

Tikkun Olam and Creation Care in Jewish Thought: Fixing the World and Hoping for the (Re)Coming of the Messiah

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Abstract: Both Christianity and Judaism share a strong belief in the coming of the Messiah and a hope for the restoration of a better world. Although creation has been corrupted by sin, it can be redeemed through the work of the Lord Jesus and the responsible actions of humankind. Humanity has received a divine mandate to care for creation—an imperative that is not optional, but a commandment. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that, through both the first and second coming of Jesus Christ, the believer's hope for a renewed and righteous world remains credible and theologically grounded.

Keywords: Messiah, Re-Coming, Jewish, Creation, Hope, Tikkun Olam

Introduction

In this article, the aim is to explore—primarily from a Jewish perspective—how the Messiah, through His two comings, works to restore a world marred by the Fall. According to both Jewish and Christian traditions, the sin of Adam brought not only spiritual corruption but also social disorder, making necessary a comprehensive renewal of creation. The Jewish hope is that, through the coming of the Messiah, both the world and humanity will be restored to a state of harmony with one another and with God. From a Christian theological standpoint, this messianic expectation is fulfilled in two distinct phases: the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. In His first coming, as foretold by the angel to Joseph, Jesus came to suffer and atone for the sins of His people (Matthew 1:21). In His second coming, He will fulfill the promise given to Mary, taking the throne of His father David and reigning as King over all the earth (Luke 1:32–33). Yet, when examined closely, both comings of the Messiah contribute to the same divine mission: the restoration and healing of a fallen world.

This topic is of significant importance, especially given that we live in a fallen world. As Christians, we are called not only to await redemption but to actively participate in the healing and restoration of creation, following the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Rotaru, 2012, p. 5). The responsibility to care for creation has been entrusted to humanity both at the time of creation and reaffirmed through the teachings of the Gospels—this is a divine mandate. To explore this idea in depth, the article will be structured into three main parts. First, we will define the concept of *tikkun olam*, a foundational Jewish notion referring to the act of "repairing the world." In the second part, we will examine *tikkun olam* in light of the first coming of the Messiah, focusing on the redemptive work accomplished through His suffering and atonement. Finally, the third part will explore the second coming of the Messiah and the eschatological hope of a fully restored world under His righteous rule.

Significance of *Tikkun Olam*

Tikkun olam is a Jewish term that means repairing the world (Rosenthal, 2005, pp. 214-240). Elliot Dorff states: "Jews today speak of repairing the world – *tikkun olam* – as a central Jewish precept, and concern for literally 'fixing the world' by making it a better place through activities we often call social action is certainly at the heart of Jewish perspective on life" (Dorff, 2008, p. 3). *Hesed* is a related term that means "what you do in faithfulness to God and your neighbor, namely, acts of love and kindness and care" (Dorff, 2008, p. 4). In other words, the term means what Jesus taught about loving God and neighbor: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy

heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself' (Luke 10: 27). It basically means making the world a better place.

According to some writers, the term does not appear in the Jewish Scriptures, Old Testament, it appears instead in the rabbinical commentaries, the Talmud and Mishna (Krasner, 2023), yet according to Mayer, the term is found in a few passages of the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 1:15, 7:13, 12:9, and Daniel 4:36) and "it means to *make straight, establish, arrange, or repair*" (Meyer, 2014). The world has fallen, and sin has left its mark deep in all areas. *Tikkun olam*, in its broadest sense, speaks of ethically repairing human behavior (Meyer, 2014). From another point of view, the term also refers to the repair of social problems as well as to helping the helpless (Noparstak, 2023). Therefore, man, through his deeds, brings humanity into a state of harmony with God and his neighbor. In Daniel 4:36 we find the Hebrew verb *tkn* (תָּקַנְתִּי): "At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established (תָּקַנְתִּי) in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me". The context in which the term is used speaks of the restoration of King Nebuchadnezzar as king over Babylon, but also his spiritual restoration (Montgomery, 1989, p. 24). After the king falls into the sin of pride and God's punishment comes upon him, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes God's sovereignty. Then comes his restoration.

Although the word *tikkun olam* is relatively new, but the concept is quite old. The concept speaks of a moral duty to humanity described in the Torah. In the book of Deuteronomy we read one of the Lord's commandments as follows: "Follow righteousness, righteousness *alone*, so that you live and inherit the land which יהוה your Elohim is giving you" (Deut. 16: 20 The Scripture 2009). But Israel did not obey the commandment. The prophet Amos condemned Israel's disregard of the widow, orphan and alien. He declared: "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live...Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate...let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" (Amos 5:14-15, 24)

According to the psalmist David, the world that was created was given to man to care for (Ps. 8). In the book of Genesis, we also read that God put man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it (Gen. 2: 15). For this reason, man must seek to make a better place to live. Because God made man the steward and protector of His creation, the rabbis say that man has a duty to make a better world; "Now each person must say: ,The entire world was created only for my sake' (Sanhedrin 37a). Consequently, because the world was created for my sake, I must constantly look into and consider ways of making world better; to provide what is missing in the world and pray on its behalf" (Likutei Moharan 5:1:2).

***Tikkun olam* in the First Coming of the Messiah**

The coming of a man, who will bring prosperity, blessing and harmony to the world, called the Messiah (Talmon, 1992, pp. 79-114), was born in the heart of the Jewish people. It is as Thomas Lancaster said: "Belief in the coming of the Messiah is not optional in Judaism" (Lancaster, 2017, p. A35). In the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* enunciated by the Rambam, we also find the coming of the Messiah followed by the resurrection of the dead (Finkel, 1996, pp. 237-244). In this regard Lancaster states: "He considered faith in coming of the Messiah to be one of the thirteen fundamental principles of Jewish faith and an obligation of the Torah incumbent upon every Jew" (Lancaster, 2017, p. A35).

Israel has long been oppressed by enemies (Rosen, 1982, pp. 2-10). Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed the Temple and ravaged the land (Rotaru, 2022, pp. 177-181). Then came the Seleucids under Antioch IV (Epiphanes), (Anderson, 1966, pp. 169-172) who conquered Jerusalem and began to spread Greek culture. In addition, he stopped Israel from celebrating the Sabbath, Feasts, Kosher food and circumcising their children. Instead, he entered in the Temple and sacrificed a pig, thus defiling the Holy Place. During that period Jewish

rabbinism was formed with the religious parties of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then came the Herodian period that ruled over Israel. Herod the Great, the one who ruled over Israel, appointed by Rome, “bore no resemblance to the Pharisaic ideal of the Kingdom of God” (Rosen, 1982, p. 8). During all this time, a hope was born for the Jewish people, the coming of the Messiah, who will bring justice, peace and prosperity for them (Lucass, 2011, pp. 19-36).

In the Second Temple period, the Messiah was an ideal figure who embodied the hopes of the godly, patriotic Jew of the time” (Rosen, 1982, p. 10). In Fredriksen's opinion, however, “late Second Temple Judaism had more views about the Messiah” (Fredriksen, 2023, p. 122). Before the Christian era, “the messianic hope took the form of a personal Messiah, a scion of David who would end the rule of pagans over the people of God and inaugurate an age of peace and justice” (Neusner, 1979, p. 44). Persons who held the functions of king, priest, and prophet were considered the messiah due to the anointing they held. The Essenes in their writings, found at the Dead Sea, spoke of the poses of the Messiah, “one sacerdotal and one royal” (Fredriksen, 2023, p. 122). In the rabbinic writings, they also speak of two messiahs: the Messiah son of Joseph, who will come to suffer to redeem his brother (like patriarch Joseph) and the Messiah son of David, who will come and rule from David's throne forever (b.Sukkot, 52a). On one side, the rabbis saw the two appearances of the Messiah well, but what they failed to realize is that there are two coming of the Messiah at different time periods and not two Messiahs. Daniel states that one Messiah will come, not two, “Know, then, and understand: from the going forth of the command to restore and build Yerushalayim until *Messiah the Prince...*” (Dan. 9: 25 The Scripture 2009 emphasis is mine)

Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth stands up and quotes from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4: 16-20; Isaiah 61: 1-2a). The text in Isaiah is a prophetic text that speaks of the Messiah (Wright, 2020, pp. 48-49) and the work he will do. The text says as follows: “The Spirit of the Master יהוה is upon Me, because יהוה has anointed Me to bring good news to the meek. He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of יהוה.” (The Scripture 2009) The text assures the reader of the good news that the Messiah will bring to the world through the work of restoring the sinful world. Repairing the world does not only mean the material part, but also the spiritual part. Origen asserted concerning this text: “Jesus came in the synagogue of Nazareth in order to read Isaiah 61, a text chosen for this day by the providence of God to declare that the Messianic Era of salvation now begins in Him” (Arthur, 2003, p.79). Unlike Origen, Theodoret of Cyr sees in the text of Isaiah the two coming of the Messiah (Eliot, 2007, p. 273). Calvin affirms this regarding the text from Isaiah: “Those persons to whom God promises restoration are called *poor*, and *broken*, and *captives*, and *blind*, and *bruised*. The body of the people was oppressed by so many miseries that this description is applied to every one of its members” (Clavin, 1845, p. 203). We see from this comment by Calvin that God intends by the coming of the Messiah to restore those who are socially, especially spiritually, disadvantaged. He intends to repair the fallen world. In the same regard Ray Summer states: “the message was one of good news to the downtrodden; the work was that of release to those bound in all the miseries of life; the proclamation was that this was a time acceptable to God for man's release and liberty” (Summers, 1972, p. 57).

Howard Marshall, based on the statement of Jesus, says (Luke 4: 21): “He stressed the note of present fulfillment: what the prophet had foretold centuries before was now coming true” (Marshal, 1994, p. 988). When Jesus was on earth for the first time he tried to restore the Israelites, but they refused (Matthew 23: 37). In one circumstance, Jesus saw a crowd of people who had no shepherds and He felt sorry for them (Mark 6: 34). In those moments Jesus did social acts by feeding the gathered crowd, thus showing his compassion (vv. 35-44). McKenna sees in the action of Jesus three social facts: feeding the hungry population, helping the helpless and wounded (McKenna, 1982, pp. 140-149).

Tikkun Olam, Recoming of Messiah and Messianic Age

The Aleinu is a Hebrew prayer from the 3rd Century, recited in the conclusion of the Shabbat services, looking forward to a day of complete restoration and repairing the world when God Himself will mend the world. The prayer says as follow: "And therefore we hope to You, Lord our God, that we may speedily behold the splendor of Your might, to banish idolatry from the earth – and false gods will be utterly destroyed; to perfect the world (*le takken olam*) under the sovereignty of the Almighty. All mankind shall invoke Your Name to turn all the wicked of the earth to you" (Manghel, 1981, p. 144).

In the Messianic Age, the Messiah will be the ruler (Walvoord, 1959, pp. 299-301) under whom the world - especially the Jewish people - will be prosperous. Under the rule of the Messiah, "it will be easy for people to earn a livelihood and to acquire much profit with little effort" (Walvoord, 1959, p. 302-304). Neusner says: "After Second Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the rabbis who led Jewry looked forward to an earthly Messiah" (Neusner, 1979, p. 44). They were waiting for the restoration of the Jewish people - the exiles - and the gathering of the people in the promised land under the rule of the Messiah and the God's Law (Neusner, 1979, p. 44). Thomas Lancaster states in this regard as follows: "Corelating passages from the Prophets indicate that the Messiah will be the agent of the ingathering" (Lancaster, 2019, p. 20). The ingathering of Jewish people it is a sign of the recoming of the Messiah (Matthew 24: 31).

I have shown in the first part that *tikkun olam* has in view, the restoration of man to his Creator. Man must make the world a better place to live. Drawing a parallel between the redemption of the Jews from Egypt under the hand of Moses and the final redemption under the Messiah, Levertoff states: "The last, Messianic, redemption will thus be similar to the first redemption. As the whole purpose of the Egyptian exile was to prepare Israel for the revelation on Sinai so the present long exile of the people of God is in order to prepare them for the greatest revelation of God, and for the comprehension of the inner meaning of the Law in the Messianic Age" (Levertoff, 1930, p. 15). Levertoff, in the same regard, also affirms: "The Messianic days are in which all Creation, even the very animal world, will know God as in the day before the Fall. The Messianic Revelation will be more perfect than that on Sinai" (Levertoff, 1923, p. 5). This observation of Levertoff, of course, is derived from prophetic texts of the Old Testament. For example, in the book of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11), we have a prophecy that contains such a message. In this chapter, Isaiah speaks of period in which the Messiah will reign over the whole earth and under whose dominion there will be "ideal conditions" (MacDonald, 2002, p. 862) of living. Commenting on this passage Paul Levertoff states: "The foundation of the Savior's Reign are right and righteousness. The basis of His kingdom is ethical. We hear nothing more of wars which he leads in order to subdue nations ... The scheme is the old one, but how transformed! The whole picture is put into a new sphere. The return of Paradise has a moral and spiritual motive, it comes because under the scepter of this Savior there is no wickedness more, but knowledge of God and fear of God" (Levrtoff, 1938, pp. 8-10)

The Messianic Era will be characterized by a world without wars, only peace (Fruchtenbaum, 2004, pp. 380-381). In the same vein as Levertoff, Walvoord states: "the government of Christ in the millennium will be that of righteousness and justice. Most of the millennial passajes emphasize this as the outstanding feature of the millennium" (Walvoord, 1959, pp. 301-302). Summarizing life in the Messianic Era, the Jew Arnold Fruchtenbaum states: "It will be time of universal and personal prosperity and peace between man and man, between animal and animal, and between man and animal, with many (but not all) of the effects of the curse removed" (Fruchtenbaum, 2004, p. 384). Baruch Korman shows that *tikkun olam* will be perfect in the Millennial Kingdom: "It is necessary to show that because of man's sin and because of His love for His creation, HaShem does what Judaism calls 'Tikkunim', a term whose direct meaning is 'to repair', but which is used with a much deeper

meaning. The concept of "Tikkun" has to do with God's redemptive work and all its implications" (Korman, 2020, p. 110).

This statement highlights a core idea in Jewish thought: that God responds to human sin not with abandonment, but with repair. "Tikkunim" (plural of *Tikkun*) refers not just to fixing what is broken, but to God's ongoing work to restore spiritual balance and bring the world closer to its intended state. It is an act of divine love and justice—intervening not only to correct, but to elevate. In this view, redemption is not a one-time event, but a continuous process driven by both divine action and human responsibility.

Conclusion

The discussion presented so far aimed to demonstrate that the hope of a better world can be true through Jesus the Messiah. In a world full of wars, famines, and plagues (Matthew 24: 6-7), where Christians and Jews are frequently targeted by acts of evil, the answer is the re-coming of Jesus into the world. When Jesus returns, he will establish the Kingdom of God, where He will be King and under whose rule creation will know prosperity from all points of view, material and spiritual. The first part of this analysis defined the concept of *tikkun olam* and the meaning behind this term, emphasizing the divine calling to participate in the repair of a fallen world. Through social and spiritual actions, we must bring creation into harmony with its Creator and into a better place to live. The second part examined how, through his first coming, Jesus brought the spiritual Kingdom of God to earth. The final part explored how, through the return of Jesus the Messiah, the world and creation will be restored in harmony with God.

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