

# Jewish Eschatology

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Until long after the exile, the Jewish people shared the view of the entire ancient world that the dead continue to exist in a shadowy realm of the nether world where they live a dull, ghostly existence. According to K. Kohler, ‘throughout the Biblical period no ethical idea yet permeated this conception, and no attempt was made to transform the nether world into a place of Divine judgment, of recompense for the good and evil deeds accomplished on earth.’<sup>1</sup> This was so because Biblical Judaism stressed the importance of attaining a complete and blissful life with God during earthly life. There was no need to transfer the purpose of existence to the Hereafter. In the words of R.H. Charles, ‘So long indeed as Yahweh’s jurisdiction was conceived as limited to this life, a Yahwistic eschatology of the individual could not exist; but when at last Israel reached the great truth of monotheism, the way was prepared for the moralisation of the future no less than that of the present.’<sup>2</sup> It was only then under social, economic and political oppression that pious Jews looked beyond their bitter disappointment with this world to a future beyond the grave when virtue would receive its due reward and vice its befitting punishment.<sup>3</sup> In the modern world, however, this traditional view has lost its hold on Jewish consciousness.

## The Biblical View of the Afterlife

Though there is no explicit reference to the Hereafter in the Hebrew Bible, a number of expressions are used to refer to the realm of the dead. In Psalms 28:1 and 88:5, ‘bor’ refers to a pit. In Psalm 6:6 as well as in Job 28:22 and 30:23, ‘mavet’ is used in a similar sense. In Psalm 22:16 the expression ‘afar mavet’ refers to the dust of death; in Exodus 15:2 and Jonah

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1. K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (New York, Ktav, 1968), 279.

2. R. H. Charles, “A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life” in *Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), 157.

3. Kohler, op. cit., 282.

2:7 the earth (*eretz*) is described as swallowing up the dead, and in Ezekiel 31:14 the expression ‘*eretz tachtit*’ refer to the nether parts of the earth where the dead dwell. Finally, the word ‘*she’ol*’ is frequently used to refer to the dwelling of the dead in the nether world.<sup>4</sup> In addition the words ‘*ge ben hinnom*’, ‘*ge hinnom*,’ and ‘*ge*’ are used to refer to a cursed valley associated with fire and death where, according to Jeremiah, children were sacrificed as burnt offerings to Moloch and Baal.<sup>5</sup> In later rabbinic literature the word ordinarily used for Hell (‘*Gehinnom*’) is derived from these names.

Though these passages point to a Biblical conception of an afterlife, there is no indication of a clearly defined concept. It is only later in the Graeco-Roman world that such a notion began to take shape. The notion of a future world in which the righteous will be compensated for the ills they suffered in this life was prompted by a failure to justify the ways of God by any other means. According to Biblical theodicy men were promised rewards for obeying God’s law and punishments were threatened for disobedience. Rewards including health, children, rainfall, a good harvest, peace and prosperity; punishments consisted of disease, war, pestilence, failure of crops, poverty and slavery. As time passed, however, it became clear that life did not operate in accordance with such a tidy scheme. In response to this dilemma the rabbis developed a doctrine of reward and punishment in the Hereafter. Such a belief helped Jews to cope with suffering in this life, and it also explained, if not the presence of evil in the world, then at least the worthwhileness of creation despite the world’s ills.<sup>6</sup>

### The Hereafter in Rabbinic Thought

Given that there is no explicit belief in eternal salvation in the Bible,<sup>7</sup> the rabbis of the post-Biblical period were faced with the difficulty of proving that the doctrine of resurrection of the dead is contained in Scripture, which they regarded as authoritative. To do this, they employed certain principles of exegesis which are based on the assumption that every word in the Pentateuch was transmitted by God to Moses. Thus, for example, R. Eleazar,

4. Ps 28:1; 88:5; Nu. 16:33, Ps. 6:6, Is. 38:18.

5. Jer. 7:31–32, 19:6; 32:35.

6. See L. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973).

7. See E. Jacob, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. ii (New York: Abington Press, 1962), 689; K. Kohler, op. cit., 392.

the son of R. Jose, claimed to have refuted the Sectarians who maintained that resurrection is not a Biblical doctrine: 'I said to them: You have falsified your Torah... For ye maintain that resurrection is not a Biblical doctrine, but it is written (in Num. 15:3ff), 'Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandments, that soul shall utterly be cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him. Now, seeing that he shall utterly be cut off in this world, when shall his iniquity be upon him? Surely in the next world.'<sup>8</sup>

Again, R. Meir asked, 'Whence do we know resurrection from the Torah?' From the verse, 'Then shall Moses and the children of Israel sing this song unto the Lord' (Ex. 15:1). Not 'sang', but 'sing' is written. Since Moses and the children of Israel did not sing a second time in this life, the text must mean that they will sing after resurrection. Likewise it is written, 'Then shall Joshua build an altar unto the Lord God of Israel (Joshua 8:30). Not 'build' but 'shall build' is stated. Thus resurrection is intimated in the Torah.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, R. Joshua b. Levi said: Where is resurrection derived from the Torah? From the verse, 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they shall ever praise thee.' (Ps. 84:5). The text does not say 'praised thee' but 'shall praise thee.' Thus we learn resurrection from the Torah.<sup>10</sup>

The principle qualification for entrance to Heaven (*Gan Eden*) is to lead a good life in accordance with God's law. Conversely, the rabbis point out that by disobeying God's law one forfeits a share in the World to Come and is doomed to eternal punishment in Hell ('*Gehinnom*').<sup>11</sup> According to the Mishnah there are various categories of sinners who will be damned: (1) He who says there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Torah; (2) He who says that the Torah is not from Heaven; (3) A heretic; (4) A reader of heretical books and one that utters a charm over a wound; (5) He who pronounces God's name by supplying vowels; (6) The generation of the flood; (7) The generation of Babel; (8) The men of Sodom; (9) The 12 spies; (10) The lost tribes; (11) The children of the wicked; (12) The people of an apostate city; (13) Those who have been executed by a rabbinical

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8. *San.* 90b.

9. *San.* 91b.

10. *Ibid.*

11. This was originally a valley near Jerusalem where Moloch was worshipped. See Jer. 7:31–32; 19:6; 32:35.

court unless they confessed their sins before death.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the discussion of these categories in the Babylonian Talmud and the remarks of sages elsewhere in rabbinic literature, Maimonides in his *Guide to the Perplexed* drew up a different list of those who have no share in Heaven which has been regarded by many as authoritative.

### The Nature of the Hereafter

The World to Come is itself divided into several stages: first, there is the time of Messianic redemption. According to the Babylonian Talmud, the Messianic Age ('*Yemot Hamashiah*') is to take place on earth after a period of decline and calamity and will result in a complete fulfillment of every human wish. Peace will reign throughout nature; Jerusalem will be rebuilt; and at the close of this era, the dead will be resurrected and rejoined with their souls, and a final judgment will come upon all humanity. Those who are judged righteous will enter into Heaven ('*Gan Eden*') which is portrayed in various ways in rabbinic literature.<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest descriptions is found in *Midrash Konen*, and the following extract is a representative sample of the type of elaboration in rabbinic sources:

The Gan Eden at the east measures 800 000 years (at ten miles per day or 3650 miles per year.) There are five chambers for various classes of the righteous. The first is built of cedar, with a ceiling of transparent crystal. This is the habitation of non-Jews who become true and devoted converts to Judaism. They are headed by Obadiah the prophet and Onkelos the proselyte, who teach them the Law. The second is built of cedar, with a ceiling of fine silver. This is the habitation of penitents, headed by Manasseh, King of Israel, who teaches them the Law. The third chamber is built of silver and gold, ornamented with pearls. It is very spacious, and contains the best of heaven and of earth, with spices, fragrance, and sweet odours. In the centre of this chamber stands the Tree of Life, 500 years high. Under its shadow rest Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the tribes, those of the Egyptian exodus, and those who died in the wilderness, headed by Moses and Aaron. There are also David and Solomon, crowned, and Chileab, as if living, attending on his father, David. Every generation of Israel is represented except that of Absalom and his confederates. Moses teaches them the Law, and Aaron gives instruction to the priests. The Tree of Life is like a ladder on which the

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12. See A. Super, *Immortality in the Babylonian Talmud* (unpublished Ph.D thesis, 1967), 103–8.

13. See A. Super, *op. cit.*

souls of the righteous may ascend and descend. In a conclave above are seated the Patriarchs, the Ten Martyrs, and those who sacrificed their lives for the cause of His Sacred Name. These souls descend daily to the Gan Eden, to join their families and tribes, where they lounge on soft cathedrals studded with jewels. Everyone, according to his excellence, is received in audience to praise and thank the Ever-living God; and all enjoy the brilliant light of the Shekinah. The flaming sword, changing from intense heat to icy cold, and from ice to glowing coals, guards the entrance against living mortals. The size of the sword is ten years. The souls on entering paradise are bathed in the 248 rivulets of balsam and attar. The fourth chamber is made of olive-wood and is inhabited by those who have suffered for the sake of their religion. Olives typify bitterness and in taste and brilliancy in light (olive-oil), symbolizing persecution and its reward. The fifth chamber is built of precious stones, gold and silver, surrounded by myrrh and aloes. In front of the chamber runs the river Gihon, on whose banks are planted shrubs affording perfume and aromatic incense. There are couches of gold and silver and fine drapery. This chamber is inhabited by the Messiah of David, Elijah, and the Messiah of Ephraim. In the centre are a canopy made of the cedars of Lebanon, in the style of the Tabernacle, with posts and vessels of silver; in a settee of Lebanon wood with pillars of silver and a seat of gold, the covering thereof of purple. Within rests the Messiah, son of David, 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief' suffering, and waiting to release Israel from exile. Elijah comforts and encourages him to be patient. Every Monday and Thursday, and Sabbath and on holy days the Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, and others, call on the Messiah and console him, in the hope of the fast-approaching end.<sup>14</sup>

As with Heaven, we also find extensive and detailed descriptions of Hell in Jewish literature. In the Babylonian Talmud, R. Joshua b. Levi deduces the divisions of Hell from Biblical quotations: *she'ol*, *abaddon*, *be'er shahat*, *bor sha'on*, *tit ha-hawen*, *zel mawet* and *erez ha-tahtit*. This Talmudic concept of the seven-fold structure of Hell is greatly elaborated in midrashic literature. According to one source it requires 300 years to traverse the height or width or the depth of each division, and it would take 6300 years to go over a tract of land equal in extent to the seven divisions.<sup>15</sup> Each of these seven divisions of Hell is in turn divided into seven subdivisions and in each compartment there are seven rivers of fire, and seven of hail. The width of each is 1000 ells, its depth 1000, and its length 300; they flow from each other and are supervised by the Angels of Destruction. Besides, in each compartment there are 7000 caves, and in each cave there are 7000

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14. Ibid., 191–3.

15. *Erubin*, 19a

crevices, and in every crevice there are 7000 scorpions. Every scorpion has 300 rings, and in every ring 7000 pouches of venom from which flow seven rivers of deadly poison. If a man handles it, he immediately bursts, every limb is torn from his body, his bowels are cleft, and he falls upon his face.<sup>16</sup>

Confinement to Hell is the result of disobeying God's Torah as is illustrated by the midrash concerning the evening visit of the soul to Hell before it is implanted in an individual. There it sees the Angels of Destruction smiting with fiery scourges: the sinners all the while crying out, but no mercy is shown to them. The angel guides the soul and then asks: 'Do you know who these are?' Unable to respond the soul listens as the angel continues: 'Those who are consumed with fire were created like you. When they were put into the world, they did not observe God's Torah and His commandments. Therefore they have come to this disgrace which you see them suffer. Know, your destiny is also to depart from the world. Be just, therefore, and not wicked, that you may gain the future world.'<sup>17</sup>

The soul was not alone in being able to see Hell: a number of Biblical personages entered into its midst. Moses, for example, was guided through Hell by an angel, and his journey there gives us the most complete picture of its torments:

When Moses and the Angel of Hell entered Hell together, they saw men being tortured by the Angels of Destruction. Some sinners were suspended by their hands, and some by their tongues. In addition, women were suspended by their hair and their breasts by chains of fire. Such punishments were inflicted on the basis of the sins that were committed: those who hung by their eyes had looked lustfully upon their neighbours' wives and possessions; those who hung by their ears had listened to empty and vain speech and did not listen to the Torah; those who hung by their tongues had spoken foolishly and slanderously; those who hung by their hands had robbed and murdered their neighbours. The women who hung by their hair and breasts had uncovered them in the presence of young men in order to seduce them.<sup>18</sup>

In another place, called Alukah, Moses saw sinners suspended by their feet with their heads downward and their bodies covered with long black

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16. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968), Vol. I, 15.

17. Ibid., 57–8.

18. Ibid., Vol. II, 310–13.

worms. These sinners were punished in this way because they swore falsely, profaned the Sabbath and the Holy Days, despised the sages, called their neighbours by unseemly nicknames, wronged the orphan and the widow, and bore false witness.

In another section Moses saw sinners prone on their faces with 2000 scorpions lashing, stinging, and tormenting them. Each of these scorpions had 70,000 heads, each head 70,000 mouths, each mouth 70,000 stings, and each sting 70,000 pouches of poison and venom. So great was the pain they inflicted that the eyes of the sinners melted in their sockets. These sinners were punished in this way because they had robbed other Jews, were arrogant in the community, put their neighbours to shame in public, delivered their fellow Jews into the hands of the gentiles, denied the Torah, and maintained that God is not the creator of the world.

In another place, called *Tit ha-Yawen*, sinners stood in mud up to their navels while Angels of Destruction lashed them with fiery chains, and broke their teeth with fiery stones. These sinners were punished in this way because they had eaten forbidden food, lent their money at usury, had written the name of God on amulets for gentiles, used false weights, stolen money from fellow Jews, eaten on the Day of Atonement, and drank blood.

Finally, after seeing these tortures, Moses observed how sinners were burnt in the section of Hell called *Abaddon*. There one-half of their bodies were immersed in fire and the other half in snow while worms bred in their own flesh crawled over them and the Angels of Destruction beat them incessantly. By stealth these sinners took snow and put it in their armpits to relieve the pain inflicted by the scorching fire. These sinners were punished because they had committed incest, murder, idolatry, called themselves gods, and cursed their parents and teachers.

From this description it might appear that Hell is reserved for those Jews who have disobeyed the Mosaic law. Such exclusivism, however, was refuted throughout rabbinic literature. For example, in *Midr. Prov. R. Joshua* explained that gentiles are doomed to eternal punishment unless they are righteous.<sup>19</sup> Asked how a man can escape the judgment of Hell, he replied, 'Let him occupy himself with good deeds, and he pointed out that this applies to gentiles as well as Jews.

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19. *Midr. Prov.*, XVII, 1, 42b.

Of course, gentiles were not expected to keep all of Jewish law in order to escape Hell; they were simply required to keep the Noachide Laws, that is, those laws which Noah and his descendants took upon themselves. The violation of such laws was regarded by the rabbis as repugnant to fundamental human morality, quite apart from revelation, and was a basis for confinement to Hell. In *Gen. R.*, Noah 34:8, for example, we read that ‘The sons of Noah were given seven commands: in respect of (1) idolatry, (2) incest, (3) shedding of blood, (4) profanation of the Name of God, (5) justice, (6) robbery, (7) cutting off flesh or limb from a living animal. R. Hanina said: Also about taking blood from a living animal. R. Elazar said: Also about “diverse kinds” and mixtures (Lev. 19:19). R. Simeon said: Also about witchcraft. R. Johanan b. Baroka said: Also about castration (of animals). R. Assi said: Everything forbidden in Deut. 18:10,11 was also forbidden to the sons of Noah, because it says, ‘whoever does these things is an abomination unto the Lord’.’ Nevertheless, despite this disagreement, a gentile who lived a sinful life by violating the Noachide laws was destined to be punished in Hell, and conversely, if he lived in accordance with them, he could gain entry into the World to Come.<sup>20</sup>

This eschatological scheme, which was formulated over the centuries by innumerable rabbis, should not be seen as a flight of fancy. It was a serious attempt to explain God’s ways to man. Israel was God’s chosen people and had received God’s promise of reward for keeping his law. Since this did not happen on earth in this life, the rabbis believed it must occur in the World to Come. Never did the rabbis relinquish the belief that God would justify Israel by destroying the power of oppressing nations. This would come about in the Messianic Age. The individual who had died without seeing the justification of God would be resurrected to see the ultimate victory of the Jewish people. And just as the nations would be judged in the period of Messianic redemption, so would each individual. In this way the vindication of the righteous was assured in the Hereafter.

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20. There were some rabbis who proclaimed that God consigns gentiles en masse to Hell. See C. G. Montefirote and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1974), XCIII.

## The Decline of Rabbinic Eschatology

On the basis of this scheme of eternal salvation and damnation—which was at the heart of rabbinic theology throughout the centuries—it might be expected that modern Jewish theologians of all shades of religious observance and opinion would attempt to explain contemporary Jewish history in the context of traditional eschatology. This, however, has not happened: instead many Jewish writers have set aside doctrines concerning Messianic redemption, resurrection, final judgment, and reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. This shift in emphasis is in part due to the fact that the views expressed in the narrative sections of the midrashim and the Talmud are not binding. As mentioned, all Jews are obliged to accept the Divine origin of the Law but this is not so with regard to theological concepts and theories expounded by the rabbis. Thus it is possible for a Jew to be religiously pious without accepting all the central beliefs of mainstream Judaism. Indeed throughout Jewish history there has been widespread confusion as to what these beliefs are. In the first century BCE, for example, the sage Hillel stated that the quintessence of Judaism could be formulated in a single principle: ‘that which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole of the Law; all the rest is commentary.’<sup>21</sup> Similarly in the second century CE, the Council of Lydda ruled that under certain circumstances the laws of the Torah may be transgressed in order to save one’s life, with the exception of idolatry, murder and unchastity.<sup>22</sup>

In both these cases the centre of gravity was in the ethical rather than the religious sphere. However, in the medieval period Maimonides formulated what he considered to be the 13 principles of the Jewish faith.<sup>23</sup> Other thinkers though challenged this formulation. Hasdai Crescas, Simon ben Zemah Duran, Joseph Albo and Isaac Arami elaborated different creeds, and some thinkers, like David ben Solomon Ibn Abi Zimrah argued that it is impossible to isolate from the whole Torah essential principles of the

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21. *Shabb.* 31a.

22. *Sanh.* 74a.

23. (1) The existence of God; (2) the unity of God; (3) the incorporeality of God; (4) the eternity of God; (5) God alone is to be worshipped; (6) prophecy; (7) Moses is the greatest of the prophets; (8) the divinity of the Torah; (9) the inalterability of the Torah; (10) the omniscience of God; (11) reward and punishment; (12) the Messiah; (13) the resurrection of the dead.

Jewish faith. He wrote: 'I do not agree that it is right to make any part of the perfect Torah into a 'principle' since the whole Torah is a 'principle' from the mouth of the Almighty.'<sup>24</sup> Thus when formulations of the central theological tenets of Judaism were propounded, they were not universally accepted since they were simply the opinions of individual teachers. Without a central authority whose opinion in theological matters was binding on all Jews, it has become impossible to determine the correct theological beliefs in Judaism. In the words of Solomon Schechter, 'any attempt at an orderly and complete system of rabbinic theology is an impossible task.'<sup>25</sup>

Given that there is no authoritative bedrock of Jewish theology, many modern Jewish thinkers have felt fully justified in abandoning the various elements of traditional rabbinic eschatology which they regard as untenable. The doctrine of Messianic redemption, for example, has been radically modified. In the last century Reform Jews tended to interpret the new liberation in the Western world as the first step towards the realization of the Messianic dream. But Messianic redemption was understood in this-worldly terms. No longer, according to this view, was it necessary for Jews to pray for a restoration in *Eretz Israel* (Palestine); rather they should view their own countries as Zion and their political leaders as bringing about the Messianic age. Secular Zionists, on the other hand, saw the return to Israel as the legitimate conclusion to be drawn from the realities of Jewish life in Western countries, thereby viewing the State of Israel as a substitute for the Messiah himself. As Louis Jacobs notes, 'most modern Jews prefer to interpret the Messianic hope in naturalistic terms, abandoning the belief in a personal messiah, the restoration of the sacrificial system, and to a greater or lesser degree, the idea of direct Divine intervention.'<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead has in modern times been largely replaced in both Orthodox and non-Orthodox Judaism by the belief in the immortality of the soul. The original belief in a resurrection was an eschatological hope bound up with the rebirth of the nation in the days of the messiah, but as this Messianic concept faded into the background so also did this doctrine. For most Jews physical resurrection is simply

24. Responsum No. 344 as quoted by L. Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1964), 24.

25. S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 16.

26. L. Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1964), 388–9.

inconceivable in the light of a scientific understanding of the nature of the world. The late British Chief Rabbi, J. H. Hertz, for example, argued that what really matters is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Thus he wrote: 'Many and various are the folk beliefs and poetical fancies in the rabbinical writings concerning Heaven, Gan Eden, and Hell, Gehinnom. Our most authoritative religious guides, however, proclaim that no eye hath seen, nor can mortal fathom, what awaiteth us in the Hereafter; but that even the tarnished soul will not forever be denied spiritual bliss.'<sup>27</sup>

In the Reform community a similar attitude prevails. In a well-known statement of the beliefs of Reform Judaism, it is recorded that Reform Jews 'reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding this belief on the Divine nature of the human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism the belief in bodily resurrection and in Ghenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for eternal punishment or reward.'<sup>28</sup> The point to note about the conception of the immortal soul in both Orthodox and Reform Judaism is that it is dissociated from traditional notions of Messianic redemption and Divine judgment.

The belief in eternal punishment has also been discarded by a large number of Jews partly because of the interest in penal reform during the past century. Punishment as retaliation in a vindictive sense has been generally rejected. Thus Jacobs writes, 'the value of punishment as a deterrent and for the protection of society is widely recognised. But all the stress today is on the reformatory aspects of punishment. Against such a background the whole question of reward and punishment in the theological sphere is approached in a more questioning spirit.'<sup>29</sup> Further, the rabbinic view of Hell is seen by many as morally repugnant. Jewish theologians have stressed that it is a delusion to believe that a God of love could have created a place of eternal punishment. In his commentary on the prayerbook, Hertz categorically declared, 'Judaism rejects the doctrine of eternal damnation.'<sup>30</sup> And in Jewish Theology the Reform rabbi K. Kohler, argued that the question

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27. J. H. Hertz, *Commentary to the Prayerbook*, 255.

28. W. G. Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965), 34.

29. L. Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith*, 364.

30. As quoted by L. Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith*, 415.

whether the tortures of Hell are reconcilable with Divine mercy ‘is for us superfluous and superseded. Our modern conceptions of time and space admit neither a place nor a world-period for the reward and punishment of souls, nor the intolerable conception of eternal joy without useful action and eternal agony without any moral purpose.<sup>31</sup>

Traditional rabbinic eschatology has thus lost its force for a large number of Jews in the modern period, and in consequence there has been a gradual this-world emphasis in Jewish thought. Significantly, this has been accompanied by a powerful attachment to the State of Israel. For many Jews the founding of the Jewish State is the central focus of their religious and cultural identity. Jews throughout the world have deep admiration for the astonishing achievements of Israelis in reclaiming the desert and building a viable society, and great respect for the heroism of Israel’s soldiers and statesmen. As a result it is not uncommon for Jews to equate Jewishness with Zionism, and to see Judaism as fundamentally nationalistic in character—this is a far cry from the rabbinic view of history which placed the doctrine of the Hereafter at the centre of Jewish life and thought.

## Conclusion

We can see therefore that the wheel has swung full circle from the faint allusions to immortality in the Biblical period which led to an elaborate development of the concept of the Hereafter in rabbinic Judaism. Whereas the rabbis put the belief in an afterlife at the centre of their religious system, modern Jewish thinkers—both Orthodox and Reform—have abandoned such an otherworldly outlook, even to the point of denying the existence of such doctrines. It may be that these concepts are outmoded and should be abandoned in the light of contemporary thought, but there is no doubt that such a development raises major problems for Judaism in the modern age. The belief in the Hereafter has helped Jews make sense of the world as a creation of a good and all-powerful God and provided a source of great consolation for their travail on earth. Without the promise of Messianic redemption, resurrection and the eventual vindication of the righteous in Paradise, Jews will face great difficulties reconciling the belief in a providential God who watches over his chosen people with the terrible

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31. K. Kohler, *op. cit.*, 309.

events of modern Jewish history. If there is no eschatological unfolding of a Divine drama in which Jewish victims will ultimately triumph, what hope can there be for the Righteous of Israel who have suffered for their convictions?