resurrected in their "gross and corruptible bodies"; after a temporary period of normal physical existence (including eating and marrying), they will die a "second death" and experience everlasting oblivion rather than eternal torment (ch. 38, pp. 329-337; ch. 44, pp. 451-453). Jesus Christ will rule as king and judge forever over the earthly kingdom of the elect in their resurrected spiritual bodies, thus recreating on a higher plane the original kingdom where "God alone is King."⁵

This summary brings into focus the only chapter in Hobbes's work devoted exclusively to explaining the mission and nature of Jesus Christ — Chapter 41 of the *Leviathan* entitled, "Of the Office of Our Blessed Savior." Here, Hobbes asserts that Holy Scripture presents "three parts of the office of the Messiah" — first, that of redeemer of sins; second, of teacher; third, of king. The most striking feature throughout the chapter is that Hobbes makes no reference at all to Jesus as the Son of God and quickly passes over the first part of Jesus's office (redeeming sin) because Christ has paid "sufficient price for the sins of all mankind, [and] *there was no more required*" (pp. 352-353, emphasis added). Hobbes's real emphasis is on Jesus as imitator and reincarnation, as it were, of Moses: Jesus will "have all the power that

was in Moses"; Jesus teaches obedience to those who sit in "Moses's seat" until He comes again to sit in Moses's seat; when Jesus comes again as king, he will be "viceregent of God the Father, as Moses was"; and even in creating the sacraments of baptism and eucharist "our Savior resembled Moses" (pp. 354-357). Indeed, Hobbes reinterprets the Trinity to make Christ a mere "representative" of God rather than his co-equal, so that Christ and Moses, who also "representeth" God, are made equals (p. 358).⁶ In short, Christ's kingship is none other than the restoration of Mosaic rule in a more permanent and secure fashion.⁷

If we inquire into the reasoning and motives that led Hobbes to this doctrine of the Messiah and to this interpretation of the Kingdom of God, several explanations could be suggested. One is that Hobbes's interpretation reflects fairly conventional Anglican thinking — an "Anglican doctrine of salvation," in the words of Johnson, that simplifies Christianity by reducing it to the single article that Jesus is the Christ.⁸ Another possible explanation is that Hobbes presents a version of radical Protestant millennialism — a doctrine in line with millennialists of Hobbes's day who hoped for or sought to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, conceived in both biblical and modern utopian terms.⁹ A third is that Hobbes's whole doctrine is primarily a political strategy, cleverly designed to neutralize the biblical notion of the Kingdom of God as a pretext for rebellion, thereby strengthening the hands of sovereigns over priests, churchmen, and radical sectarians.

The problem with proving any of these interpretations is that Hobbes says very little about how or where he derives his doctrine. There are no citations to any scholar or theologian indicating the sources of Hobbes's views; there are even disclaimers of dependence on others in statements such as, "this doctrine...will appear to most men a novelty" (*Leviathan*, ch. 38, p. 329) and "this assertion...being somewhat new, it may possible be distasteful to many divines" (*De Cive*, 18.6,n.). Nor is there a sustained interpretation of any part of the Bible or a commentary on any biblical chapter as a whole which might allow us to see the rationale behind Hobbes's positions. Instead, he presents his doctrine one theme at a time, asserting his view and then pulling biblical quotes from their contexts to support his pre-determined position, thereby violating his own admonition against cutting Scripture into little pieces or "atomes of Scripture, as dust before men's eyes."¹⁰ Nevertheless, a few clues support the suggestion that Hobbes arrived at his views on the Messiah for political rather than theological reasons.

The two most important clues are statements by Hobbes that explicitly draw out the political implications of his central claim: that Jesus was the Messiah in both a Jewish sense (the king of the Jews promised by the prophets who would restore the original Kingdom of

God under Moses) and in a Christian sense (the Son of God who would not establish this kingdom until his Second Coming). In a well-known passage in *Leviathan*, Hobbes makes clear the political significance of this doctrine:

The greatest and main abuse of Scripture...is the wresting of it to prove that the kingdom of God...is the present Church, or multitude of Christian men now living, or that being dead, are to rise again at the last day: whereas the kingdom of God was first instituted by the ministry of Moses over the Jews only...and ceased afterward, in the election of Saul....Nevertheless, he [God] promised by his prophets to restore this his government to them again...[and] he invited the Gentiles...[and] promised also to send his Son into the world...to prepare them by his doctrine, to receive him at his second coming. *Which second coming not yet being, the kingdom of God is not yet come, and we are not now under any other kings by pact, but our civil sovereigns* (ch. 44, pp. 438-439), emphasis added).

The obvious implication of this passage, as Joel Schwartz has shown in his insightful article, is that Hobbes's teaching about the two kingdoms of God — the Jewish one under Moses and the Christian one under Christ at the Second Coming — is designed to produce obedience by subjects to their present civil sovereigns. For it postpones indefinitely the realization of the Kingdom of God, removing it as a pretext for revolutionary change and rebellion. And it presents a vision of that kingdom, consisting of pacified men existing here on earth, that is essentially a "utopian solution to the political problems with which the Leviathan-state can more or less successfully deal."¹¹

In a second passage that is less well-known, Hobbes also points to his political motivation. Commenting on the biblical line, "Thy kingdom come," Hobbes says it must refer to a kingdom on earth rather than in heaven — specifically to "the restoration of that Kingdom of God by Christ, which by revolt of the Israelites had been interrupted in the election of Saul." To which Hobbes adds, sensing that he has uttered a new and controversial statement: "There be so many other places that confirm this interpretation that it were a wonder there is no greater notice taken of it, *but that it gives too much light to Christian kings to see their right of ecclesiastical government*" (*Leviathan*, ch. 35, p. 301, emphasis added). In other words, Hobbes is saying that his rather unusual interpretation of the Kingdom of God as an earthly kingdom restored at the Second Coming is obvious to him; but it has never been noticed by other interpreters — chiefly priests and divines who speak of a "heavenly kingdom" — because it takes away clerical power over those seeking entrance into the heavenly kingdom and thereby strengthens kings in their right of church government.

Hobbes Compared to Maimonides and Pascal

In order to see more clearly the unusual character of Hobbes's doctrine, it might be helpful to compare it to other conceptions of the Messiah and the messianic age. Since Hobbes combines both Jewish and Christian elements in his conception of the Messiah, we shall examine each element in its pure form — first, that of the great Jewish theologian, Maimonides, and then the view of the Christian theologian, Pascal. By virtue of these comparisons, the peculiar character of Hobbes's "Jewish Christianity" comes to light more clearly.

Maimonides's view might be characterized as the minimalist or ultra-rationalist view. This is true not only in relation to Christian conceptions but also in relation to Jewish ones. For as one Jewish scholar notes, even within the Jewish tradition "the conception and personality of the Messiah are so heavily freighted with all sorts of bizarre hopes and beliefs, extravagant myths and fancies born largely of the desperate fate of the Jews that it became increasingly difficult to know what Judaism really teaches on the subject. Between the mystic visionaries, who had almost deified the Messiah and ascribed to him supernatural powers, and the Jewish philosopher [Maimonides], who took a more rational view of his origin and activity, there is a wide and bewildering gap."¹²

One obvious sign of the sobriety of Maimonides's approach is his extreme reluctance to discuss the matter. There are few direct references to the Messiah in Maimonides's most famous work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*.¹³ In his other famous work, *Mishneh Torah* (literally meaning "repetition of the Torah" and often translated as *The Code* because it codifies the Torah by providing a systematic summary of all the laws), Maimonides does offer an explicit, thematic discussion of the Messiah. But this discussion occurs only at the very end of a fourteen-volume treatise — the last five pages of a thousand page work. Here is what Maimonides says on this important subject.

In the first place, he makes clear that, despite the brevity of his discussion, belief in the coming of the Messiah is obligatory for all Jews: "He who does not...look forward to the coming of the Messiah denies not only the teachings of the Prophets but also those of the Law and Moses, our teacher, for Scripture affirms the rehabilitation of Israel" (*Code*, vol. 14, p. 238). Moreover, Maimonides provides a clear and simple description of what the Messiah will do: "King Messiah will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its former state and original sovereignty. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All the ancient laws will be reinstated in his days; sacrifices will again be offered; the Sabbatical and Jubilee years

will again be observed in accordance with the commandments set forth in the Law" (*ibid.*). In no uncertain terms, Maimonides describes the Messiah as an earthly king of the Jews — in fact, he repeatedly uses the phrase "King Messiah" as if it were a single word. The King Messiah is simply a second David: for "the prophecy...bears upon the two Messiahs: the first, namely, David, who saved Israel from the hand of their enemies; and the later Messiah, a descendant of David, who will achieve the final salvation of Israel" (*ibid.*, p. 239).

As a kind of Zionist conqueror, who will gather in the dispersed Jews of the world to the land of Israel and defeat all her enemies, the Messiah will be a warrior-king of heroic but strictly human proportions. As Maimonides says, "do not think that King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, bring anything new into being, revive the dead, or do similar things. It is not so." In fact, the historical example that Maimonides himself raises is that of Ben Kozba (otherwise spelled, Bar Kokhba) — the leader of the political rebellion against Roman domination in 132 A.D. As Maimonides notes, many of the rabbis and sages of that time shared the belief that he was King Messiah. They were wrong, Maimonides says, because Ben Kozba was slain and his effort failed and perhaps, Maimonides hints, because he tried to change the Law; but the rabbis were right in expecting nothing supernatural or miraculous from the Messiah (*ibid.*, p. 240). As one scholar succinctly states, for Maimonides, "the Messiah is a successful Bar Kokhba...a general rather than a prophet" or miracle-worker.¹⁴

In accordance with the strictly human character of the Messiah is Maimonides's view of the nonmiraculous condition of the messianic age (although there is some ambiguity here). Maimonides's main emphasis is on normalcy: "Let no one think that in the days of the Messiah any of the laws of nature will be set aside, or any innovation be introduced into creation. The world will follow its normal course." To support his view, Maimonides is required to interpret *metaphorically* the famous passages in Isaiah, chapter 11, describing a change in the natural order where "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb." According to Maimonides, the lamb is a symbol of Israel and the predators represent her enemies, implying that Israel will live securely among its former enemies who will be pacified and "will accept the true religion, and will neither plunder nor destroy, and together with Israel will earn a comfortable living in a legitimate way" (*Code*, 14, p. 240). Here, Maimonides rejects the literal meaning of Isaiah and follows the line of Rabbi Samuel the Babylonian, of the third century A.D., whom he cites in these words, "'The sole difference between the present and the Messianic days is delivery from servitude to foreign powers' (B.T., Sanhedrin, 91b)" (*ibid.*, p. 241).

The ambiguity that exists in this account is whether the deliverance of Israel from its enemies produces an age of universal peace that

requires some kind of change in human nature, if not in nature as a whole. For Maimonides also asserts in the last paragraph of the *Code* that "in that era there will be neither famine nor war, neither jealousy nor strife. Blessings will be abundant, comforts within the reach of all. The one preoccupation of the whole world will be to know the Lord." Or, stated more precisely, the messianic age will be characterized by universal leisure to use for the highest purpose — study of the Torah. In this way, "Israel will be free to devote itself to the Law and its wisdom, with no one to oppress or disturb it, and thus be worthy of the world to come" (*ibid.*, p. 242). It may be the case that Maimonides considers this preparation for the world to come as nonmiraculous even though it is wholly unprecedented in history because the *means* are natural — pacification through military conquest and overcoming ignorance through enlightenment or study of the Torah.¹⁵

The greatest ambiguity, however, is Maimonides's view of the "world to come," which he was obliged to spell out in a separate treatise because of widespread doubts about his belief in the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul. Maimonides asserts that these beliefs are obligatory because they are taught by Scripture, the Talmud, and the prayers composed by wise and inspired men (*Selections*, p. 402). The dilemma for Maimonides is understanding how bodily resurrection, which is physical or corporeal and seemingly cannot last forever, could be combined with the immortal soul, which is spiritual or incorporeal and seemingly imperishable.

His solution, it appears, is to treat the two (resurrection of the body and life in the world-to-come) as a sequence. The resurrection of the body will occur first, inaugurated by the coming of the Messiah; it will be a temporary phase, a condition that eventually decomposes or passes away. But the soul will endure forever afterward in the world-to-come, with the righteous enjoying eternal "bliss" and the wicked being completely "cut-off" from God in a condition of non-existence. Or, as Maimonides says in his *Treatise on Resurrection*, "the expression of our Sages allows free scope to the assumption that the bodies restored to life will eat, drink, and generate and die after a prolonged existence, as at the time of the Messiah, but that the life which is not destined to end is that in which the spirit will not be confined to bodily tenements. This truth is obvious to the mind of every intelligent person, I mean that in the World-to-Come we must be incorporeal as angelic beings." As far as understanding what kind of bliss these angelic beings or pure souls might enjoy, the mind cannot comprehend it in this world, except to say that where "there are no bodies, there is neither eating nor drinking, nor anything that human beings need on earth." In sum, everything that "the prophets prophesied to Israel only refer to material things that Israel will enjoy in the days of King Messiah when sovereignty will be restored to Israel. But as for the bliss in the world-

to-come, nothing can be compared with or likened to it" (*Selections*, pp. 402, 406-408).

Maimonides's views on the Messiah, the messianic age, and the world-to-come provide some interesting comparisons with those of Hobbes. Maimonides, like most Jews and unlike Hobbes and Christian believers, does not believe the Messiah has come yet, so Jews must live in a state of anxious waiting. Like Hobbes, however, Maimonides conceives of the Messiah as an earthly king of the Jews, whose main task is restoration of the kingdom. But the model for Maimonides is the Davidic kingship, not Mosaic theocracy, although King Messiah will institute the law of Moses, including sacrificial laws. In other words, human kingship for Maimonides is not the defective government or "fall from grace" that it is in Hobbes's account.¹⁶ King Messiah for Maimonides will be a successful warrior whose victories will inaugurate a messianic age in this world, rather than in the indefinite future when the last judgement occurs. The messianic age will be peaceful but ascetic, largely devoted to study of the Torah. Unlike Hobbes, Maimonides conceives of the world-to-come as an angelic existence — not of spiritual bodies but a bodyless condition — of indescribable bliss. Maimonides, in other words, is more down-to-earth than Hobbes in his conception of the Messiah's kingship; but more other-worldly and incorporeal in his conception of the afterlife and heavenly bliss.

An important affinity of the two thinkers is the strong desire to tame and control messianic impulses. Maimonides, like Hobbes, has a political motive behind his doctrine: discrediting false messiahs and fanatics whose charisma and zeal captivate naive followers.¹⁷ Maimonides was certainly aware of the numerous messianic pretenders of his age (around the twelfth century) in Jewish communities of Europe and the Muslim world — in 1100, a certain Ibn Areyh who, influenced by a dream, proclaimed himself Messiah and was flogged and expelled by Jewish community leaders; in the early 1100s, the messianic movement led by David Alroy produced militant struggles against the eastern Muslim empire; in 1121, a man named Solomon of a "kohen" community claimed to be messiah, even though he was a Levite rather than from a Davidic line (an Aaronide Messiah); in 1127, a scholar named Moses Al-Dari from Morocco made false predictions about the coming of the Messiah but reportedly was admired by Maimonides, apparently because he preached return to the land of Israel and died in Eretz Israel; in 1172, a Messiah pretender appeared in Yemen, who was severely condemned by Maimonides apparently because he was a kind of socialist revolutionary rather than a "Zionist."¹⁸

In sum, one may surmise that cases like these led Maimonides to formulate his doctrine of the Messiah in the most restrictive terms — in narrow political, military, and ultimately empirical terms. Yet, it

should also be emphasized that the general aim of his theology is to rationalize Judaism along Aristotelian lines, inclining him to view the Messiah as an exceptional man — a second David but not a second Moses and certainly not a supernatural being — whose coming will not change the world miraculously but bring the Jewish nation to the forefront of the world, inspiring all nations to worship God properly through the study of the Torah.

Pascal diverges from both Hobbes and Maimonides because he presents the whole drama of the coming of the Messiah in Scripture as an opposition or contrast — between “carnal” Jewish conceptions and “spiritual” Christian conceptions. In this respect, Pascal is actually a very typical spokesman for the Christian tradition, even though he was a Catholic who was never considered entirely orthodox by the Church. For Augustine and Aquinas among Catholics as well as Luther, Calvin, and Hooker among Protestants have all viewed the Messiah like Pascal: as an idea originating in the Old Testament that was understood too literally by the Jews, who expected the Messiah to be a political and military figure or a prophet, and that was fulfilled only by the coming of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. What Pascal does, it seems to me, is to spell out this interpretation of the Bible — both Old and New Testaments — in greater detail than anyone else, making it a central part of his *Apology for the Christian Religion* (which he left to us in fragmentary form, later called the “pensees”).

Moreover, Pascal, unlike the other theologians mentioned above, avoided the “scholastic” approach of trying to explain in metaphysical terms the significance of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity; indeed, he avoids metaphysics altogether (except in employing simple mathematical concepts like infinity).¹⁹ He treats the problem of the Messiah in scriptural terms, explaining how the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New, and in psychological and cosmological terms, showing how the wretchedness and greatness of man as well as the infinite smallness and infinite vastness of the natural universe are mediated by Jesus the Messiah.

For Pascal, therefore, the strategy of his apology is to present two proofs: first, the “misery of man without God” or “the corruption of Nature”; and second, that “there is a Redeemer, proved by Scripture” (#6). These two propositions are obviously linked. For, as Pascal says, “the Christian religion consists in believing that man has fallen from a state of glory and communion with God into a state of gloom, penitence, and estrangement from God, but that after this life we shall be restored by a promised Messiah” (#281). The second proposition is what concerns us here, for the proof that there is a redeemer lies in the biblical idea of the Messiah.

Pascal’s thesis is a radical one: the Bible shows “that from the beginning of the world the Messiah has been awaited and worshipped

continuously" (#390) or that "the Messiah has always been believed in" (#282). This claim — which Pascal refers to as "perpetuity" and uses as a label for a number of powerful thoughts on the Bible — means that every age has had some person who prefigures or testifies to the Messiah:

In the first age of the world men were led into all kinds of misdeeds, and yet there were holy men like Enoch, Lamech, and others who patiently awaited the Christ promised since the world began.

Noah saw men's wickedness at its height, and he had the merit to save the world in his person, through hoping in the Messiah, whom he prefigured.

Abraham was surrounded by idolaters when God showed him the mystery of the Messiah whom he hailed from afar. In the time of Isaac and Jacob, abomination spread over the whole earth but these holy men lived in their faith, and Jacob on his deathbed, as he was blessing his children, cried out in rapture which made him interrupt his speech: "I await the savior whom thou hast promised, O Lord" [Genesis, 49:18].

The Egyptians were riddled with idolatry and magic, and even the people of God were carried away by their example. Yet Moses and others saw Him that they did not see, and worshipped as they looked to the eternal gifts he was preparing for them.

Next, the Greeks and Latins set up false gods. The poets invented a hundred different theologies, the philosophers split up into a thousand different sects. And yet in the heart of Judaea there were always chosen men foretelling the coming of the Messiah who was known only to them. He came at last in the fullness of time...(#281, see also 282, 390, 451, 456, 487).

For Pascal, the perpetuity of the belief in the coming and the arrival of the Messiah is the central idea of the Bible.

But if the Messiah has always been believed in and Jesus is the Messiah, why has this not been recognized by everyone at all times? Pascal's answer is that God is a "hidden God" — *Deus absconditus* — who reveals as well as conceals himself in order to make faith a test of the will or heart rather than a conclusion of reason (#242, 427, 444). The Messiah was revealed in the Old Testament, but also concealed or disguised: "What do the prophets say about Jesus Christ? That he will plainly be God? No, but that he is a truly hidden God, that he will not be recognized, that people will not believe that it is he, that he will be a stumbling block" (#228). As a result, the Jews were destined to misunderstand his true nature: "They are clearly a people created expressly to serve as witness to the Messiah. They hand down the books and love them and do not understand them...The judgments of God are entrusted to them, but as a sealed book" (#495). This insight is the

basis of Pascal's theory of biblical interpretation — that there are both literal and figurative meanings to the Bible which when properly understood break the "seal" of the book and unlock the secret of the Messiah.

Although this theory may sound complicated and esoteric, it is actually quite simple. It means that prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah have two meanings, a literal one that is "carnal" and a figurative or symbolic one that is "spiritual." The whole case rests on the demonstration of two levels of meaning: "For if we believe that they have only one meaning it is certain that the Messiah has not come, but if they have two meanings, it is certain that he has come in Jesus Christ" (#274).

Pascal explains the two levels of meaning as follows. On the one hand, "The Jews were used to great and glorious miracles, and so, having had the great wonders of the Red Sea and the land of Canaan as an epitome of the great things to be done by the Messiah, they expected something more glorious [than] the miracles performed by Moses" (#264). What exactly did they expect? What could outdo the special favors granted by God in the past and the feats of Moses? Only a universal monarchy: "The Jews had grown old in these earthly thoughts: that God loved their father Abraham [and his generations]....[Later] when they were languishing in Egypt he brought them out...[and] fed them manna...[and] led them into a rich land...[and] gave them kings and a well-built temple...[so] *that finally he was to send them the Messiah to make them masters over the whole world and that he had foretold the time of his coming*" (emphasis added).

Because of these extravagant worldly expectations, Pascal says, the Jewish people were in for a big surprise: "When the world had grown old in these carnal errors, Jesus Christ came at the time appointed, but not in the expected blaze of glory and thus they did not think it was he. After Christ's death St. Paul came to teach them that all these things had happened figuratively, that the Kingdom of God was not in the flesh but the spirit, that the enemies were not the Babylonians but their passions, that God did not delight in temples but in a pure and humble heart, that the circumcision of the body was useless, but that there must be circumcision of the heart" (#270). In short, Pascal gives the traditional Christian interpretation of two contrasting ideas of the Messiah: the triumphant earthly king vs. the suffering spiritual redeemer.

The twist Pascal gives to this idea is that the rejection of Jesus actually makes the Jews unimpeachable witnesses to his Messiahship: "To inspire faith in the Messiah there had to be previous prophecies and they had to be handed down by people above suspicion, universally known as conscientious, loyal, and extraordinarily zealous....And so this people, disappointed by the poor and ignominious coming of the

Messiah, became his cruellest enemies, with the result that of all people in the world they can least be suspected of favor towards us." In other words, the hostility of the Jews is a mark of their impartiality as witness. This is the grand irony of the Bible for Pascal: "Those who rejected and crucified Christ...are the same who hand down the books which bear witness to him and say he will be rejected and a cause of scandal. Thus, they showed he was the Messiah by refusing him" (#502). The Bible, therefore, has to have a figurative or symbolic or hidden meaning if it is to reflect the nature of the Hidden God who reveals as well as conceals His message of salvation.

It was then up to Jesus and the Apostles to break the code and reveal hidden meaning. They saw that the Bible "had to address a carnal people and make [them] the depository of a spiritual covenant" (#502). They read figuratively the Old Testament references to physical things and saw their spiritual meaning — that circumcision is not a physical sign but a circumcision of the heart, that manna is spiritual bread, that the Promised Land is not physical territory but heavenly, that enemies are not the nations but man's passions, that the kingship of the Messiah "will be spiritual and his kingdom of the spirit, that there will be two comings, one in wretchedness to humble the proud, the other in glory to exalt the humble, that Jesus is God and man" (#260, #502).²⁰ The proper reading of the Bible, then, leads to the central mystery of Christianity — the Incarnation, the Word of God made flesh, the divinity and humanity of Christ, whose promised salvation is not earthly but a spiritual redemption from sin and death.

Here is where the real differences between Hobbes and Maimonides, on the one side, and Pascal, on the other, can be seen. For Maimonides, the rationalist Jewish theologian, the Messiah is a temporal king, a second David, who will inaugurate an age of peace and harmony on earth, which will be an indefinite transition stage to the world-to-come; the Messiah, therefore, has no role in the redemption of souls for heavenly bliss (if, in fact, Maimonides really believes there is such a redemption). For Hobbes, propounder of a curious Jewish-Christian doctrine of the Messiah, Jesus came to restore the Mosaic regime in a more permanent and secure fashion at the second coming — an earthly empire of peaceful and satisfied men. For Pascal, the Messiah redeems human nature from sin and the whole of nature from chaos: "Jesus Christ is the center towards which all things tend. Whoever knows him knows the reason for everything" (#449).

Thus, the infinite universe, which has no center or circumference, is given a center. Man, whose "wretchedness induces despair and pride induces presumption," is given a mediator that both exalts and humbles him (#352). The gaping void in the human heart induced by the "eternal silence of the infinite spaces" and the sense of contingency — of not "knowing why I have been put in this place rather than that, or

why the brief span of life allotted to me should be assigned one moment rather than another in all of eternity" — can be filled. But that fulfillment is purely spiritual: only the eternal life of the individual soul, saved by God's grace after a lifetime of trials and proper atonement, provides true happiness. As for the second coming, Pascal acknowledges it will occur; but the whole eschatology of the messianic age, last judgment, and Kingdom of God is simply omitted in favor of the personal encounter with the suffering and loneliness of Jesus (#919, "The Mystery of Jesus").

Conclusion

The idea of the Messiah developed by Hobbes has led us down the path from Maimonides to Pascal because Hobbes's doctrine stands in a curious middle-ground between Judaism and Christianity. In this regard, it reminds us of positions taken centuries before Hobbes, at the dawn of the Christian age, and a century after Hobbes, during the age of Enlightenment. From history, we learn that there were religious sects in the early centuries A.D. whose beliefs could be called Jewish Christianity. One such group was the Ebionites, who regarded Christ as "a revived Moses...[and] attempted to combine what was characteristic of Judaism with a faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Cerinthus, one of the leading Ebionite scholars, rejected the preexistence of Christ and taught the millennial reign of the Messiah in Jerusalem. Similarly, Justin believed that the seat of the Messiah's kingdom would be a restored Jerusalem, where all believers, together with the patriarchs and the prophets, would enjoy happiness for over one thousand years."²¹ This group could be seen as a precursor of Hobbes because of its emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah in a Jewish sense, as the leader of an earthly empire emanating from Jerusalem. Yet, the Ebionites expected this kingdom to begin within their lifetime and, when it did not, lost credibility.²² Hobbes cannot be linked with them because he accepts the indefinite postponement of the Kingdom of God.

A century after Hobbes, a figure from the German enlightenment, Hermann Samuel Reimarus, wrote a short work called "The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples" that could also be called a statement of Jewish Christianity. Influenced by the thinking of English Deism, Reimarus argued that Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah in the Jewish sense — a mortal man who would establish a kingship on earth for the deliverance of the Jews from their oppressors.²³ But Reimarus also drew out the scandalous conclusion of this view: that the disciples of Jesus "fabricated" the whole story of the resurrection and the second coming out of disappointment at Jesus's failure as a political

revolutionary, creating the Christian myth of a "spiritual suffering savior of the whole human race."²⁴ Because his views were so shocking, Reimarus never published them during his lifetime; they created a great sensation after his death when Lessing published them in fragments without divulging the author's name. This, Strauss suggests, would have been Hobbes's fate if Hobbes had spelled out in complete detail the implications of his position: that the *spiritualism* of Christianity — the divine nature of Jesus, his resurrection and other miracles, the immortality of the soul, the heavenly kingdom — was a fabrication of followers who were seeking earthly empire.²⁵ Hobbes and Reimarus, along with the Deists of the enlightenment era, thus prepare the way for a new, "this-worldly" version of Christianity — one whose doctrines and aims are fully compatible with the earthly goals of physical security, materialism, and skeptical reason.

Notes

1. "The noun *mashiah* ("anointed" or "anointed one") occurs 38 times in the Hebrew Bible, where it applies twice to the patriarchs, six times to the high priest, once to Cyrus, and 29 times to the Israelite king, primarily Saul and secondarily David or an unnamed Davidic monarch." William Scott Green, "Messiah in Judaism," in *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, p. 2.
2. See "Messiah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, pp. 1407-1417.
3. Interestingly, the Hebrew word *mashiah* actually appears in the Gospels, in two places of John's Gospel: 1:41 when Andrew "first found his brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means the Christ)"; and in John 4:25 when Jesus is about to reveal himself to the Samaritan woman at the well and she says, "'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ).'" Presumably, the reason why the Hebrew word for "anointed" is used in these two places while the Greek *christos* is used in all other references to Jesus in the Gospels is that we have direct dialogue about the Messiah by people who are speaking Hebrew or Aramaic or some language other than Greek.
4. Matthew, 27:11, "And the governor [Pilate] asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You have said so.'" And in 27:29, "And kneeling before him they [the soldiers] mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" And 27:42.
5. Leo Strauss, "On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy," pp. 188-189; and Joel Schwartz, "Hobbes and the Two Kingdoms of God," pp. 7-24.
6. Hobbes presents the Trinity as a doctrine of how God is "represented" rather than of His being or divine nature, as a political rather than a metaphysical doctrine, which would imply a rejection of traditional

Trinitarianism. In fact, when one reads Hobbes's account of the doctrine, it seems like a deliberate distortion:

The doctrine of the Trinity, as far as can be gathered directly from Scripture, is in substance this: that God who is always one and the same, was the person represented by Moses; [as well as] the person represented by his Son incarnate; and the person represented by the apostles. As represented by the apostles, the Holy Spirit, by which they spake, is God; as represented by his Son, that was God and man, the Son is that God; as represented by Moses and the high-priests, the Father, that is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is that God....[For] those names *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit*...are persons, that is, they have their names from representing" (ch. 42, p. 361).

7. See the full development of this argument in Schwartz, "Hobbes and the Two Kingdoms of God," pp. 18-23; also, Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," p. 173.
8. See Paul J. Johnson, "Hobbes's Anglican Doctrine of Salvation," pp. 102-128; and Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, "Thomas Hobbes: the Philosophical Presuppositions of his Biblical Criticism," pp. 194-222.
9. See Pocock, "Time, History, and Eschatology," pp. 174-186; Eldon Eisenach, *Two Worlds of Liberalism*, pp. 51-54, 60, 66; Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, especially, pp. 75-99.
10. James Farr, "Atomes of Scripture: Hobbes and the Politics of Biblical Interpretation," p. 172.
11. Schwartz, pp. 10, 22-24.
12. Jacob Samuel Minkin, ed., *The World of Moses Maimonides: Selections of His Writings*, p. 398. Gershom Scholem confirms the view that Maimonides had a rationalist or minimalist idea of the Messiah, compared to the apocalyptic or utopian versions of other Jewish thinkers (Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 25-33).
13. I can find only two explicit references to the Messiah in *The Guide* (II.36 and 45), both occurring in Maimonides's chapters on prophecy. In II.36, Maimonides gives his famous definition of prophecy (an "overflow overflowing" from God that stimulates the "active intellect" which, in turn, moves or energizes the rational faculty and then the imagination). At the end of the chapter, Maimonides says that prophecy as such ceased during the Exile because the imaginative faculty was too sad and depressed; but it will be "restored to us in its habitual form, as has been promised in the days of the Messiah, may he be revealed soon." In II.45, Maimonides describes the eleven degrees of prophecy and mentions in the first and lowest degree of prophecy inspired actions, such as the deeds of the Judges and kings; included among the latter are "all the virtuous Messiahs of Israel." From these references one may infer that the Messiah will be a virtuous king, with low-grade prophetic powers reflected in his inspired deeds (rather than in dreams or visions like the higher-grade prophets or in hearing speeches like the highest prophet, Moses).

14. Ralph Lerner, "Moses Maimonides," in *History of Political Philosophy*, p. 218.
15. This may also explain the apparent discrepancy between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide* in interpreting the famous passage in Isaiah, ch. 11 about a future reign of peace and harmony. In the *Mishneh*, as we have seen, Maimonides interprets it metaphorically to mean Israel's pacification of its enemies. In the *Guide* (III.11), it is interpreted literally: by a kind of universal enlightenment about the true reality of the deity, ignorance will be overcome; and since ignorance is the cause of evil and hatred among men, war and strife will cease. The *Guide*, then, is more frankly utopian than the *Mishneh* and even points the way to the realization of universal peace by teaching the reader about the true reality of the deity (God's incorporeal nature and His miraculous creation of the world from nothing).
16. On this point — that human kingship beginning with Saul is a falling away from God's kingship — Hobbes seems closer to the biblical view than Maimonides; for an insightful interpretation of the biblical teaching on human kingship as a rejection of God's kingship see Martin Buber's *The Kingship of God*, pp. 59-84, 99-107.
17. Scholem emphasizes Maimonides's deep suspicion of the anarchical element in messianic movements and his deliberate strategy aimed at "liquidation of apocalypticism in Jewish Messianism," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 26-33.
18. See "Messianic Movements," in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, pp. 1422-1423.
19. Thus, we find no metaphysical analysis of the Trinity in the *Pensees* and its vexing problem of explaining rationally both the unity of being in God and His division into three "persons" that are all equally and fully divine. Pascal's anti-scholasticism is emphatic: "And that is why I shall not undertake here to prove by reason from nature either the existence of God, or the Trinity, or the immortality of the soul...because such knowledge, without Christ, is useless and sterile" (*Pensees*, #449).
20. Interestingly, Pascal feels that some Jews have always recognized the spiritual meaning beyond the carnal meaning — the mystics and even Maimonides (#274) and certain Rabbis (#278). Hence, Pascal maintains, true Jews and true Christians have always worshipped the same God; only "carnal Jews awaited a carnal Messiah, and gross Christians believe that the Messiah has dispensed them from loving God. True Jews and true Christians worship a Messiah who makes them love God" (#286-289).
21. Wilson D. Wallis, *Messiahs: Christian and Pagan*, p. 153.
22. Thus, the Ebionites — or Nazarenes, as they are sometimes called — were the first disappointed millennialists who paid the price of extinction for their false expectations. In a recent study of the Ebionites (which is both fascinating and flawed by exaggerated sympathy for an "underdog" sect), Hans-Joachim Schoeps notes in several places that "when the force of their eschatological expectation was sapped by the delay of the

- Parousia [or Second Coming],...the Ebionites, because they did not become part of the Catholic Church, disappeared in the variegated religions of the Near East" (Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, pp. 37, 65, 132).
23. It is interesting to note that several of the English deists who influenced Reimarus, such as Toland and Priestly, actually argued that "the early Jewish sects, the Nazarenes and Ebionites, who still observed the Mosaic law and believed in the humanity of Christ, were *the genuine Christians*" (see Sir Leslie Stephens, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1, p. 87, emphasis added).
 24. Reimarus even says that the disciples stole the body of Jesus in order to fake the resurrection. Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples*, pp. 75-79, 80-84, 95-97, 104-107, 115, 129-130; Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, p. 412.
 25. Leo Strauss, "On the Basis of Hobbes's Political Philosophy," p. 189.

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