

Exploring the Old Testament Messianic Theology in the Light of its New Testament Understanding

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Abstract

To many, the difficulty posed by the messianic texts of the Old Testament (OT) cannot be addressed easily. Conservative Jews, up till modern times have resisted any attempt to interpret the Old Testament texts in favour of any human figure in history. To others, especially the Christians, the messianic hope is a partly realized eschatology. For them, Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament (NT) is the adequate theological terminus of the messianic tradition. This paper traces the development of the messianic theology from its OT background to its NT Christian perception. This is done with a view to examining the issue of its fulfilment. The work adopts historical, comparative and evaluative methods. It employs the theoretical framework of canonical literary reading of the Bible and finds that a canonical reading of messianic texts in the OT, shows that the Jewish messianic concept continues into the NT with Christians' second coming of Jesus as the appropriate theological terminus. The difference in the ideological conceptions of the messiah basically revolves around the interpretation of some OT texts like: the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14), the reinstatement of the Jewish state (Isaiah 43:5-6), the building of the Third Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28), the expected era of world peace (Isaiah 2:4), the spread of universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will consequently lead to the unification of humanity as one (Zechariah 14:9), among others. The paper concludes that although the Jews argue that historically, Jesus fulfilled none of these messianic prophecies, it is plausible to view Christians' hope of Jesus' Second Coming (Parousia), as essentially same with Jewish messianic hope; and both remains fundamentally unrealized eschatology.

Key Words: Messiah, Messianic, Theology, Old Testament, Jews, Christians.

Introduction

Largely because of their apparent centrality in the Bible, messianic texts, especially within the books of the Old Testament have had their share of attention in biblical researches and writings. However, many irresolvable questions have trailed research in the area, especially those about the origin of the concept among Israelites, the proper meaning of משיח *mashiach* in the Hebrew Bible, the significance of messianic theology within the broader scope of Israelites' salvation history, among others. Perhaps, the most perplexing part of the questions surrounding messianic theology is the issue of the fulfilment of messianic texts in the Old Testament.

As far back as 1724 and 1727 CE., Anthony Collins contented that the use of the natural or literal meaning of certain OT messianic texts, previously used as proof-texts for messianism in the OT, could not support the messianic interpretation placed on them by the NT. To those who were attempting to defend a messianic reference in these OT texts by talking about a 'spiritual' or 'complete' fulfilment as referring to Jesus Christ, Collins concluded that these could be no more than mere illustrations; but in no case did they constitute a specific 'proof' that Jesus had been anticipated in the OT (qtd. in Kaiser 197). In apposition, E. W. Von Hengstenberg, in the end of the 19th century accepted the New Testament to be the final arbiter of what the OT texts said about messianic prophecies. In this way, the difficulty posed by the fulfilment of these texts was solved by allowing Jesus as their terminus (qtd, in Kaiser

199). Michael Rydelnik sees this as a confessional/dogmatic approach which paid little attention to the historical setting of messianic predictions (15).

Using historical criticism, G.S. Goodspeed in 1900 rejected the idea of any supernatural fulfilment of messianic texts and argued that Jesus is the natural fulfilment of the Israel's history, not the supernatural fulfilment of Israelites prophecy (qtd. in Rydelnik 15). Similarly, Aage Bentzen did not see any eschatological dimension to messianic texts. For him the concept of the messiah was an idealized one to which Israelites resorted after the fall of the kingdoms. The messianic concept was no more than the expectation of a king who will guarantee Israel's happiness (qtd in Rydelnik 20). John Sailhamer, in 1995 used a compositional/canonical approach and concludes that a careful textual study of OT texts could show clues that point beyond the immediate historical referent of the texts to a future messianic age (154).

Rydelnik's summary of the various positions held by scholars on the issue of messianic fulfilment is apt here. Thus, there are those that maintain the historical fulfilment of the texts in which all prophecies refer to no more than the time of the prophets. The second, are those who hold the position of a dual fulfilment of the texts, in which the prophecies both concern immediate historical events and also refer to a future messiah. Third, are those who argue that all OT messianic prophecies are typical fulfilment of the texts, in which a literal historical messianic figure

referred in the OT is to be found in the NT. The fourth group are those that argue that the texts are undergoing progressive fulfilment. Here, the prophecies are given in seed form and grow progressively, with various historical figures, into the ultimate intended messianic fulfilment (Rydelnik 27-30).

The prevalent position among scholars has been, to focus on the textual analysis and interpretation of OT messianic texts and the NT gospels' texts that see Jesus of Nazareth as the ultimate fulfilment (Rydelnik 3-4; Scott 6; Knibb 480; Juel 3). There is hardly a work so far, that pays serious attention at connecting the whole messianic theology throughout the Bible as a single unit of discourse. In most part scholars have stopped at the lifetime of Jesus in the gospels without continuing into the prophecy of His second coming. This method would certainly live many questions unanswered. This work fills this gap by exploring messianic theology as a whole. The study will utilize a canonical approach to the messianic texts in the OT and look beyond the Jesus in the gospels to Jesus in the second coming. This has not recently been done and which is somewhat a new methodology compared to historical critical methodologies adopted by many scholars. This study follows the recent trend in messianic studies which tends to be holistic. Thus, this study reads messianic texts in the canonical context of messianic theology of the Old Testament and shows the intertextual connections with the New Testament that make Jesus' second coming the theological terminus.

The central question this study then asks is: could a canonical approach to OT messianic texts engender a new perspective upon the nodal problem of their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth if stretched to the prophecy of His second coming? Consequently, other questions are: what is the actual meaning משיח *mashiach* in the OT? Are the Christological adaptations of OT messianic texts appropriate? What is the primary early Israelite conception of the Messiah's assignment; does it make sense in the context of prophecy of Jesus' second coming? We should be able to answer these questions in this paper.

Conceptualizing Messiah

The English word messiah comes to us from the Hebrew word משיח *mashiach* literally meaning the "Anointed one." The word is from an Aramaic root which means "Anointed one" (Jenni 360). The word *mashiach* is derived from the Hebrew verb *masha* which means "to anoint." It is used thirty-nine times in the Old Testament, and designates primarily and in most cases the ruling king of Israel or of Judah. In almost all Old Testament, the ruling king was generally called the "anointed of Yahweh" (Jenni 360-361). For instance: "God forbid that I [David] should stretch out my hand against the Lord's Messiah [Saul]..." King Saul is referred to as the Lord's Messiah here. (I Samuel 26:11. Cf. II Samuel 23:1, Isaiah 45:1, Psalms 20:6).

It has been argued that the biblical usage of the word messiah referred to any person charged with a divine office as king or priest, who was physically anointed with oil as a

symbol of being chosen for a special purpose (Bronner Par. 1-2). The Hebrew word was translated into the Septuagint as *Christos*, which also means "anointed". In addition, Nuefeld states that the term messiah is an adaptation of the Hebrew word *meshiach* "anointed one" just as Christ is the adaptation of *Christos*, which is the Greek translation of *meshiach* (307). Lexically, the English words messiah and Christ mean exactly the same thing.

Theoretical Framework

This paper works within the theoretical frame of canonical reading of the Bible which was first used by Brevard S. Childs. Generally, the scholars that are routinely associated with the development of canonical approach can be roughly divided into two groups: those who put emphasis on the final shape of the biblical canon that is, canonical shape (Childs, Rendtorff and Sheppard), and those who put emphasis on the shaping of the biblical canon that is, canonical process (Fishbane and Sanders) (Callaway 145-147; DeClaissé- Walford 6-7; Sheppard 862-864; Soulen and Soulen 29-30). This paper is attuned to Childs usage of the approach.

Canonical reading is aimed at comprehending the Bible as an integral part of a holy scripture that emanated from a believing worshipping community. It addresses dynamic quality of scripture in interactive formation with the believing communities. Its focus is on final form of the scripture rather than on the developmental stages of texts. To canonical critics, the final version of canon of scripture has its own validity,

meaning and artistry, independent of the development of the parts. For them, it is the overall unity that provides access to theological truth and religious experience, not the analysis of origins, source and layers of tradition, even though these may exist. While the historical-critical school adopts a diachronic approach in treatment of text, canonical critics rely on a synchronic approach also called final form interpretation. In this sense, text is treated as an organic whole with its own intrinsic integrity (Brett 34; Callaway 142; Coogan 93; Hayes and Holladay 154).

In his book *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Childs contends that a basic characteristic of the canonical approach in regard to both its literary and textual levels is its concern to describe the literature in terms of relation to the historic Jewish community rather than seeing its goal to be the reconstruction of the most original literary form of the books, or the most pristine form of a textual tradition. In achieving this, the approach builds on some of the findings of other critical tools in biblical studies. With regards to the approach's dependence on other critical tools, Sanders notes that Canonical Criticism might be seen in metaphor as the beadle (*bedelos*) who now carries the critically studied Bible in procession back to the Church lectern from the scholar's study (Childs 57; Sanders 20).

Childs understanding is succinctly captioned when he posits that there is no one hermeneutical key for unlocking the biblical message, but the canon provides the arena in which the struggle for understanding takes place

(Childs, *OT Theology in Canonical Context* 15). The rubrics of the approach are basically: that canonical approach, even though it uses literary and historical methods, is primarily theological in nature; that biblical texts are seen as the product of faith community, but at the same time the community's identity has been shaped by reflections on its religious traditions; that the true interpretation of texts are found within the scriptures; and finally, that authority resides only in the full canon, which is the context in which every biblical text finally must be read (Callaway 147-148).

Thus, this study seeks to point out how the canonical approach might solve the difficult and seemingly irresolvable question of the fulfilment of the messianic prophecies of the OT. By applying a canonical approach to these texts, we will be able to hear the whole scriptures' final word on the messianic theology rooted in the OT. This approach as used here, sees OT's messianic prophecy as a program which is being executed in history and would ultimately climax at Jesus' second coming.

The Understanding of Messiah in the Old Testament

The word messiah applies to the kings of Israel more than any other usage in the Old Testament. The basic form of the title "the Lord's anointed," appears in various ways, according to the context of usage in the OT. For instance, "mine anointed," "your anointed," "his anointed," among others, are variants of "the Lord's anointed. (I Sam. 2:35; Ps.132:17; 84:9; II Chron. 6:42; Jenni 360). As already

hinted in the clarification above, the Old Testament sees messiah as one anointed with oil as symbol of authority and acceptance of the person who receives such anointing from Yahweh. Although the concept applies to the king in most usage, such anointing was also carried out on the high priest and those who ministered with him as a physical sign of investiture (Exodus 29: 7, 21). The anointing signifies the consecration status of the recipient before God who sets him apart from the ordinary people (Boadt 532).

Anderson in his *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, sees the cosmic significance of the anointed as a channel through who cosmic blessing and righteousness flows into the society. The anointing sets them off to enjoy some form of special relationship with God and most of the time they were conceived of as "sons of God," that is, one consecrated to be God's representative on earth (203-204). This special image and character of the king as "son of God" is very popular in the Christian doctrine (Psalm 2). It is cleared already in the foregoing that the Old Testament applies messiah to the kings of Israel and some others who were installed in their royal offices by the ritual act of investiture. This is clearly seen in the anointing of Saul (I Sam. 10:1), David (I Sam. 16:13), Solomon (I Kings 1:34) among others.

The term messiah also refers to anyone divinely appointed to a task that affected the destiny of the Jewish people throughout the Old Testament. In this sense, a foreign king like Cyrus who was a vassal-king of Ansan in South of Iran and from the

Achaemenid house which was related to the Median kings in power in the sixth century BCE, was called Yahweh's anointed (Bronner Par. 3; Lovelace 154; Isaiah 45:1). Although Jenni argues that some scholars already see here, the *terminus technicus* for the ultimate king of the world, and that the title was transferred to the king of Persia as a special title of a special honour, fashioned to express the lofty position of God's chosen instrument, the passage remains one of the most debated regarding the use of the term messiah in the Old Testament (360).

The term messiah is also used in the Old Testament to refer to Israel as the chosen people of God (I Chron. 16:22; cf. Ps. 105:15). In this sense, the expression points to the special intimate relationship and connection between Yahweh and the people of Israel which was guaranteed by the covenant Yahweh willingly entered into with them (Exodus 20). Eventually, as history unfolded, and following series of events, the term came to denote a divinely inspired future king with eschatological and apocalyptic dimensions. That is, one who will arrive at the end of the age and usher in an era of peace (Bronner Par. 4). It should be mentioned here that this later utopic idea of messiah is what later traditions have built upon in their various teachings. For instance, in the New Testament, and throughout the history of the church, Christians understand the mission of Jesus, first, as the servant or suffering messiah, and second, Christians are also convinced that the vocation of the messiah as the ultimate king ruler would be fully realized in Jesus Christ

as the appropriate theological terminus of the messianic hope (Anderson, *Understanding the OT* 427).

The Messianic Theology in Old Testament

The messianic theology falls within the Old Testament's eschatological theme. In the Old Testament theology, the term messiah meaning the "anointed one" in its later connotation and usage is a divinely chosen person who would bring to fruition, God's plan for his people - Israel and the whole world. It conjures up images of a future world filled with peace and divine tranquillity (Bronner Par. 3). The messianic theology in Old Testament can also be generally distinguished from apocalyptic views expressed above. The messianic hope in this sense, expected the messiah-king to be an actual historical man who would restore some of the former glories and independence to Israel (Boadt 533). This view seems to express in clear terms the most popular idea of the character and functions of the messianic king especially as held by the Jews.

A canonical perspective of the messianic theology in its proper frame holds that the messiah is one expected to usher in the age of perfection characterized by universal peace and recognition of Yahweh as the sovereign God of the whole earth. Sections like, Isaiah 2: 1-4; Zeph. 3: 9; Hosea 2: 20; Amos 9: 13-15; Micah 4: 1-4; Jer. 31: 33-34 etc, are clear on this idea (Jews for Judaism Par. 1-2). Many Jews till date believe that the messiah would be a great political leader, a descendant of David (Jeremiah 23:5), a charismatic leader, inspiring others to

follow his example while acting as a great judge and making righteous decisions (Jeremiah 33:15; Tracey Par. 1-2).

It is a standing contention that the messiah was never thought of as a supernatural being and that the idea is a later interpolation into the whole concept of messiah in the Old Testament. The view also holds that the apocalyptic dimensions introduced to the idea of the messiah king are the work of the Christian revolutionists who seek to explain the work of Jesus as the expected messiah (Bronner Par. 4-5 cf. Madukwe 189). In all however, the Old Testament canonically paints a picture of the messiah as the final king who will not only restore Israel to its pride of place among the nations, but also who will restore humankind to perfection and total tranquillity.

The messianic theology as already mentioned underwent several stages of development in the Old Testament. Many biblical scholars agree that the Davidic kingship is the appropriate place to begin any serious and meaningful discussion on messianic theology in the Old Testament. Von Rad submits that it was the honorific set-up of David as the king over the whole Israel that certainly struck out what was a basic element in the picture of Yahweh's anointed. The old portrait according to him, shows the anointed in all the frailty of the human nature and have little to say about a great supernatural figure of the messiah as it later came to be construed (310).

The messianic idea in King David's dynasty was first hinted in the prophecy of Nathan. Von Rad again maintains that the prophecy shows at

first impression, that the promise of Yahweh was directed to David only, but in a later comprehension, all the interest is diverted to David's posterity and behind this later tradition there obviously already lies a later age concern to extend the content of the Nathan prophecy to include those who would come forth from king David's loins (310). The consequence of this is the idea of the continuity of the Davidic kingship which Yahweh declared to be an everlasting covenant (Von Rad 310; see Psalm 21:8 Isaiah 55:3). Bronner also agrees that the antecedents of the messianic figure in the Old Testament and the Bible as a whole may have their origin as far back as the enthronement of David in 1010-970 BCE. She adds that although the longing for an ideal order under an ideal Davidic king began to crystallize already in biblical times, in the Bible the term was not yet used in its specific later eschatological sense (Par. 6). What this means in effect is that the idea of a messiah-king which later received an eschatological meaning actually has its origin in the belief that a certain ideal Davidic king would rule over Israel as promised by Yahweh through Prophet Nathan.

Similarly, Anderson holds that Nathan's prophetic oracle contains the two essential elements of royal covenant symbolism. That is, the continuity of Davidic dynasty and of the temple of God's dwelling place among his people. In this oracle, Yahweh promised to make a 'house' (dynasty) for David (*Contours of Old Testament Theology*, 205). A careful look at the two symbolism would reveal the idea of the messianic hope,

although not yet with an eschatological dimension. In his book *Understanding the Old Testament*, Anderson argues that Yahweh's promises of grace to David does not guarantee the continuance of a dynasty and consequently, the identification of the messianic figure, but rather support Israel, whose suffering will bring divine blessing to the world at last (426). We can say from a canonical context that this position does not reflect the entire content of Nathan's prophetic oracle to David. In view of the evidences that support Davidic dynasty as the origin of the messianic hope which this paper has briefly explored, it should be cleared that Anderson's position is perhaps not totally comprehensive, especially considering the fact that his argument are based on the Deutero Isaiah's 'Yahweh's servant' discourse.

Interestingly however, Boadt identifies at least three stages in the development of the messianic concept in the Old Testament. The first stage is found in the oracle of Prophet Nathan to David (II Sam. 7; I Chron. 17; Psalm 89; Boadt 132). The second stage is presented in the prophets up to the time of the exile. The proto Isaiah's 'book of Emmanuel' (Isaiah 7-9 and 11), Micah's prophetic oracles (5:2-5) Jeremiah and Ezekiel's prophecies that the ideal king would possess the spirit of Yahweh, are all vivid description of the messianic hope at this stage. The third stage according to Boadt, takes place after the exile when the actual Davidic kingdom no longer exist. At this stage, the prophets Zachariah and Haggai, first held on to the hope for a descendant of a royal family (Zerubabel) to be king, and when this

did not happen the prophets began thinking towards a more distant future (Zachariah 9:9, Boadt 532-533).

As could already be seen in this section, the vast majority of Old Testament scholars connect the origin of the messianic hope with the establishment of the Davidic monarchy which received its divine legitimacy in Nathan's prophecy. The promise simply focused on the enduring divine blessing to David and his posterity whose rule is portrayed as a representation of the rule of Yahweh on earth (Childs, *Biblical Theology of OT and NT* 452). This tradition may have shaped the efforts of the Christian evangelists by connecting the genealogy of Jesus to the Davidic ancestry. As Brown explains, Matthew probably created fictional genealogical links back to Abraham and David also "to appeal to the mixed constituency of his [Matthew's] community of Jewish and Gentile Christians" (68).

Rydelnik consideration of OT presents a different perspective to the treatment of messianic prophecies. His work puts it plainly that the best way of understanding the Bible as a whole is to see the OT as predicting the coming of the messiah and the NT revealing him to be Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly, a commitment to faithful exegesis of the Hebrew Bible should yield a messianic interpretation (8). This understanding favours a canonical reading approach even though its focus is on Jesus of Nazareth in the gospels. This work will extend this thought to cover the promise of Jesus' second coming as a necessary inclusion in the theological

terminus of messianic prophecies of the OT.

A Canonical Survey of Some OT Texts on Messianic Hope

What this paper seeks to achieve in this section is to give a step by step clarification of development of some of the texts regarding messianic hope and concept from the earliest stage in the Old Testament to the period after the exile. Let us quickly note here that there is a major challenge with this kind of approach, which is the challenge of identifying the true texts of messianic hope as conceived by the OT prophets; and that of hermeneutical consideration of the texts. These challenges are especially simplified by Christian exegetes who tend to interpret the texts in favour of Jesus of Nazareth. For the Christians, the entire messianic concept found fulfilment only in Jesus, but for a non Christian, the challenge is a difficult one that cannot be passed off simply by putting Jesus at the centre of these texts.

The earliest canonical hint of the messianic figure appears in Genesis 3:15 where the seed of the woman is expected to put an end to the overriding influence of the serpent, the culprit behind the fall of man whose original position was to have dominion over Yahweh's creation. The next major text is in Genesis 49:10. Here, Jacob's blessing places Judah in pre-eminence and the sceptre of rulership would remain with him "until Shiloh come...and to him shall be the obedience of the people." Jenni argues rightly that this clearly goes beyond the condition attained under King David because the Israelites

conceive of the coming Shiloh as the era of the messianic ruler (362). As noted earlier, the problem of interpretation goes along with these texts. For instance, while 'Shiloh' in the text may simply pass as Jesus Christ (second coming) among the Christians, others (Jews) may hold a contradicting position in which a physical monarch of Israel is implied.

There are several texts in psalm that presents the idea of the messiah. While all may not attract serious consideration here, it must however be noted that the texts are vital to the construction of the messianic theology, because they appear in the earliest stage of the development of the tradition (Psalm 2:2; 45:2; 68:18; 69:21; 110:1; 118:22; 132:11). Harrington concludes this group of psalms as the Royal psalms and subscribes to the view that most of them are pre-exilic and they visualize a historical king who would sit on the throne of David. He adds that by this same token, they are messianic, since the messianic king is a member of the Davidic king dynasty by virtue of his office (227).

There are myriad of texts in the book of Isaiah on the messianic tradition among Jews. We would consider three major passages in proto Isaiah that concern messianic hope. The first text is Isaiah 7:10-17 which concerns the sign of Immanuel to the fearful Judean king Ahaz who had been contemplating alliance with other nations to stop the eminent invasion of the Syro-Ephratmite coalition (Folarin 30). Prophet Isaiah comes to him with the decree that there is no cause for fear and asked the king to demand a sign as a proof, but Ahaz refused because he will not 'tempt Yahweh.'

However, the sign is given; the birth of a child whose name would be Immanuel (God with us). Harrington does not think of a futuristic dimension to this messianic oracle. To him, king Ahaz feared the discontinuity of the Davidic kingship (7:1-3, 6) and he had already sacrificed his first born son (2 kings 16:3, cf 23:10), possibly the only son. He adds that the prophetic oracle referred to the king's wife who will bear a royal heir as a sign that the Davidic kingship will remain (229-230). Harrington's position raises some arguments. First the virgin referred to in the text may actually be a virgin and not the wife of king Ahaz as Harrington proposes. Secondly, the sign of Immanuel is a punishment for the faithless king (Ahaz) (7:17, Heaton 315). Again, the description of Immanuel reign from v21-25, presents a form analogous to the eschatological messianic idea expressed in other passages of the Old Testament. The Isaiah 7:14 text is also contentious on the basis that the Christian interpretation of *Alma* as a virgin could be a misreading of the text because the Hebrew word *alma* always convey "a young woman" as its appropriate meaning.

The second text is Isaiah 9:1-7, the so called Christmas promise. Jenni submits that the investiture and the conferring of the coronation titles of the Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace, actually set the foundation and program of the eternal messianic reign in justice and peace (362). The futuristic connotation of the text must be noted here since that is the centre

focus of the Jews and the Christians messianic theology.

The last text is Isaiah 11:1-7. Without doubt, the text describes a future king who would sit on the throne of David after the existing ruling house might have been destroyed. Harrington again states that this perhaps indicates the step from dynastic messianism to personal messianism (231). The uncertainty expressed by Harrington here will lead us to think in line with the idea that the text in its entirety is eschatological and resembles the future hope of the Jews and the Christians' Second coming of Christ at the *parusia*.

The rest of Isaiah (Deutero and Trito Isaiah) is permeated with messianic utterances which the size of this paper cannot afford to x-ray. However, Isaiah 61:1-6 which describes the characteristic function of the anointed one, which is adapted as Jesus' programmatic sermon in Luke 4:17-21, must be mentioned. Apart from this, four passages of Deutero Isaiah that have had special significance for both Christian and Jewish commentators must also be identified. These are the servant songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:1-9; 52:13-53:12), which Christians consider to be prophecies concerning the mission and the passion of Jesus Christ, but which most Jews traditionally interpret as a personification of postexilic Israel (Microsoft Encarta Par. 1-4).

Micah 5:2-5 is another text of interest. It gives the origin and birth of the messiah. Though a descendant of David, the messiah constitutes a new beginning from David's kinsmen, the

Ephrathite (11sam 17:12) whose dwelling place is Bethlehem (Jenni 363). The Christian understanding of these prophecies is very well expounded in the gospels. Jeremiah 23:5-6 also describe the reign of the messiah. Mariottini holds that Jerimiah 23:5-8 are believed even among Jewish scholars to refer to a more distant future of the coming of the messiah - the 'Branch' (Par. 1-2).

Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at the earliest period of the post exilic era. In Haggai 2:23, Zerubbabel is linked up with the old royal messianic expectation and its fulfilment. However, Haggai had misread the signs of the time and the hope of messiah never found fulfilment in Zerubbabel as expected (Howie 135). Zechariah, obviously a contemporary of Haggai (zech 6:9-14) also describes the symbolic crowning of Zerubbabel as king messiah; but like Haggai, this was not to be a reality. It must be noted however that Christians strongly hold that Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophesy on Palm Sunday, when he triumphantly entered Jerusalem (Harrington 233).

A canonical reading of these texts reveals that the messianic prophecies as delivered at different times in the course of Israel's history, looked beyond the immediate periods of the faith communities that received them. It ostensibly convincing, that even though these prophecies would have served their original communities as Yahweh's assurance of comfort, especially amidst the oppression of Israel by other nations, a more distant period was in view for the ultimate fulfilment of the messianic hope. The appearance of Jesus of Nazareth in the

NT, does not constitute a separate event, but rather, a significant part of the ongoing salvation history of Israel.

Christians' Understanding of Old Testament Messianic Tradition

The New Testament gospels present Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish expected messiah (Matthew 16:16). The preaching of the apostles begins in the book of Acts with claims that the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah (Acts 2:36). According to Weis, the apostle designates Jesus as the messiah who was prepared by God through the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the highest mission in Jewish history. They recognized him as the Anointed One (Mark 3:29; Bernhard Weiss 23).

The fact that the messianic tradition was highly appealed to in the Early Church is made apparent in the writings of the apostle Paul. Childs argues that Paul's entire ministry was shaped by his belief in the messiahship of Jesus. To Paul, the crucified and exalted Christ Jesus is the messiah of Israel (I Cor. 15:3; Rom. 10:9, 459). To the apostles, the Old Testament texts that witness to the emergence of the Messiah are quintessential because they pointed to the subject of their faith, that is Jesus (I Peter 1:10-12). Childs again posits that it is not as if there was a unilinear development from a Jewish concept of the messiah to a stage in which the title became a proper name for Jesus, rather, the actual impact of Jesus' life, death and resurrection was what continued to shape the meaning of messiah for the Christians (*Biblical Theology of OT and NT*, 460).

A very core aspect of the Christian doctrine on the messianic tradition concerns Jesus' 'Second Coming' which biblical scholars have termed the *Parousia*. In this doctrine, the Christians hold very strongly that the resurrected and the exalted Jesus Christ will again appear in the course of history as the triumphant messiah who is crowned the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This doctrinal theme falls into the eschatological discourse among Christians. The event as recorded in the gospels describes a coming cosmic upheaval and predicts that in the midst of it 'they will see the Son of Man coming with the clouds with great power and glory.' (Mark 13: 24-26). In this respect, Jesus himself affirmed that he is the messiah and added 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:61-62; Collins 261).

The description of the character and features of the messiah in the *Parousia* doctrine of the Church canonically follows the Jewish concept of messiah in a remarkable way. An x-ray of some of the New Testament texts will buttress this point. Jesus himself had foretold his second coming stating clearly that 'when the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory' (Matt. 25:31). The 'throne of his glory' here if viewed against the OT, would adequately fit the Davidic throne which Yahweh had promised its continuity forever (II Sam. 7: 15-16). Jesus' testimony again clarifies the continuity of the Davidic throne in the apocalyptic discourse thus: "I am the

root and the offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16, cf Isaiah 11:1).

The Jews of the Old Testament hold that the messiah-king would judge in righteousness. In this regard the New Testament apostles hold that the messiah would at the *parousia* come to execute judgment upon all (Jude 14-15). The Advent is the appointed day in which the messiah-king will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10). The messianic utterances of the Old Testament prophets are replete with the idea of the peaceful reign of the messiah-king. The New Testament also maintains that the *parousia* will usher in the era of total peace for man. Accordingly, in Christ Kingdom there will be 'no sorrow, no pain, and no crying' (Rev. 21:4).

Christians are satisfied in the fact that this glorious reign has been put into motion by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Neufeld put this clearly thus:

The early followers of Jesus insisted that his resurrection must not be isolated from the larger picture of God's redemption of the cosmos. Jesus' resurrection is thus the first fruit of the resurrection of all God put his stamp of approval on Jesus, and with his resurrection, God's dramatic transformation of the cosmos has begun (295).

Critical Evaluation

In the foregoing sections of this paper, attempts have been made at unravelling the basic positions of both Jews and the Christians on the messianic theology of the Old Testament. Various clarifications have also been made in this regard. This

section seeks to evaluate these positions in view of the submission that the messianic hope of the OT continued in a canonical sense into the NT with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and himself as the *terminus ad quem* of the messianic prophecies. A guiding question here is: at what point in a canonical appreciation of OT messianic theology does the Jewish and Christians understanding of the concept meet?

The Jews expect a physical messianic king who would sit on the throne of David and reign in righteousness. This is the messiah who would restore the people of Israel to their rightful place of honour. He would bring about a state of total peace on the earth, among others. The Christians on the other hand hold that the messianic prophecies have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. However, there are two dimensions of Jesus' fulfilment of the messianic prophecies. First, there is a stream of messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that unveils the sufferings the messiah king would encounter at his coming (Psalm 69:21; 22:18; Isaiah 50:6; 53:1-10; 52:14; Daniel 9:26; Zechariah 11:12; 12:10; 13:7). This stream of prophecies according to Christian tradition has been fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ (Thompson 1656). The second stream of prophecies concern the kingly nature of the messiah (Psalm 2:6-8; 68:18; 118:22; Isaiah 9:6-7; 32:1-3; 42:1-9; Jer. 13:5; Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14; Micah 5:2; Zech. 6:12-13; 9:9-10, Malachi 3:1), which Christians traditionally hold largely, would be fulfilled at the second coming of Jesus Christ or the *parousia* (Thompson 1656).

In terms of physical realization of the hope, the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospels can hardly pass as fulfilment of the first stream of messianic prophecies as noted above; let alone meeting the expectation of the second stream of prophecies. The question posed to Jesus by John the Baptist from the prison is a pointer to the fact that the Jews of Jesus' day believed little or not in the realisation of the messianic hope in Jesus Christ. The tough question therefore is: is Jesus of Nazareth the messiah? Firstly, we must recognise that both the messianic expectations of the Jews and the *parousia* claims of the Christians, characteristically point to the same figure. Both accept a coming futuristic messiah; a future of peace for Israel and the world; a king who rules in righteousness, among others. Secondly, in terms of the theological nature of canonical reading, it is the descriptions of Christians' second coming of Jesus that appropriately fit the theological character of Jewish messianic hope (Akwanya 86). Finally, the fragmentary textual scrutiny of messianic texts cannot answer the question; but a faith response to the canon as a whole including the NT as one divine plan of God in human history. Of course, a faith response to the canonical scripture is consistent with canonical approach.

Conclusion

This paper has shown essentially, that the messianic hope of traditional Jewish people is the same as the hope of the second coming of Jesus for Christians. Irrespective of this, the Jews continue to make frantic effort at disproving Christians' claims regarding messianic

prophecies and raising awareness to the fact that the messianic hope remains unfulfilled. Christians on the other divide continue their evangelistic mission to the world with the call for all to prepare for the messiah's second coming.

To address this seemingly irresolvable issue, individuals in early Christian era wrote apologetically pointing to different messianic prophecies in the OT with their NT fulfilments. Progressively, scholars over the years have adopted different methods in interpreting messianic text. But what has been lacking is a holistic approach of the Bible as a case for the unity in the meaning of messianic prophecy. A canonical approach as used in this work does not seek to fragmentise the prophecies and associate meaning to them arbitrarily, instead, we have argued that they comprised one continuous plan of God, each being linked to the other in an ongoing narrative of the salvation history of Israel.

In our canonical understanding of the messianic texts, we have argued that although the prophecies were meaningful to their original believing communities to whom they were first addressed, they ultimately point to a future fulfilment. Thus, while we appreciate the growth of messianic prophecies and the fact that they have been shaped and reshaped by various events in the history of Israel, it makes sense to see them as part of a holistic program in the divine plan of God. Thus, a canonical comprehension of messianic texts as we have presented in this paper, shows that God has dealt with His people based on the covenant made first with Abraham

and, later, Israel at Sinai. Through Israel, as implied in His promise to Abraham, Yahweh has extended his benevolence to the world in a decisive act of salvation through His anointed. Israel is no longer the only covenant people because, in the first instance, the redemptive work of Jesus has restored man to his original place with God. Jesus' return in glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords in the event that climaxes the existence of the world as we know it, is the final fulfilment of the messianic hope. It is safe therefore to conclude that the messianic hope of both the Jewish and Christian faith communities ultimately rest on Jesus' second coming as the Lord's anointed.

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