

Article

The Savior Narrative: A Comparative Study of the Messiah in Early Judaism and Maitreya in Buddhism

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Abstract: This paper explores the savior narratives of the Messiah in early Judaism and Maitreya in Buddhism focusing on the structural and thematic similarities between the two savior figures. Through an analysis of the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and Buddhist texts such as *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya) and *Anāgata-vamśa* (The History of the Future), the study examines four key elements of these narratives: the bestowal of the savior's divine identity, the tribulations of the end times, the fulfillment of the savior's mission and the role of "virtuous individuals" in redemption. The research highlights how both saviors are portrayed as future redeemers tasked with guiding humanity to redemption, while also emphasizing the moral requirements for believers in both religions. Specifically, the analysis reveals a "dual-redemption paradigm", wherein both the savior's mission and the moral actions of followers are essential to achieving redemption. The study also examines the balance between the divine and secular aspects within the narrative structure, illustrating how historical figures have manipulated these narratives for political and social gains. This research aims to deepen the understanding of savior traditions in Judaism and Buddhism, foster inter-religious dialogue, and contribute to comparative religious philosophy.

Keywords: Messiah; Maitreya; savior narrative; comparative religion; dual-redemption paradigm



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1. Introduction

The term "savior" originates from the Latin word "salvātor" meaning "to rescue or save someone/something from danger, failure, loss, etc." (Crowther 1995, p. 1044). Ancient humans, constrained by their limited capabilities, frequently sought supernatural assistance. This need became especially pronounced when they faced the overwhelming forces of nature and other uncontrollable events. The apparent endlessness of human suffering fostered the belief that only a savior could bring an end to this misery. Consequently, the eschatological and apocalyptic concepts in the world's major religions led to the belief that a brighter, happier millennium (as portrayed in the Biblical Book of Revelation) would replace the current age of suffering (Dinh 2024, p. 73). The more difficult life became, the more people longed for the arrival of a savior. In Christianity, the figure of Jesus Christ;¹ in Islam, the Mahdi;² in Hinduism, Kalki;³ and even in Zoroastrianism, Saoshyant,⁴ each represent the concept of the savior within their respective religious traditions.

In the influential Jewish tradition, which has deeply shaped Western civilization, the idea of the "Messiah" continues to be frequently used as a synonym for a savior. According to most dictionaries and encyclopedias, the Messiah is defined as "a person who is expected to come and save the world" (Crowther 1995, p. 733). The word "Messiah" is derived from the Hebrew word "מָשִׁיחַ" (Mashiach) meaning "the anointed one". It originally referred to monarchs and priests anointed with oil in ancient Jewish practices, signifying them as agents of God. When discussing the origins of the Messianic concept, many scholars have noted similar practices in neighboring cultures, such as Babylon, Egypt, Hittite, and Canaan. These classical texts indicate that anointing with holy oil during investiture ceremonies was a common practice

across many regions of the ancient Near East and North Africa. This ritual was intended not only to sanctify the person assuming office (Fleming 1992, p. 42), but also to endow them with extraordinary powers, authority, reputation, and glory (Klingbeil 2000, pp. 237–40). However, the Messianic consciousness in these cultures was often shaped by their early polytheistic contexts. As a result, it exhibited relatively primitive characteristics regarding the Messiah's role, mission, goals, methods, and functions (Perkins 1985, p. 630). Thus, the most canonical concept of the Messiah is best sought within the biblical texts.

The concept of the Messiah varies significantly across different books of the Hebrew Bible, making it difficult to identify a universally applicable archetype. Generally speaking, three distinct Messianic figures have been shaped in different periods: The Earthly Leader Messiah of the pre-monarchical and monarchical periods, the Ideal King Messiah around the time of the exile, and the Eschatological Redeemer Messiah of the Hellenistic period (Liang 2006, p. 73). The last is considered the most canonical form of the Messianic idea, described as “a future noble figure sent by God who will save God's people and the world, establishing a kingdom characterized by justice and righteousness” (Rose 2000, p. 23). In addition to the Hebrew Bible, the Babylonian Talmud contains extensive discussions about the Messianic era, which have significantly contributed to the development of the Jewish Messianic concept.

In Buddhism, a major Eastern religion, there is a similar savior-like figure known as Maitreya, the future Buddha. Before attaining parinirvāṇa (final nirvana), Śākyamuni Buddha prophesied several times that Maitreya would become a Buddha in the future. Some Mahayana Buddhist scriptures,⁵ such as the *Ekottara Āgama* (增壹阿含經 translated into Chinese by Samghadeva), the *Sūtra on Maitreya's Descent* (佛說彌勒下生成佛經 translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva), and the *Buddha Pronounces the Sūtra of Maitreya Bodhisattva's Attainment of Buddhahood* (佛說彌勒大成佛經 also translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva), detail Maitreya's future role in leading beings to salvation.⁶ In the Theravada Buddhist texts,⁷ while records of Maitreya's future Buddhahood exist, a comprehensive account is lacking. The only detailed narrative is found in the Pali text, *Anāgata-vamṣa* (The History of the Future), attributed to Kassapa from South India in the late 12th century, which describes Maitreya's entire journey from his descent to Buddhahood to his final nirvana.⁸

These Buddhist texts differ slightly in their structure and certain details, but they share a common narrative: Maitreya will descend to the human world in the distant future, renounce worldly life, attain enlightenment, lead many beings to salvation, and finally enter nirvana. Some scholars believe that these textual differences arise from their different transmission lineages (Wang 2010, pp. 51–52). Nonetheless, these texts collectively form the “Maitreya Descent” series, which together construct the Buddhist narrative of a future savior.

Through the examples provided, we can see that the concept of a savior is widespread across many religions and cultures. This makes the savior theme a broad and interdisciplinary field of study. However, a review of existing academic research reveals that much of the focus has been on the discussion of the savior within a single religious tradition,⁹ while inter-religious studies are relatively scarce. The inter-religious study of saviors has primarily focused on comparisons within monotheistic religions (for example, Judaism and Christianity, Christianity and Islam) or between Eastern and Western religions, predominantly Buddhism and Christianity. Additionally, there have been some comparative studies on the savior figures in Buddhism and Manichaeism, as well as Islam (Azimi 2023; Kamada 2013b).

This paper compares the savior narratives in the canonical texts of Judaism and Buddhism, examining the structural and thematic similarities between them. In terms of source selection, the Jewish section primarily focuses on the Hebrew Bible, with additional references to the Babylonian Talmud. The Buddhist section centers on the English translation of the Sanskrit manuscript, *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya), supplemented by the English translation of the Pali text, *Anāgata-vamṣa* (The History of the Future).¹⁰ This study explores the dual-redemption paradigm in both Judaism and Buddhism, highlighting how the active roles of both the savior and the adherents contribute to the realization of redemption. The research concentrates on the mechanisms of redemption

in these two major religions, aiming to reveal their similarities in narrative structure and religious ethics, rather than investigating the origins or similarities between the Messiah and Maitreya, or other savior figures in different religions. By examining this dual-redemption model, the paper deepens the understanding of Judaism and Buddhism and fosters inter-religious dialogue. This study contributes to the enrichment of religious philosophy and supports cross-cultural communication and religious tolerance in a globalized context, carrying significant contemporary relevance.

2. The Bestowal of the Savior's Divine Identity

The idea of the Eschatological Redeemer Messiah in Judaism emerged after the destruction of the Second Temple. This was a period when Jews in the diaspora began to express a longing for the early prosperous days of the Jewish kingdom. During this period, Jewish rabbis extensively discussed the Messiah, focusing primarily on interpretations and elaborations of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and other related texts. For instance, the prophet Jeremiah conveyed the oracle of God Yahweh, saying:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 23:5–6)¹¹

God also spoke to David through the prophet Nathan, saying:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me... Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:12–16)

In these verses, it is evident that God made a promise to David that his throne will be perpetuated through his descendants. The majority of Jewish scholars posit that this descendant is the future Messiah.¹² The Messiah is considered a descendant of the Davidic line because he is chosen by Yahweh according to the "covenant" established between God and the House of David. The Hebrew word for "covenant" is בְּרִית (berit), which refers to a solemn promise with a strong binding force for both parties involved. It encompasses all forms of social interactions and agreements, whether between individuals or between God and humans. In the English Bible tradition, the term "covenant" is specifically used to refer to a divine-human "berit", while words like "agreement", "alliance", "compact", "league", and "treaty" are used for other types of contracts. In the Bible, eight covenants are made between God and humanity. These include the Edenic Covenant, the Adamic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Palestinian Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant (Fruchtenbaum 2011). The coming of the Messiah can be seen as the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. Judaism places great importance on the concept of the covenant because it signifies the special relationship between God and the Jewish people. This relationship is established through several covenants made between God and the ancestors of the Jewish nation. As in the Book of Exodus:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. (Exodus 19:5–6)

This passage clearly shows God's intention in choosing Israel as His people and explains both the responsibilities and promises of the covenant. Through this covenant, Israel is endowed with a sacred mission: to become a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation" (Weinfeld 1993, p. 32).

The concept of the covenant holds profound divine significance in the Bible, since it represents a sacred agreement between God and humanity, particularly between God and the people of Israel. Since God is holy, omnipotent, and eternal, the covenants He establishes are also imbued with sanctity. Isaiah 6:3 is often regarded as one of the key verses that best embodies God's holiness. This verse describes the prophet Isaiah's vision in the temple, where he saw Yahweh seated on a high and exalted throne, surrounded by angels who continuously cried out: "And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" The threefold repetition of "holy" powerfully underscores God's holiness, surpassing all else, and further emphasizes His uniqueness and supreme divinity. The title "LORD of hosts" indicates that God is the ruler and commander of the universe, with all power and authority under His control. The declaration that God's glory fills the whole earth underscores His omnipresence and transcendent divinity.¹³

Thus, much of Jewish theology and historical development centers around the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. The covenant is regarded as a part of a divine promise. Through the "Davidic Covenant", God directly grants legitimacy and authority to the Messiah's identity, simultaneously proclaiming the Messiah's divinity to all Israel. In Buddhism, the identity of Maitreya is derived from the "vyākaraṇa" by Śākyamuni Buddha, which endows Maitreya with the mission to guide sentient beings towards liberation. For instance, the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya), begins with Śāriputra, one of the Śākyamuni's Buddha ten principal disciples, asking the Buddha to speak about the future advent of Maitreya:

Out of pity for all the worlds, the very wise Śāriputra, universal commander of the doctrine, asked the teacher this:

"Within the earlier and later discourses, you have taught about Maitreya, the future Buddha who will serve as leader of the world. O best of men, please explain in detail everything about him including his powers as well as his supernormal abilities. We indeed wish to hear about this leader." (Grove 2021, pp. 6–7)

From Śāriputra's words, it is evident that the Śākyamuni Buddha had previously mentioned multiple times to his disciples that Maitreya would descend in the future to attain Buddhahood. Unlike ordinary discussions or teachings, the Buddha's predictions about the future are referred to as "vyākaraṇa (授記)". The events foretold in a "vyākaraṇa" are destined to occur. The content of such prophecies typically includes significant future accomplishments of an individual, such as becoming a Buddha or ruling the world as a Cakravartin (Wheel-turning King, the ideal universal ruler). In Buddhism, the significance of "vyākaraṇa" is highlighted by the numerous Jātaka tales (the birth stories of Śākyamuni in past lives). The Buddha's eventual enlightenment was not only the result of continuous practice and gradual accumulation over past lives but because he had received a "vyākaraṇa" from Kāśyapa Buddha (the last Buddha before the historical Gautama Buddha), predicting his future Buddhahood:

Now, Ānanda, the Tathāgata Dīpaṃkara proclaimed the Tathāgata Sarvābhībhū. Sarvābhībhū proclaimed Padumuttara... Viśvabhū proclaimed Krakucchanda. Krakucchanda proclaimed Konākamuni. Konākamuni proclaimed Kāśyapa. Kāśyapa proclaimed Śākyamuni. (Jones 1956, p. 230)

The above citation indicates that the Buddha's prophecy of the next Buddha before his passing is a tradition deeply rooted in Buddhist belief. In the past, Kāśyapa Buddha predicted that Śākyamuni would become a Buddha in the Saha world (the world of endurance), and now Śākyamuni Buddha foretells that Maitreya will descend to this world and attain Buddhahood in the future. This tradition of successive prophecies is analogous to the succession of a worldly throne. As stated in the Sectarial Buddhist text *Mahāvastu* (Great Event): "Exalted Buddhas do not pass away until they have anointed an heir to the throne" (Jones 1949, p. 52). Therefore, the "vyākaraṇa" in Buddhism is considered a sacred prophecy that is destined to be fulfilled, serving as the means of passing on the identity of the highest enlightened being.

The sacredness of “vyākaraṇa” stems from the fact that it is a prophecy made by the Buddha. In Buddhism, the Buddha is regarded as the highest enlightened being in the world, possessing unparalleled wisdom and immense merit, enabling him to perceive all things and deliver sentient beings from suffering. As the supreme saint, the Buddha, is unique. Just as a country can have only one king, a world cannot have more than one Buddha at a time. As stated in the *Madhyama Āgama* (中阿含經 Middle-Length Discourses):

Ānanda, it is not possible for there to be two wheel-turning monarchs ruling in the world at the same time; but it is certainly possible for there to be one wheel-turning monarch ruling in the world.

Ānanda, it is not possible for there to be two tathāgatas in the world at the same time; but it is certainly possible for there to be one tathāgata in the world. (阿難！若世中有二轉輪王並治者，終無是處，若世中有一轉輪王治者，必有是處。阿難！若世中有二如來者，終無是處，若世中有一如來者，必有是處。) (Anālayo and Bucknell 2022, p. 464)

Therefore, the Buddha’s “vyākaraṇa” can be easily understood as analogous to the passing of a throne by a king. Since Maitreya is destined to become the highest enlightened being in the future world, his wisdom will be identical to that of Śākyamuni Buddha, who is currently imparting teachings to disciples like Śāriputra. Thus, the sacredness of Maitreya Buddha will be indistinguishable from that of Śākyamuni Buddha. Through the “vyākaraṇa” and his descriptions of future events, Śākyamuni Buddha announces to all Buddhist followers that the future Maitreya Buddha will possess the same divine nature as himself.

The sacredness of the Messiah in Judaism stems from the “covenant” between God and the people of Israel, while the sacredness of the yet-to-descend Maitreya arises from the “vyākaraṇa” made by Śākyamuni Buddha. Since God or the Buddha is a sacred being, the narrative of the Messiah or Maitreya suggests that the description of the savior indicates that this actual divine nature will be manifested in the future world through another necessary individual.¹⁴ Moreover, this individual, as the Messiah or Maitreya, must possess complete agency in order to fulfill the mission of saving the world.

3. The Tribulations of the End Times

The concept of the Messiah is not only central to Jewish faith but shapes a vivid expectation for the future. Eschatology, as an expression of Jewish Messianism, involves more than abstract doctrine; it represents a hope for human redemption, especially within specific historical contexts. The prophecies of the Hebrew Bible’s prophets are rooted in divine revelation, but also reflect the suffering and despair they witnessed in their own time. For instance, in *Isaiah*:

Now the LORD is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word. (Isaiah 24:1–3)

The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. (Isaiah 24:19–20)

These passages vividly illustrate the destructive and chaotic nature of the end times, where both the earth and its inhabitants are depicted as enduring severe calamity and devastation. This portrayal starkly contrasts with the hopeful vision of a renewed future found in the Book of Isaiah,

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem,

and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. (Isaiah 65:17–19)

Despite the grim depictions in the earlier chapters of Isaiah, a later passage emphasizes the coming of a “new heavens and a new earth”, along with the joy that will be found in God’s newly created Jerusalem. This suggests a future era of happiness where suffering and lamentation will cease. The vision reflects both the expectation of a renewed world and God’s promises of redemption and restoration. Through its portrayal of end-time suffering, the scriptures highlight the significant disasters and upheavals that must be endured, while also foreshadowing ultimate redemption and renewal. Such a perspective underscores the importance of the Messianic age’s arrival.

In medieval Judaism, the concept of the Messiah became closely intertwined with the domain of Halakha (Jewish law). During this period, the divine perspective evolved beyond merely revealing isolated historical events or apocalyptic visions to the prophets. Instead, it provided a comprehensive understanding of history as a whole, particularly in relation to the advent of a new era. This broadened perspective allowed the emerging eschatology to transcend earlier revelations (Scholem 1995, p. 44). As a result, the Messiah assumed a dual character: one that honors the ancient promises and traditions while also emerging within a new interpretive framework. This duality is reflected in Messianism’s focus on both utopian ideals and the catastrophic, destructive aspects of redemption.

Jewish Messianism, in its origins and essence, is fundamentally apocalyptic. This theory emphasizes revolutionary and catastrophic elements, which are often associated with the birth or destruction of the Messiah (Scholem 1995, p. 47). In the Talmud, the phrase “Hevlei Mashiach” (the birth pangs of the Messiah) is used to describe the state of the world before the Messianic age. This period is depicted as one of extreme difficulty and turmoil, marked by significant moral decline, chaos, and suffering. The Talmud (particularly in *Sanhedrin* 97a and *Sotah* 49b) details a series of specific end-time scenarios, including:

3.1. The Breakdown of Family Relationships and Discord

In the generation when the son of David comes ... the son will disgrace his father, the daughter will rise up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. (Sanhedrin 97a)

The Talmud describes a time of profound societal upheaval preceding the arrival of the Messiah. Among the most striking images of this period is the breakdown of relationships within the family, particularly between parents and children, and between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This familial discord symbolizes the collapse of the fundamental social unit—the family—during the turbulent times leading up to the Messianic era. The breakdown of family relationships not only reflects the decline of individual and social morals but signifies the collapse of fundamental social order. This internal chaos further extends to the economic sphere, inevitably exacerbating economic crises and poverty in the end times.

3.2. The Spread of Economic Crisis and Poverty

In the footsteps of the Messiah ... the face of the generation will be like the face of dog, and poverty will increase greatly. (Sotah 49b)

The Talmud describes the pre-Messianic era as a time of severe economic turmoil where poverty will be widespread. People will struggle to make ends meet, and the collapse of the economic system will make life extraordinarily difficult. This material hardship will define the period leading up to the Messiah’s arrival, highlighting the severe conditions humanity will face before the anticipated redemption.

3.3. The Collapse of Political and Social Order

In the generation when the son of David (the Messiah) comes, the house of assembly will be for prostitution, Galilee will be destroyed, Galban will be desolate, and the men of the borders will go from city and will receive no pity. (Sanhedrin 97a)

In the context of Judaism, synagogues — normally sacred symbols of morality — are compared to brothels amid the chaos of the end times. This comparison symbolizes the corruption of religious institutions and the complete collapse of faith and moral standards. The destruction of the Galilee and Golan regions reflects not only physical devastation but the disintegration of cultural and social structures. The plight of border residents, abandoned to wander without compassion, highlights the deepening internal divisions within society and the erosion of interpersonal relationships. The collapse of political and social order not only brings about external chaos, but also triggers a widespread questioning of morals and values. As these cornerstones disintegrate, society further descends into disorder, laying the groundwork for a deeper crisis of faith.

3.4. The Abandonment of Truth

The truth will be absent, and the face of the generation will be like the face of dog. (Sanhedrin 97a)

In the footsteps of the Messiah, arrogance will increase and prices will rise. The vine will yield its fruit, yet wine will be expensive. The government will turn to heresy, and there will be no rebuke. The meeting place of scholars will be used for immorality. (Sotah 49b)

Truth will no longer be valued, and instead, falsehood and deception will dominate. The centers of knowledge and education will succumb to corruption, becoming breeding grounds for immoral behavior. This decline signifies the fall of intellectual and moral systems, leading to the collapse of the very pillars that sustain society's spiritual and intellectual integrity.

These prophecies illustrate the complete breakdown of moral, economic, and political order preceding the Messianic era. Although the chaos and suffering are profound, they herald the advent of new life and hope, symbolizing the dawn of the Messianic age. In Jewish eschatology, the catastrophic nature of redemption is a defining feature, which ultimately gives way to the utopian vision of the Messianic era (Scholem 1995, p. 47).

Unlike the apocalyptic vision in Judaism, the future world foretold by Śākyamuni Buddha, where Maitreya will appear, is depicted as a place of great beauty and peace. As stated in the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya):

Also at that time the people of that country will indeed flourish, and their wealth will be without end. They will cause no harm and be virtuous.

The earth will be free from thorns and level, with verdant plains. Rising and falling according to one's needs, the ground will be soft like cotton.

Sweet and fragrant rice will grow that requires no cultivation. Trees will grow that produce beautiful cloth of various colors.

And the trees will be a league wide, loaded with leaves, flowers and fruit, and in those days their lifespan will be 80,000 years.

The beings there will be faultless, sinless, joyful, and full of life. They will be tall in stature with a beautiful complexion and have great strength. (Grove 2021, p. 7)

In the future world described in the scriptures, the earth will be abundant in resources, eliminating the need for labor and effortlessly meeting people's needs for food and clothing. Additionally, human lifespans will be extraordinarily long. The *Anāgata-vamśa* (The History of the Future) further elaborates on this vision, depicting a world with an ideal climate, free from natural disasters, and perfectly suited for human habitation:

There will be a kind of grass, as soft as cotton, that grows only four inches high, and a gentle breeze bringing regular rainfall, neither too cold nor too hot.

There will be always be good weather, the reservoirs and rivers will be full, and in various places here and there smooth, pure sand will be strewn around, like pearls the size of peas and beans. (Collins 1998, p. 364)

Before the arrival of Maitreya, the world was ruled by the powerful and wealthy monarch King Śankha. His capital city, Ketumati (translated as "City of Flags") was celebrated for its

magnificence. The city's walls, moat, towers, and gates were adorned with precious gems, and it was filled with countless treasures. Under Śankha's wise and effective governance, both the capital and the entire realm experienced a period of prosperity and security. His leadership ensured that the world was not only affluent but safe and well-organized:

There will be cities densely packed with people, rich, prosperous and safe, free from disease and distress.

There will be constant pleasure and amusement; and people will wander around delightedly as if in a constant festival, experiencing perpetual happiness. (Collins 1998, p. 364)

In this future world, free from natural disasters, wars, diseases, and food shortages, “three discomforts” remain: the need to relieve oneself, hunger, and old age (Grove 2021, p. 8). This suggests that, despite a lifespan of up to 80,000 years, people are still biological beings reliant on energy and nutrients. They require regular meals, must expel waste, and inevitably face death. Even in an era of wealth and comfort, where labor, theft, and disputes are absent, humans continue to experience basic survival instincts and are troubled by the prospect of death. The cycle of life remains a continuous process of birth and death, indicating that even in this seemingly perfect world, desirable aspects cannot be possessed permanently. Thus, although the world Maitreya will encounter may appear idyllic, it is not without its own troubles.¹⁵

From a Buddhism perspective, this imperfect future world is inherently despairing. Buddhism teaches that human lifespans have fluctuated over time. During the time of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, the human lifespan was 100 years, which gradually decreased to 10 years before beginning to lengthen again. By the time Maitreya is prophesied to appear, human lifespans will have become extraordinarily long. This change in lifespan is significant for the prophecy of Maitreya, as it is said that “During the period from the time of Gotama Buddha to the minimum life span, the Buddha's Dispensation (Buddhasāsana) will disappear” (Tin and Pruitt 1992, p. 38). *Buddha Pronounces the Sūtra of the Total Annihilation of the Dharma* (佛說法滅盡經) states:

When my Dharma perishes, it will be like the extinction of a lamp. What will happen afterward is hard to describe. Eventually, after tens of millions of years, Maitreya Bodhisattva will descend to this world to become a Buddha. (吾法滅時亦如燈滅。自此之後，難可數說。如是之後數千萬歲，彌勒當下世間作佛) (Rulu 2012, pp. 75–76)

Thus, in the future world with an 80,000-year lifespan, the Dharma (teachings of the Buddha) will have disappeared, leaving people without a means to resolve their troubles. Consequently, despite the attainment of what was once considered the key to overcoming all suffering, people will still feel helpless and despair when their troubles persist. To escape this discomfort, they will seek continuous pleasure to forget their suffering. The *Anāgata-vamśa* (The History of the Future) suggests that people will engage in endless entertainment, which reflects an attempt to evade their troubles and numb themselves.

Moreover, those who attempt to escape the suffering of life and death through indulgence will continue to transmigrate through the six realms and endure pain after death. *The Buddha Pronounces the Sūtra of Maitreya Bodhisattva's Attainment of Buddhahood* (佛說彌勒大成佛經) describes how individuals reflect on their predicament and seek Maitreya's teachings as they confront their situation.

Our gratification of the five desires, lasting even as long as the lifespan of gods in No-perception Heaven ... will come to an end. Then we will go down the three-evil life-paths to undergo immeasurable suffering. The pleasures are few and illusory, not worth mentioning. When we enter into hell, the enormous fire will be horrendously ablaze. It will be hard to be released from the 1,000,000 kotī kalpas of immeasurable suffering. It will be hard to escape from the tribulations in the long night. (設受五欲經無數劫，如無想天壽無量億歲……會歸磨滅，墮三惡道受無量苦。所樂無幾，猶如幻化，蓋不足言，入地獄時，大火洞然，百億萬劫受無量苦，求脫叵得。如此長夜，苦厄難拔。) (Rulu 2012, p. 89)

According to Buddhism, for the people of the future world, what appears to be a perfect life is merely an “endless night” devoid of hope. The suffering of this end age is not due to harsh living conditions, societal chaos, or environmental collapse. Instead, it arises from the absence of a means to escape the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Maitreya’s mission is to terminate this era of Dharma’s disappearance, addressing the fundamental sources of the “threefold discomfort” and leading people to liberation from the cycle of rebirth, thereby achieving the eternal bliss of Nirvana.

The stark differences in the apocalyptic visions portrayed by Judaism and Buddhism largely stem from their differing understandings of the divine. Judaism posits that God is the one and only deity, an omnipotent being. Therefore, appointing the Messiah to save the Jewish people and all of humanity amid the disorder and chaos of the end times serves to emphasize God’s greatness. This act highlights His role as a powerful savior during times of turmoil (Bultmann 1967, p. 170). By contrast, Buddhism does not recognize the existence of an omnipotent deity. The divinity of the Buddha, as the enlightened one, is reflected in his mastery of the truths that lead to liberation from the cycle of rebirth, as well as in his wisdom to guide people away from the suffering of life and death. Thus, the suffering depicted in the Buddhist end times more reflects spiritual despair and helplessness rather than material or social crises.

While Judaism and Buddhism offer differing visions of the end times, they share a significant commonality: both traditions depict the end times as a period when truth will be lost. This extreme situation signals the arrival of a savior. The savior’s role is to restore truth to those suffering in the end times, re-establishing their connection with the divine.

4. The Fulfillment of the Savior’s Mission

In the end times, catastrophic events will completely upend society and ultimately destroy the world. However, this terrifying scenario will be replaced by an ideal and perfect world. According to Jewish belief, God will send the Messiah to deliver the Jewish people from exile and suffering, leading them back to the land of Israel and establishing a kingdom aligned with God’s will. In this new era, the Jewish people will enjoy eternal peace, love, and justice. Conflicts among nations will cease, and harmony will prevail across all of creation.

As previously mentioned, the Messiah is traditionally regarded as a descendant of King David and is seen as the legitimate ruler of Israel. His arrival signifies the fulfillment of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Beyond his royal lineage, the Messiah is expected to be a just and righteous leader. He will govern according to God’s laws, treating people with fairness and bringing true justice to the world. This quality is emphasized in the Book of Isaiah:

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
(Isaiah 11:3–5)

In addition, the Messiah is expected to possess exceptional wisdom and intelligence, enabling him to lead the people with outstanding understanding, strategy, and ability, because:

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.
(Isaiah 11:2)

The arrival of the Messiah marks the beginning of a new era, one in which the Messiah will bring about the complete transformation and perfection of the world, thereby fulfilling the messianic mission. The fulfillment of this mission is generally understood to require four key elements: the gathering of the Jewish exiles, the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel, the rebuilding of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and establishing an era of world peace. These elements encompass significant changes on religious, political, and social levels.

4.1. Gathering of the Jewish Exiles

The Messiah is expected to gather the Jewish people dispersed across the world and bring them back to the land of Israel. This gathering symbolizes the unity and sense of belonging of the Jewish nation, and is seen as the fulfillment of God's promise, as well as a hallmark of the Messianic era. This is reflected in the Book of Isaiah:

On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:11–12)

Particularly striking is the vision in Isaiah 27:13, where it is prophesied that all exiles returning from Assyria and Egypt will gather and declare, "And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem." This prophecy underscores the Messiah's crucial role in uniting the Jewish people and leading them back to their ancestral homeland.

4.2. Restoration of the Kingdom of Israel

After the exiles return to the land of Israel, the Messiah will reestablish the Davidic dynasty, restoring the Kingdom of Israel. This restoration is not merely a political revival but symbolizes the return of national identity and sovereignty, representing the independence and unity of the Jewish people. As stated in the Book of Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 23:5–6)

The kingdom established by the Messiah will still exist within the earthly realm, as the Kingdom of Israel under the leadership and governance of a righteous king. The political and social conditions described reflect an ideal state of the kingdom on earth, embodying the Jewish people's longing for the prosperity and strength of the Solomon and Davidic dynasties. It also reflects their deep desire for a free, independent, and complete kingdom during their years of exile and dispersion.

4.3. Rebuilding the Holy Temple in Jerusalem

Another key task of the Messiah is the rebuilding of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, which is seen as the central place of worship and a symbol of God's presence among His people (Youvan 2024). The reconstruction of the Holy Temple not only signifies the revival of religious rituals but the restoration of the relationship between God and His people. This is described in the Book of Ezekiel:

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Ezekiel 37:26–27)

4.4. Establishing an Era of World Peace

The arrival of the Messiah is expected to usher in an unprecedented era of peace and harmony, where all nations will share in this tranquility. The Book of Micah paints a vision of this peaceful future:

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall

all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:3–4)

And in that world, there will be no more predatory behavior; all forms of ferocity, savagery, and cruelty will become gentle and kind, and people will be filled with love and joy. This vision is further illustrated in the Book of Isaiah:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6–9)

The process of redemption following the Messiah's arrival involves several progressively realized stages. Initially, the Messiah will achieve political and religious redemption through political and military means, including gathering the Jewish exiles, rebuilding the Davidic kingdom, restoring Israel's independence, and rebuilding the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The Messiah will lead the Jewish people to escape foreign oppression, enabling them to worship God fully. Additionally, the Messiah will not only save the nation of Israel, but also bring global peace, with all nations recognizing the LORD as the one true God. This process encompasses not only the restoration of political and religious institutions but an elevation of human morality and spirituality, ultimately aiming to establish a world of divine harmony and perfection.

Similarly, the Buddhist savior Maitreya is also expected to be born into a noble family. According to the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya), Maitreya will be born into a Brahmin family, with his father being an official of King Śaṅkha.

The minister of this king will be the brāhmaṇa Subrahmaṇa. A very learned man who knows the four Vedas, he will be the king's teacher.

He will be a scholar and holder of mantras, possessing the whole body of sacred knowledge, as well as an expert in the Vedas, ritual science, lexicology, and grammar.

At that time, a woman with the name of Brahmāvātī will be his wife. She will be beautiful, gracious, charming, and popular.

Now having died and fallen from the company of those in Tuṣṭita heaven, Maitreya, the best of persons, will securely bridge the transition between lives by entering into the womb of that woman. (Grove 2021, p. 10)

The Brahmin (Sanskrit: brāhmaṇa) is the highest of the four varnas in ancient Indian society, possessing the privilege of interpreting religious scriptures and performing sacrifices, and enjoying the benefits of offerings. They are considered the most esteemed class. Maitreya's father is depicted as a learned Brahmin well-versed in religious texts. As his son, Maitreya's early life is expected to be more luxurious compared to that of ordinary people in the future world. This is described in the *Anāgata-vamṣa* (The History of the Future):

He who named Ajita will be named Metteyya, best of all two-footed beings, endowed with the thirty-two Major Characteristics, as well as the eighty Minor Marks, with a golden complexion, without stain, very splendid, shining with the utmost splendor, beautiful, handsome, good to look at, mighty, unequaled ... There will be four palaces made of precious things for Ajita to use, called Sirivaddha, Vaddhamāna, Siddhattha and Candaka.

Ajita will have female attendants with perfect bodies, adorned with all kinds of ornaments, large, medium and small—no less than 100,000 bejeweled women. (Collins 1998, pp. 364–65)

As noted in the above excerpt, Maitreya is not only of noble birth but possesses striking looks, a distinguished demeanor, and innate strength. Additionally, the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya) emphasizes that Maitreya is endowed with compassion and wisdom: "And Maitreya, the best of people, upon reaching his youth,

will think about the nature of reality, that all creatures are indeed afflicted with suffering” (Grove 2021, p. 13).

To fulfill his savior role as a noble, Maitreya must attain Buddhahood. A prerequisite for achieving Buddhahood is to leave home and become a monk, which involves renouncing the worldly life. Maitreya soon encounters a pivotal event that leads him to make this decision. King Śaṅkha, to make offerings for the Brahmins, constructs an exceedingly grand sacrificial post with various jewels and hosts an assembly of 84,000 people. As an eminent young Brahmin, Maitreya teaches mantras at the assembly and accepts the sacrificial post on behalf of all Brahmins from King Śaṅkha. He then distributes the post to thousands of present Brahmins, who dismantle and divide it among themselves. Maitreya realizes that even the most precious sacrificial post cannot last forever and, reflecting on the impermanence of life, decides to renounce the worldly life. He prays: “Having renounced all this for wandering wherever, let me reach the state of deathlessness. Let me liberate people from the fear of sickness, death, and old age” (Grove 2021, p. 14). In the *Anāgata-vamśa* (The History of the Future), Maitreya’s decision to renounce is prompted by witnessing the “four signs which destroy desire and pleasure”—an old person, a sick person, a corpse bereft of life, and a renouncer looking happy (Collins 1998, p. 365). In summary, Maitreya, with his compassion and wisdom, encounters events that make him aware of life’s impermanence and thus chooses to leave home and become a monk.

Unlike Prince Siddhārtha, who faced a complex path of renunciation and enlightenment to become the Buddha, Maitreya’s journey from renunciation to Buddhahood is smooth and unobstructed, receiving substantial support from many people.

That Maitreya, the highest of people, accompanied by the 84,000 followers will leave to go forth in renunciation.

In those days, his tree of enlightenment will be the Nāga tree, the branches of this tree rising 50 yojanas in height.

And having sat down under those branches of that tree, Maitreya, the highest of people, the leader, will reach the unsurpassable, auspicious enlightenment.

And on that very night when he will set forth in renunciation of the world, he will indeed attain the other side of enlightenment. (Grove 2021, pp. 14–15)

In the *Anāgata-vamśa* (The History of the Future), it is mentioned that 84,000 Brahmins, along with their family members and other prominent followers, choose to renounce their secular lives with Maitreya (Collins 1998, p. 366). Furthermore, the *Buddha Pronounces the Sūtra of Maitreya Bodhisattva’s Attainment of Buddhahood* (佛說彌勒大成佛經) states that Maitreya attains Buddhahood on the very night he renounces (Rulu 2012, p. 86). These Buddhist texts also indicate that, after attaining Buddhahood, Maitreya will hold three large assemblies under the Nāga tree, where he will expound the Dharma, leading countless beings to salvation and eliminating their suffering. Following this, Maitreya will travel to various regions to spread the Dharma.

In addition to teaching the Dharma, Maitreya will also manifest miraculous phenomena as a means of guiding beings. These phenomena are not isolated events but create a profoundly beautiful environment centered around Maitreya. For instance, after Maitreya becomes Buddha under the Nāga tree, the tree undergoes transformation. The flowers of the Nāga tree become as large as wheels, continuously bloom, and their fragrance spreads widely, drawing people to exclaim: “Fortunate is the result of merit for the excellent outstanding Buddha, because of whose glory this unimaginable scent wafts forth” (Collins 1998, p. 369). As Maitreya travels to various parts of the world to spread the Dharma, the miraculous phenomena will shift in accordance with his actions.

Every time he lifts his foot in walking, a blooming lotus will grow to receive it, whose larger, outside leaves will be uniformly thirty feet and whose smaller inside leaves twenty-five ... Gods from the Sphere of Desire will construct columns of honor, the nāga kings and Garuḍa birds will decorate them.

There will be eight such columns of gold, eight made of silver, eight made of jewels and eight made of coral.

Many flags, several hundred, will hang there playing in the breeze, adorned with various precious things and decorated with garlands like flags.

There will be awnings decorated with strings of pearls and other jewels, resembling the moon, surrounded by networks of little bells and garlands of jewels.

Scattered around will be various kinds of flowers, fragrant and sweet-smelling, different kinds of aromatic powders, divine and human, and various dyed cloths, beautiful with the five colors. With faith in the Buddha, they will sport all around him.

Expensive jeweled gateways will be set up there, a thousand feet high, good to look at, delightful, unobstructed and firmly-set;

They will appear glorious, shining on every side. The Buddha, at the head of the Community of Monks, will be in the middle of them... They will move about when the Buddha moves about; remain motionless when he does; when the Teacher lies down or sits, along with his assembly, they will always and everywhere adopt whichever is appropriate of the four positions.

There will be these and other forms of worship, both divine and human, and various miracles all the time, in order to worship Maitreya, thanks to the glory of his infinite merit. Many people, from various castes, will see the miracles and go for refuge to the Teacher, along with their wives and children, whereas those who will listen to the Sage's words and lead the celibate religious life will cross over the round of rebirth, which is subject to death and so difficult to cross. (Collins 1998, pp. 370–71)

These miraculous phenomena seem to be produced by the devotion of Maitreya's followers rather than by Maitreya himself; however, they arise due to Maitreya's presence. These phenomena manifest only in the presence of Maitreya, indicating that both the devotees and their miracles form part of Maitreya's sacred realm. This sacred realm is known as Maitreya's buddhakṣetra, a pure land where all beings receive and obey the Buddha's truth. In Buddhism, there is a close relationship between the body and its environment: the consequences of one's past actions are reflected in one's body and surroundings. Therefore, the appearance of Maitreya's pure land in the future world is directly related to his enlightenment, and his presence marks the domain of his pure land.

Through teaching the Dharma and manifesting miraculous signs, Maitreya will reintroduce Buddhism to the human world, liberating countless beings from the cycle of birth and death, thus fulfilling his savior mission. As stated in the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya): "The whole earth will be filled with Foe-Destroyers¹⁶ whose defilements will have been destroyed; faults, thrown away; and bonds of existence, cast off" (Grove 2021, p. 22).

For Jewish believers, redemption means completely escaping exile, hunger, war, and injustice under the leadership of the Messiah, enjoying a life of happiness and abundance in God's eternal kingdom. For Buddhists, receiving the teachings of Maitreya and breaking free from the suffering of the cycle of birth and death marks the end of the end times. Maitreya's activities are limited to offering spiritual teachings through words instead of taking direct action in the external world, because "the culture of India attaches greater importance to spiritual activities than practical, worldly pursuits" (Kamada 2013a). The Messiah's redemption for Jewish believers focuses on the secular realm, reflecting the tragic reality of the Jewish people's long-standing dispersion and exile (Tinder 1965, p. 314).

While the Messiah's perfect kingdom in Judaism has strong secular characteristics, Maitreya's pure land focuses more on spiritual attainment, representing different aspects of the savior's role. Both saviors, from distinct religious traditions, combine sacred and secular traits. In Judaism, the Messiah is viewed as a human, specifically a descendant of King David, anointed as the leader of Israel. Although expected to possess great wisdom, justice, and leadership, the Messiah is not considered a divine being. This view is rooted in

the Hebrew Bible, where the Messiah is expected to achieve redemption for Israel and the world through his actions and adherence to God's commandments. Similarly, Buddhist texts mention that despite Maitreya's enlightenment and status as the most esteemed saint in Buddhism, his lifespan is limited to 60,000 years, shorter than the 80,000-year lifespan of future humans. Thus, Maitreya, though a savior, remains a human with a finite lifespan.

Both the Messiah and Maitreya, while bearing divine missions, are human and not eternal beings. This reflects a shared feature of combining the sacred and the secular in the savior figures of Judaism and Buddhism. Consistent with this feature, both the Messiah's perfect kingdom and Maitreya's pure land are rooted in the material world but transcend human social realities.

5. The Role of "Virtuous Individuals" in Redemption

From a broad perspective, both Judaism and Buddhism's savior narratives suggest that all people in the world will eventually be saved in the future. However, in terms of timing, the salvation of humanity by the savior follows a specific order, meaning that those closer to the savior will be prioritized. Therefore, both traditions outline the specific conditions required to be among those closer to the savior. In simple terms, "virtuous individuals" who meet the moral standards of their respective religions are more likely to be saved in the future world.

Personal repentance (Teshuvah) and good deeds (Mitzvot) are two core paths to redemption in Judaism. Repentance is a profound internal process that requires an individual to acknowledge their sins, feel genuine remorse, and commit to changing their behavior, ensuring they do not repeat their wrongdoings. This concept is reflected in the Book of Ezekiel, which highlights God's forgiveness and delight in those who repent:

But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord GOD, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? (Ezekiel 18:21–23)

In Judaism, the process of repentance typically involves four steps, which are elaborated upon in rabbinic literature, especially in Rabbi Maimonides' Laws of Repentance.¹⁷ The first step is regret. The penitent must feel genuine remorse, which is the starting point of repentance, requiring a deep inner recognition of the wrongdoing. The second step is confession. The penitent needs to publicly confess their sins, verbally expressing their self-reflection. The third step is the resolution not to repeat the sin. The penitent must firmly resolve not to commit the same sin again, which is the core of the repentance process. The final step is reparation and positive actions. The penitent should correct their actions by compensating for past wrongs and change their behavior.

Good deeds in Judaism refer to observing the 613 commandments found in the Torah. These commandments cover a wide range of practices, from charity to prayer, and guide individuals in how to relate to God, others, and society. The commandments are generally divided into two types: commandments between a person and God, such as prayer, observing the Sabbath, and keeping kosher; and commandments between a person and others, such as charity, justice, honesty, and helping those in need. The Book of Deuteronomy emphasizes the importance of loving God with all one's heart and instructs believers to internalize and practice God's words in all aspects of life.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:5–7)

Repentance and good deeds are daily practices through which Jews maintain harmonious relationships with God and others. These acts are not only ways of following God's commandments but serve as part of fulfilling moral duties and religious rituals. According to Jewish tradition, even non-Jews who revere God and perform good deeds can achieve redemption at the end of days. This implies that as long as one upholds basic moral and just behavior, regardless of their religious belief, they may receive God's forgiveness.

The Buddhist narrative of Maitreya's future descent specifies the conditions for receiving salvation in the future world. As previously discussed, Maitreya's first step in fulfilling his mission as the savior is to hold three assemblies under the Nāga tree, during which he will preach the truth of the Dharma. Those who attend these assemblies will be saved, completely liberated from all suffering. Before these assemblies begin, Maitreya Buddha will explain to the attendees why they are privileged to be the first to receive his direct teachings.

"All you people were seen by the Lion of the Śākyas, the protector with the best qualities, the world sovereign, and having been entrusted with the sphere of the good doctrine, you were in fact sent through the path of liberation into my teaching.

Having worshipped Śākyamuni at the stūpas with parasols, banners, pendants, perfumes, garlands, and ointments, you have come into my teachings.

Because you have given to the Sangha gifts of clothes, food and drink, and various cures for the weary, you have indeed come into my teachings.

Having sprinkled saffron water and rubbed sandalwood paste on the stūpas of the sage of the Śākyas, you have indeed come into my teachings.

It is because you placed your vows in the teachings of the Lion of the Śākya clan and have in fact thoroughly guarded them that you have indeed come into my teachings.

You have spent the noble, auspicious, eight-limbed uposādhā days fasting, on the 14th, the 15th and likewise the 8th of the month, and moreover you were very focused on the eight-limbed uposādhā vows during the Miraculous fortnight.

Having accepted the well-obtained precepts and the teachings, those beings have gone to the teachings, and you beings have gone for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the community, and because of performing that meritorious deed, you have approached my teachings.

You beings are impelled by that, and so you have met with me. You have been encompassed by the sage, the best of teachers, whose intelligence is great." (Grove 2021, pp. 17–19)

From the cited text, it is clear that those who receive Maitreya Buddha's teachings first are individuals who, in their past lives, diligently followed the teachings left by Śākyamuni Buddha. These practices include honoring pagodas (Sanskrit: stūpas), going for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the community, performing various virtuous deeds, strictly observing precepts, and making offerings to the monks. Those who sincerely and diligently engaged in these virtuous practices will be reborn into the beautiful future world where Maitreya will descend. Upon hearing that Maitreya has attained Buddhahood under the Nāga tree, they will actively seek out the assembly in the Nāga tree grove, rather than waiting for Maitreya to leave the grove to spread the Dharma across the world.

In Judaism, based on the covenant between God and the Jewish people, the Jews are regarded as the chosen people. As previously mentioned, after the Messiah arrives, the Jewish people will be gathered, the nation of Israel and the Temple will be rebuilt, and redemption will be achieved. This highlights the special status and priority of the Jewish people in the redemption process. By contrast, Buddhism does not explicitly state that those who are saved by Maitreya Buddha must have been Buddhists in their past lives. In *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya), when Maitreya, born as a Brahmin, renounces the world, the 84,000 followers who accompany him are not Buddhists. This is because before Maitreya attains Buddhahood in the future world, there will be neither a Buddha nor Dharma. Therefore, from the perspective of religious

faith, there is no absolute difference in priority between Buddhists and non-Buddhists in receiving redemption in the future. Non-Buddhists who perform good deeds can also be near Maitreya in the future world. The less inclusive nature of the Jewish Messiah's role compared to that of Buddhism stems mainly from Judaism's identity as a national religion. However, this does not mean that the Jewish messianic narrative is absolutely exclusive. Non-Jews who follow the Noahide Laws are considered righteous Gentiles and are assured a place in the world to come, which is the ultimate reward for the righteous (Maimonides 1993, 8:14). According to the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 56a-b) and the *Tosefta Avodah Zarah* 9:4, the Noahide Laws are a covenant between God and Noah and his descendants—that is, all humanity. The laws include the following: (1) Not to worship idols; (2) Not to curse God; (3) Not to commit murder; (4) Not to commit adultery or sexual immorality; (5) Not to steal; (6) Not to eat flesh torn from a living animal; (7) To establish courts of justice. This indicates that anyone who adheres to these laws, even among non-Jews, has the opportunity to attain redemption in the world to come, reflecting a relative inclusivity.

Both the Judaism and Buddhism savior narratives depict visions of future redemption, offering followers not only hope for the future, but also clear criteria for being among the first to receive redemption through “good deeds”. In Judaism, repentance (Teshuvah) and good deeds (Mitzvot) are essential actions for achieving redemption. Repentance involves profound self-reflection and a resolution to correct wrongs, while good deeds are exemplified by adhering to the commandments of the Torah. Similarly, at the end of the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya), there is a passage that states the following:

Thus, when one calms their thoughts by placing them on the conqueror, the sage of the Śākyas, then you will see the thoroughly enlightened Maitreya, the best of bipeds.

So, when one places their thoughts on the Doctrine, the Buddha, and the best of assemblies, the Saṅgha, they will become very powerful.

Through propitiating such a one like the compassionate Maitreya, best of bipeds, in time you will proceed to nirvāṇa.

Having heard this extraordinary tale and having seen such abundant good fortune, what wise person would not have faith, since even those in dark rebirths do so?

Therefore, those who, here and now, are desirous of emancipation and long for magnanimity should remember the teachings of the Buddha and make the good doctrine their teacher. (Grove 2021, pp. 23–24)

If Buddhist believers wish to receive Maitreya's salvation in the future, they must begin now by adhering to the teachings left by Śākyamuni Buddha. Similarly, for Jewish followers, repentance and good deeds must be practiced immediately rather than delayed for some future time. This indicates that the core function of savior prophecies is to motivate adherents to strengthen their religious faith and diligently practice the virtuous deeds outlined in their religious texts.

From the perspective of both Jewish and Buddhist believers, savior narratives present a vivid religious vision that reinforces faith and delineates the moral practices required within each tradition. In other words, the moral standards for personal development in Judaism and Buddhism are based on the guidelines set forth in their respective savior narratives. Through these narratives, the ultimate divine authority establishes the standards for interpreting and applying religious moral principles in textual form. Consequently, followers of this divine being do not need to rely on a separate religious authority for interpretation. As we observe, Judaism has a tradition of Talmudic debate, while Buddhism holds the precept “take refuge in the Dharma, not in the person”, meaning that both Jewish rabbis and Buddhist monks can be questioned and challenged. Only the Torah and Halakha are unconditionally binding for Jews, just as the Buddhist scriptures and precepts are for Buddhists.

The savior narrative is fulfilled, and the future world is redeemed when people adhere to its requirements and perform good deeds, while the savior completes their mission of world redemption. From a textual structural perspective, among the four stages previously outlined, the conferring of the bestowal of the savior's divine identity, the tribulations of the end times, and the fulfillment of the savior's mission are described from the standpoint of the divine—namely, God or Buddha—and are thus miraculous and extraordinary. The final stage, which is the role of “virtuous individuals” in redemption, is described from the standpoint of ordinary people—namely, believers or followers—and is practical and actionable. If the first three stages represent the divine aspect, and the final stage represents the secular aspect, then the complete savior narrative embodies both divine and secular qualities, consistent with the savior's dual nature as both divine and secular.

Emphasizing the dual nature of the savior narrative's structure highlights how historical figures have exploited savior narratives to serve their ambitions. These figures often omit the final, secular aspect of the narrative and instead emphasize the first three, divine aspects to present themselves as the savior. For example, Shabbatai Tzvi, in the 17th-century Ottoman Empire, claimed to be the Messiah and vowed to overthrow Ottoman rule and establish a Jewish-led kingdom.¹⁸ Similarly, monks such as Fa Qing (515 CE) and Xiang Haiming (613 CE) in China, who led uprisings, hinted or claimed to be Maitreya and linked the Maitreya narrative's apocalyptic end times with the harsh realities of common life, interpreting spiritual salvation as political revolution.¹⁹ These ambitious figures focused on their roles as saviors and neglected the requirement for “virtuous individuals”, effectively manipulating religious moral demands to secure followers' loyalty rather than promoting adherence to religious ethics. This indicates that the final, secular aspect of the savior narrative is crucial for preventing the distortion of religious practice by self-styled saviors. Together with the divine aspects, this secular component forms a dual-direction redemption paradigm in Judaism and Buddhism savior narratives. This paradigm requires both the savior and the saved to be active: the savior must appear, and believers must live according to religious moral standards to ensure priority redemption in the future world.

6. Conclusions

Through a comparative analysis of the Messianic savior narrative in early Judaism and the Maitreya savior narrative in Buddhism, this study reveals both the structural similarities and the distinctive meaning within each tradition. The savior narratives not only provide believers with hope for future redemption but impose moral obligations on their present lives. Both traditions highlight the dual nature of the savior, combining divine and secular elements, and emphasizing the savior's role as a spiritual leader and a worldly figure.

The first aspect examined is the bestowal of the savior's divine identity. The Messiah's divine status is rooted in God's covenant with Israel, particularly the “Davidic Covenant”, while Maitreya's identity is affirmed through the prophecy of Śākyamuni Buddha. Both figures are seen as predestined to lead humanity to redemption, offering their followers a moral foundation upon which to build their lives and practices.

The second focus is on the tribulations of the end times. In Judaism, the period leading up to the Messiah's arrival is one of upheaval and disorder, necessitating the Messiah's intervention to restore justice and peace. By contrast, Buddhism describes an era of material prosperity yet spiritual desolation, where Maitreya will emerge to liberate beings from suffering. Despite these contrasting depictions, both eschatological narratives center around the savior's pivotal role in alleviating human suffering.

The third aspect considered is the fulfillment of the savior's mission. In the case of the Messiah, redemption is achieved through tangible, secular acts such as the rebuilding of the Kingdom of Israel and the establishment of world peace. For Maitreya, redemption is a spiritual endeavor, as he will spread the Dharma once again and guide beings out of the cycle of rebirth. These differing approaches underscore the savior's significance in delivering transformative redemption.

Lastly, the study highlights the role of “virtuous individuals” in redemption. This study proposes a “dual redemption paradigm”, which reveals that redemption relies not only on the arrival of the savior but on the active participation of believers. Whether through repentance and good deeds or adherence to religious laws, believers play an indispensable role in achieving future redemption. This paradigm emphasizes the interactive relationship between savior and believers, demonstrating that redemption is not a passive waiting but a shared goal requiring joint effort from both the savior and the faithful.

In conclusion, by comparing the Messianic and Maitreya narratives through the lenses of the bestowal of divine identity, end-time tribulations, the fulfillment of the savior’s mission, and the role of virtuous individuals, this study has illuminated both the convergences and divergences in their respective redemption models. The “dual redemption paradigm” proposed here not only enhances our understanding of the savior figure in these two traditions but lays a foundation for future inter-religious dialogue and comparative studies on redemption.

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Notes

- ¹ The Old Testament book of *Isaiah*, along with the New Testament books of *Matthew*, *Luke* and *Revelation*, detail the messianic role of Jesus Christ and his prophesied second coming. For a detailed discussion on Jesus as the Messiah, see (Wright 1997).
- ² The Qur’an addresses the concept of Mahdi and the End Times in several passages. The Hadith of Shia Muslims provides extensive details on the arrival of Mahdi and his role as a savior. See (Madelung 1998; Sachedina 1981).
- ³ The Bhagavad Gita presents Krishna as a divine figure who upholds cosmic order and plays a crucial role in the preservation and salvation of the universe. The Puranas, especially the Vishnu Purana, prophesy that Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu, will descend at the end of the current age. For further reading, see (Doniger 2010; Flood 1996).
- ⁴ The Avesta, particularly in the *Yasna* and *Visperad*, discusses the future savior Saoshyant. This savior is expected to resurrect the dead and achieve ultimate victory at the end of time. For more insights, refer to (Boyce [1979] 2001).
- ⁵ Mahayana is a term for a broad group of Buddhist traditions, texts, philosophies, and practices developed in ancient India. It is considered one of the three main existing branches of Buddhism, the others being Theravada and Vajrayana. Various Mahayana traditions are the predominant forms of Buddhism found in China, Korea, Japan, Singapore, etc. (Harvey 2012, p. 189).
- ⁶ A Sanskrit manuscript of the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam*, discovered in Gilgit in the 20th century, closely corresponds to the Chinese version of the *Sūtra on Maitreya’s Descent* (佛說彌勒下生成佛經 translated by Yijing during the Tang dynasty).
- ⁷ Theravada is the most commonly accepted name of Buddhism’s oldest existing school. Theravada is the official religion of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Cambodia, and the main dominant Buddhist variant found in Laos and Thailand.
- ⁸ Although the *Anāgata-vamśa* does not carry the title of “sūtra” or begins with the traditional “Thus have I heard” (Pali: *Evam me sutam*), its structure follows the general format of Buddhist scriptures.
- ⁹ Western scholars have extensively studied the concept of the Messiah. Notable works in this field include those by John J. Collins, Martin Hengel, and William Horbury.
- ¹⁰ For the English version of *The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya*, see (Grove 2021). <https://texts.mandala.library.virginia.edu/text/prophecy-maitreya> (accessed on 17 August 2024); For the English version of *Anāgata-vamśa*, see (Collins 1998, pp. 361–73).
- ¹¹ All translations of biblical texts are from New Revised Standard Version (RNSV).
- ¹² At that time, there were some views suggesting that the Messiah would not come from the House of David; for example, some Jewish individuals believed the Messiah would descend from the family of Joseph. However, these views were relatively marginal. For more insights, refer to (Saperstein 1992).

- 13 John N. Oswalt's *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* provides a detailed discussion on the background and significance of this verse. He points out that the thrice-repeated “Holy” signifies the absolute nature of God’s holiness, distinguishing Him fundamentally from all other beings. Brevard S. Childs also highlights the importance of Isaiah 6:3 in his book *Isaiah*, noting that it serves as the central declaration of God’s holiness throughout the book of Isaiah. This verse not only reveals God’s essence but also lays the foundation for the prophet’s calling and the faith of all Israel. R.C. Sproul, in his classic work *The Holiness of God*, references this verse as key to understanding God’s holiness, considering it one of the most significant passages in the Bible for its direct portrayal of God’s divine nature. For further reading see (Oswalt 1986; Childs 2001; Sproul 2000).
- 14 Unlike Theravada, Mahayana holds that all sentient beings have the potential to achieve Buddhahood through practice. Although this potential is inherent, it does not imply that all beings are as sacred as the Buddha. Their sanctity is neither actual nor necessary, as they are not Buddhas before their awakening, and their enlightenment is not necessarily certain to occur. Only Maitreya is certain to attain Buddhahood, and he will necessarily become as sacred as Śākyamuni Buddha in the future. Therefore, only Maitreya and the Messiah are recognized in their respective religions as individuals who will possess divine nature in the future world.
- 15 Buddhism identifies the eight distresses: birth, age, sickness, death, parting with what we love, meeting with what we hate, unattained aims, and all the ills of the five skandhas. According to the narrative of Maitreya’s salvation, the future world will only eliminate two of these: sickness and meeting with what we hate.
- 16 The term “Foe-Destroyers” corresponds to the Sanskrit word “Kṣīṇāśrava”, which means one who has destroyed the enemies. It is an epithet for the “Arhat”, the Buddhist saint who has eradicated all defilements and afflictions.
- 17 Given that the textual focus of this paper is primarily on the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, Maimonides’ work will not be discussed in detail. For further information, see (Shure 2004).
- 18 As history has progressed, discussions on redemption in Judaism have gradually evolved into three main theories, which the Jewish philosopher Gershom Scholem termed as the “apocalyptic”, “restorative”, and “kabbalistic” models of redemption. Scholem describes these schools of thought in his work *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, where he writes that apocalyptic messianism focuses on the “catastrophic and destructive nature of the redemption”. On the other hand, the restorative model attempts to alleviate fears of catastrophe by emphasizing renewal and transformation rather than absolute destruction. (Maimonides provided one of the earliest and clearest views on restorative redemption, specifically in *Mishneh Torah*). The kabbalistic model ties the redemption of the Jewish people to the redemption of the entire world and the consequent restoration of the universe to its original state during creation. However, regardless of which theory one supports, Orthodox Jews have consistently believed that any type of redemption must involve the Messiah, whose role as the precursor, creator, or ruler of the new world remains unchanged. For more insights, refer to (Scholem 1995).
- 19 It is important to note that during this period, Mahāyāna was prevalent in China. The Mahāyāna Buddhism understanding of Maitreya, the future Buddha, differs from that of Theravāda. The most notable difference is that while Mahāyāna acknowledges that Maitreya as the savior has not yet descended to become a Buddha, Maitreya Bodhisattva as a practitioner is believed to already exist. The Mahāyāna scripture *The Sūtra on Maitreya’s Birth in the Heaven of Joy* (佛說觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經) states that Maitreya, in his previous life, was a disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha. After his death, he was reborn in the Heaven of Joy (Sanskrit: Tuṣṭita), where he currently teaches as a Bodhisattva, guiding beings through his sermons. After a long period, Maitreya will descend from Tuṣṭita to the human realm (Sanskrit: Jambudvīpa) and complete his transition from Bodhisattva to Buddha in human form. This scripture acknowledges the authenticity of the *Ārya Maitreya-Vyākaranam* (The Prophecy of the Superior Maitreya) and holds that beings who practice specific virtuous deeds will receive an additional assurance. “They will undoubtedly be born in the Heaven of Joy and come face-to-face with the noble Maitreya. Having entered into Maitreya’s service, they will then first hear his Dharma in Jambudvīpa.” (必定無疑當得生於兜率天上值遇彌勒，亦隨彌勒下閻浮提，第一聞法) (Dharmachakra Translation Committee 2024). This Chinese translation, which appeared in the 5th century, has no corresponding Indian text discovered so far and is thought by scholars to have originated in the Khotan and Turfan regions (Anderl 2016, pp. 113–43). Some scholars also argue that this and other “visualization” sutras originated in northern India, specifically in the Kashmir region, but there is insufficient evidence to support this claim (Mai 2009, p. 166). Regardless of its origin, it can be confirmed that the narrative structure of Maitreya descending to become a Buddha and the idea that virtuous beings will receive priority salvation has remained unchanged.

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