

**MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS AS PROPHETIC  
RESPONSES TO CRISES:  
A ZIMBABWEAN PERSPECTIVE**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and it has not been submitted previously in its entirety or in part at any university or college for a degree.

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## **ABSTRACT**

What stimulates the emergence of messianic expectations or messianic figures in a society such as ancient Israel? Messianic expectations emerged as prophetic responses to social, economic, political and religious crises. This could be traced from the historical background of the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods. Messianic expectations in pre-exilic Israel were triggered by the failure of the Davidic dynasty to uphold Yahweh's instructions and they depict the shift in focus from the anointed kings to the birth of a new Davidic prince (Isa. 9:1-7). The exilic period drew attention to a gentile king, Cyrus as Messiah (Isa. 44:28-45:1-8) who would restore Israel from exile. However, messianic expectations in Daniel 9:25-27 came about as a response to the extended subjection to foreign rule after the return from exile. The expectation for a messiah therefore changed from focusing on a historical figure to an apocalyptic figure in the post-exilic period.

This approach is triggered by the situation in Zimbabwe where messianic rhetoric is now being used in an attempt to address the fragile socio-economical situation. It is shown that recent characterization of President Robert Mugabe as a messianic figure based on his role as a former liberator is a skilful propaganda and manipulation of the expectations of a messiah to legitimize his leadership amidst growing opposition.

## OPSOMMING

Wat stimuleer die verskyning van messiaanse verwagtinge of messiaanse figure in 'n samelewing soos dié van ou Israel? Messiaanse verwagtinge het ontstaan as profetiese antwoorde op sosiale, ekonomiese, politiese en godsdienstige krisisse. Dit kan histories teruggelei word na die tydperke voor die ballingskap en na die ballingskap. Messiaanse verwagtinge in voor-ballingskap Israel is aangewakker deur die Dawidiese dinastie se onvermoë om Jahweh se opdragte te handhaaf, en dui op die fokus-verskuiwing van gesalfde konings na die geboorte van 'n nuwe Dawidiese prins (Jes. 9:1-7). Die ballingskap het die aandag gevestig op 'n heidense koning, Kores, as die messias (Jes. 44:28-45:1-8) wat Israel uit ballingskap sou red en herstel. Messiaanse verwagtinge in Daniel 9:25-27 het egter ontstaan as 'n reaksie op die voordurende onderwerping aan buitelandse bewind ná die terugkeer uit ballingskap. Die verwagting van 'n messias het dus verander van 'n fokus op 'n historiese figuur na 'n fokus op 'n apokaliptiese figuur in die na-ballingskap-era.

Die benadering tot Messianisme in hierdie navorsing is na aanleiding van die huidige situasie in Zimbabwe, waar messiaanse retoriek gebruik word om die brose sosio-ekonomiese situasie aan te spreek. Die studie dui aan dat onlangse uitbeelding van President Robert Mugabe as 'n messiaanse figuur op grond van sy rol as 'n voormalige bevryder, is knap propaganda en manipulering van die verwagtinge van 'n messias, met die doel om sy leierskap te legitimeer te midde van toenemende teenkanting.

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## **Abbreviations**

AC – After the Common Era

AICs – African Independent Churches

BCE – Before Common Era

BSAC – British South African Company

LXX – The Septuagint

NABS – The New American Standard Bible

NIV – The New International Version

NRSV – The New Revised Standard Version

RSV – The Revised Standard Version

ZANU – Zimbabwe African Nation Union

ZANU (PF) – Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)

ZAPU – Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZCC – Zion Christian Church

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## MAPS



Figure 1: Political Map of Zimbabwe

<http://www.mapsofworld.com/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-political-map.html> Retrieved 06 24, 2011

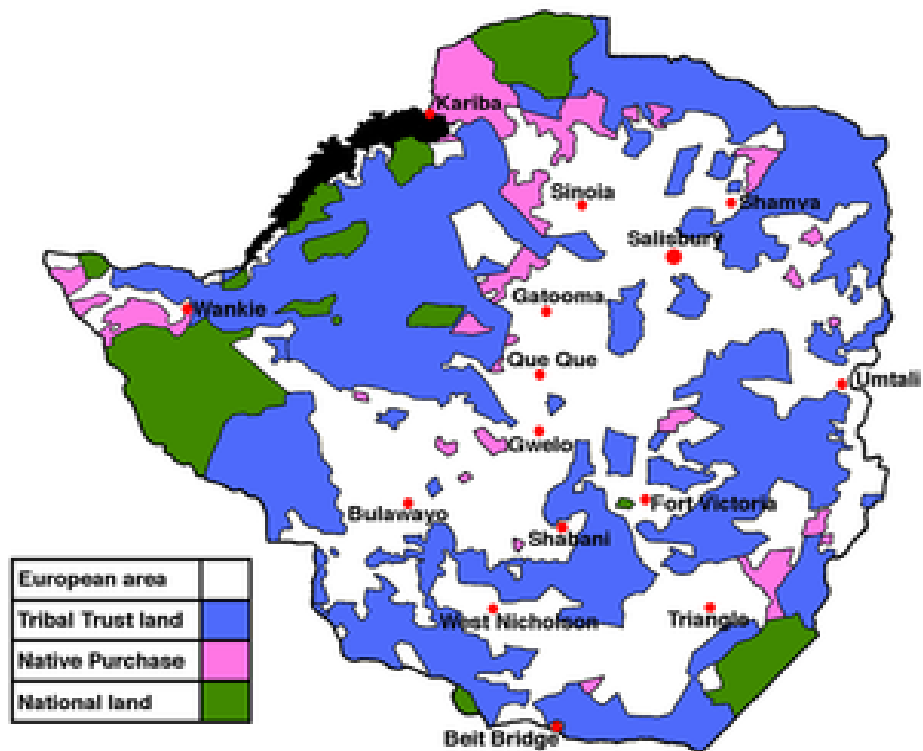


Figure 2: Land Distribution in Zimbabwe after the Land Apportionment Act of 1930

Downloaded from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land\\_reform\\_in\\_Zimbabwe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_reform_in_Zimbabwe) on 11-07-2011



Figure 3: The Geographical Location of the Ancient Near East Today (Van der Merwe 2010:BH 178 No 1 ANE.ppt).

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Political and socio-economic crises are prophetic moments which incite messianic expectations. Religiously rooted messianic expectations tend to be manipulated by political powers which utilize the messianic phenomenon for political propaganda. Due to such rhetorical strategies, communities may not be able to discern the truth. Since prophesy can be manipulated, communities should be informed about the foundations of messianic expectations in order to discern who the messianic figures of their time are and to identify falsehood. Prophetic books are one of the major sources of messianic expectations. They respond to political, socio-economic and religious crises by raising expectations for future salvation.

The motivation for this thesis comes from the fact that the researcher is a citizen of Zimbabwe, a country where the political and socio-economic crises were so great that the hope of the people was thrust into a distant future. However, those who are loyal to the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) ZANU (PF) recognize the present predicament as the handiwork of the enemies. They even recognize the current president as a messianic figure who brought the nation from political bondage into independence. This research may help the people to distinguish between true and false prophecies and to refocus their destiny.

Messianic traits in prophetism are investigated by socio-anthropology. This research could also facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of messianism in the Old Testament.

#### 1.2 Research Question

What stimulates the emergence of messianism (messianic expectations and messianic figures in prophecy) in a society such as ancient Israel?



### **1.3 Hypothesis**

Messianism emerged as a prophetic response to political and socio-economic crises. The expectation of the coming of a messiah was therefore rooted in political, socio-economic and religious crises.

### **1.4 Research Methodology**

This thesis conducts a literature study of existing scholarly research on messianism as a prophetic response to political, socio-economic and religious crises as well as the exegesis of relevant texts. Some attention will also be given to socio-anthropological studies of prophetism. This aspect may also be discussed more extensively in future research.

### **1.5 Definition of Concepts**

#### **1.5.1 Messianism**

##### ***1.5.1.1 J. Bright***

Bright (1953:18-19) refers to Isaiah 9:6 as a messianic text from its use in the New Testament Jesus' birth narratives. He considers messianic expectation as part of a wider Jewish eschatological hope since Israel's hope was the coming kingdom of God. Such hope was rooted in Israel's faith and history. Isaiah's hope for the Messiah Prince came as organic revelation to the people and advanced from tragic experiences. More strikingly, for Bright (1953:83-97), Isaiah's use of denunciation and doom is placed on the flipside with the idea of a glorious hope. This idea can also be traced in Micah, Amos and Hosea. He claims that messianic expectations have been nurtured on the seedbed of Israel's faith. Isaiah's revelation was given in the temple; therefore, we may see his prophecy as being rooted in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Messianic expectations were related to the Davidic lineage, Jerusalem and the temple.

Bright (1953:170-178) contends that the postexilic community was based on law observance in which the prophets insisted on the righteous establishment of covenant brotherhood. Exile was previously associated with failure to uphold the covenant. After the destruction of the Temple and the nation, what remained for the Jews was to keep the law to maintain their status. It was also believed that if at all the messiah would

come the Sabbath had to be observed fully. On the flipside of law observance was the growing stress on keeping the law which resulted in the thirst for catastrophic divine intervention and to the development of apocalypticism. Apocalypse discredits individual works. It therefore led to the revival of the prophetic traditions. Though accompanied by traits of observance of the law, the book of Daniel was meant mainly for the days of Daniel when divine intervention was eminent. Daniel 2 depicts the image of Nebuchadnezzar's vision that typifies the succession of powers that governed the earth. This brought in the prophetic interpretation that God would establish an unshakable kingdom which will bring to an end all other powers. This is also followed by the vision of "one like the son of man" who will be given the kingdom over all humankind.

#### *1.5.1.2 H. Ringgren*

Ringgren (1956:7-10), in the introduction to his book *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, defends the idea that the Old Testament reference to the Messiah was based on the historical situation of Israel. The New Testament passages reflect the idea that some Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled at a later stage. However, modern biblical scholars have provided different interpretations of those passages. This has actually created a great gap between the historical-critical understanding and the interpretation of the biblical passages; that is, we have two interpretive contexts – the historical and the theological. Some scholars defend the messianic interpretation of the Old Testament texts in the New Testament. In this way, the historical exegesis would in a way support the traditional Christian interpretation. Ringgren's book, in principle, outlines this understanding. Considering that the Psalms were hymns of ancient Israel, it would be made clear that its content is of pre-exilic origin. Some of these hymns portray Enthronement Festival, Covenant Festival or New Year Festival, for example, Psalms 24, 47, 96 and 99 which refer to God's enthronement and kingship. Also considering that similar festivals were held in ancient Near East (see map page xiv), Israel could not be exempted from such festivals. These festivals were also found in Babylon as New Year festivals and equally dealt with victory over powers of darkness and death and the creation of a new order of life. In this regard, it is shown that the Babylonian New Year Festival was a reinterpretation of the former. This paves the way

for the New Testament reinterpretation of the theme of messianism in light of the Old Testament.

#### *1.5.1.3 E. Jenni*

Jenni (1962:360-365) is of the opinion that Messianic hope dominates other eschatological hopes because of the New Testament use of the term in relation to Jesus. The Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern messianic expectations based on the kings should however not be translated to mean a present king but should focus at a king of eschatological character. While the picture of the Messiah is also found among Babylonians and Egyptians, they do not specifically project the culmination of history. Messianic expectations in Israel were based on the royal ideology of the Davidic dynasty but also follow the mythical ideology of the origin of man as king of paradise. This expectation is related to the expectation of Yahweh's full revelation. While messianic expectations are mentioned in the Old Testament, it is controversial whether they are truly messianic or not. Some examples are Isaiah 7:10-17; 9:1-7; 11:1-9, Micah 25:2-5a; Haggai 2:21 Zechariah 6:9-14 and Daniel 7. The list does not include Daniel 9:25 and 26. Isaiah 45:1 is not considered as messianic in character because Yahweh himself was king and Cyrus portrayed a political forerunner in the service of Yahweh. Even the "suffering servant" is only considered in the New Testament when integrated with the figure of "the son of man."

#### *1.5.1.4 E. Rivkin*

Rivkin (1976 588-591) considers the emergence of messianic ideas to be understood by distinguishing various stages of the evolution of Israel's religion. He then discusses the four main stages of the development of this term. First and foremost, God was the leader of Israel. A military figure only surfaced when Israel faced threats from the Palestinians which led to Samuel's anointment of Saul and eventually David as king. The promise by Yahweh of an everlasting throne in Samuel 7:8-29 was Yahweh's commitment to uphold his promises which resulted in the messianic idea.

Second, the divine commitment developed a new meaning as prophets like Amos, Hosea, and Micah perceived a future righteous that would reign in Israel. This new

meaning was a response to grave internal and external crises. Internally there was disloyalty to Yahweh, socio-economic distress, political corruption and immorality. Externally was drastic opposition from the imperial powers which threatened to devastate the people and subject them to exile. A remedy to this was to have a perfect king, to institute a perfect society, creating perfect peace with other nations, resulting in perfect harmony throughout the whole creation.

Lastly, the eschatological idea developed when the prophetic dreams were shattered as a response to the social, economic and political reality that resulted from Babylonian exile. The restoration hailed by Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1) did not fulfil the prophetic visions. Power struggle developed between the priests and the monarchy. This was the time when the Pentateuch was canonized, which mandated the priests to exercise hegemony, and negate the need for a king.

The story went on and on but for the sake of this discussion, it is better to consider at this point, the later development which led to alternative views. The authority of the priests was undermined by the decree by Antiochus Epiphanes who demanded the worship of Greek deities and scrambled the authority of the priests. In search for a constructive solution, four basic solutions emerged namely faith in God's power, revival of prophetic visions, armed uprising and shift from earthly rewards to heavenly ones. Daniel advanced the messianic ideas with his use of the terms "son of man" and "messiah" which were used even in other Jewish writings and the New Testament. The Pharisees also contributed to the trend by emphasizing individual faith and salvation which hoped for (spiritual) life after death.

#### ***1.5.1.5 W. Eichrodt***

Eichrodt in his, *Theology of the Old Testament*, considers messianism as profoundly rooted in prophetic interpretation of the covenant in Deutero-Isaiah. Although this point does not actually pertain to the covenant at Sinai, it speaks of the redemption from Egypt. Isaiah presents the ideal conditions of the time in which the divine plan of salvation would be realized. He links this to the faithfulness of God to Abraham as the background to accomplishing the work that began in earlier times. The covenant is

embodied in a human being, i.e. the suffering Servant of God who becomes a messianic ruler in solidarity with the people of God. He fuses messianic hope with the concept of the covenant (Eichrodt 1961:61-62).

Eichrodt believes that eschatology is not simply an appendix to the prophetic thoughts in line with messianic prophecies. Otherwise, without considering messianic prophecies in light of eschatology, we are tempted to degrade them to merely nationalist popular expectations. He rejects the consideration of messianic texts as predominantly determined by their historical background but considers them as the portrayal of complete divine sovereignty. The eschatological features of the prophetic message are given to answer difficult questions concerning imperialism (Eichrodt (1961:385-386).

Isaiah's prophecy (11:1-9) pictures the royal judge endowed by the spirit of Yahweh. Through the king, the operation of the Spirit was applied not to a sphere of purely miraculous, but to political social and ethical dimensions. The king became the incarnate judge who determined the hopes of the people for an ideal society. The prophets contrasted the idea of the state, as they understood social righteousness as the divine universal prerogative to influence earthly affairs and to settle the destiny of the nation. The prophets were actually more critical of the military and political power yet the purpose of divine providence is to morally rule with justice and righteousness. The prophets pictured the messianic future as transformation in understanding the purpose behind God's operations. The new age is therefore brought about by the destruction of the hostile nations in war, but in the building of the kingdom of God through conversion. The Messiah would become the deliverer who suffers for his people rather than a warrior (Eichrodt 1961:454).

Eichrodt describes messianic consummation as "... the ordinances laid down once for all and now affecting the whole of life; and it is in the irrevocability of these ordinances that faith is built up. (1961:479)".

From the exilic period, the moods and elements of popular salvation forced their way into prophetic eschatology.

#### **1.5.1.6 G. Von Rad**

Von Rad uses the word “messianic” in the sense of the Old Testament’s specific meaning with particular reference to the anointed which was associated with the anointment of David and his descendants to the dynastic throne of Israel. The message was prophesied along with David’s plan to build a house for the Lord by Nathan who claimed that God was going to build the house for David. The promise alludes to the covenant plan of Yahweh with the house of David. The covenant relationship was woven within a wider historical context in which the point of view shifted to the question of how it transpired in a series of internal political struggles. The history of David is presented as culminating from the message of a prophet which reveals God acting in the life of a sinner in secret. The history of the Davidic dynasty reveals the messianic ‘problem’ in which the one whom Yahweh loved would ascend the throne despite his sinfulness. The fulfilment of this promise was totally unexpected. If such a complex of events associated with David led to the realization of divine salvation, human offence could not have been the releasing factor, but could have come as divine initiative (Von Rad 1962:308 -318).

Von Rad further claims that Nathan’s prophecy was developed in the Chronicler’s messianic tradition in which the prophecy extended to the post-exilic period. The one who was being awaited from the Davidic lineage would unite the two royal and the priestly offices (Von Rad 1962:151).

#### **1.5.1.7 G. Fohrer**

According to Fohrer (1968:141), messianism was based on the recognition of the Davidic dynasty of the Southern kingdom as a religious role player. Its legitimization by Yahweh was invoked by its intimate relationship with Yahweh. This resulted in the messianic expectation of the post-exilic period. The Northern kingdom of Israel experienced a succession of various individual kings. The Davidic dynasty also played a priestly role by virtue of occasional cultic performance at the Jerusalem Temple. Fohrer (1968:334-335) further alludes to the postexilic prophecy regarding Zerubbabel as symbolically messianic referring to the Davidic king of the *eschaton*, whose dignity is

divided between two representatives by including the high priest Joshua as the agent of spiritual affairs. Furthermore, Fohrer (1968:338-340) takes this as being shared between Haggai and Zechariah yet with few differences. Haggai is depicted as considering the inauguration of the messianic age by the promise of blessing on the day when the cornerstone was laid. This was to be followed by the destruction of power among the nations this was going to happen before the installation of Zerubbabel to the messianic rule. Zachariah differs in the sequence of events. He starts with the destruction of the Gentile kings which was blamed for Jewish misfortunes. This would be followed by creation of wonderful circumstances for the community of Jerusalem among whom Yahweh made his dwelling for the sake of protecting them, as well as destroying the sinners in Judea and the removal of sin from the community. This would be also followed by the return of the exiles which would usher in the inauguration of the Messiah. Fohrer realizes the eschatological transformation in the pre-exilic prophetic proclamations.

Fohrer (1968: 347-353) considers messianic expectation as developed around two theories upon who would exercise authority on the earth in the salvation age. One theory is that Yahweh will reside the earth in the salvation age. The other view is that Yahweh would not rule but would appoint someone as his representative and governor. This ruler would be named 'Messiah although the Old Testament does not use the term as is used today. He believes that today's designation was developed in the post Old Testament period. He also does not perceive that any Old Testament prophecies mentions the term "messiah" as being set apart for divine purpose as found in later texts of Isaiah 45:1. Therefore, the Messiah would be described as an eschatological figure standing in an intimate relationship with Yahweh like priests, prophets and kings set apart by the anointing with oil. Such a candidate was expected after the fall of Judah. The Messiah is just a mortal man and not a supernatural being and no individual Messiah was expected but a dynastic Davidic figure. There was no miracle around the figure of the Messiah. The miracle would rather be the age of salvation inaugurated by Yahweh and the establishment of the empire by him. Since the task of the Messiah was to sit on the throne of David, this presupposes that the Messiah did not bring salvation.

The messiah of early Judaism was treated as a political and national leader of the earthly order and the postexilic prophets reinterpreted the message of the pre-exilic messiah.

#### *1.5.1.8 M. Assimeng*

It is clear that messianic movements are rooted in the social context of a particular group of people. Messianism entails eminent expectation by a group of people of a hero who will usher them into a golden age. However, it is difficult to distinguish between distinctly religious messianic expectations and secular (Assimeng 1969:2).

#### *1.5.1.9 J. Neusner*

In other words, as Neusner (1984: xi) puts it in the preface of his book *Messiah in Context*, “the Messiah is an all blank screen unto which the given community would project its concerns”. As a result, various points of divergence could be recognized.

#### *1.5.1.10 M. L. Daneel*

Daneel (1984:40) rejects the negative judgment of messianic movements in Africa which Western scholars view as non-Christian or post-modern. On the basis of empirical facts relating to the Shona Independent Churches in Zimbabwe, Daneel contends that the black Messiah figures are concerned with a legitimate contextualization of the Christian message related to their own socio-cultural and religious backgrounds.

#### *1.5.1.11 D. H. Wallace*

In the Inter-testamental period, two kinds of messiahs were expected. One was the national messiah who would assume kingship over Judah to deliver the people from their political oppressors. There was also hope for a transcendent messiah descending from heaven who would be both human and divine and who would establish the kingdom of God on earth (Wallace 1984:764).



#### ***1.5.1.12 M. De Jonge***

According to De Jonge (1992:777), the use of the term messiah was not initially for an expected future agent of redemption but it was developed in later Jewish writings of between 200 and 100 BCE. He claims that it could simply mean any figure that could bring eternal bliss. The terms messianism and messianic are generally used to denote change in history not necessarily brought about by a particular future redeemer. Historians and social anthropologists use these terms to discuss later development in western history and other cultural contexts mostly in relation to western colonial, missionary and modern influences. Messianic expectation becomes the expectation of a saviour called messiah. De Jonge further warns that the treatment of messianism in light of eschatology needs to be taken seriously. Eschatological expectation however is described as based on the conviction that God would inaugurate a new era using human or angelic mediators.

De Jonge (1992:778) reiterates that reference to messiah in Daniel 9:25 is believed to refer to Zerubbabel during the time of Onias, and Daniel 9:26 to Joshua in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. He however warns that the absolute use of the term messiah without a definite article should also be taken into consideration. Isaiah 45:1 and Habakkuk 3:13 are the only Old Testament prophetic texts which prophesy about the future Davidic king. However, present inquiries confirm undeniable related elements in many prophetic books.

#### ***1.5.1.13 W. Kaiser***

The term 'messianic' has a wider range of meaning than 'Messiah'. It is usually used in the Old Testament with reference to a glorious hope of a glorious future. This suggests that the Messiah is the central figure to bring about this golden age (Kaiser 1995:15).

#### ***1.5.1.14 J. G. McConville***

Messianic expectations refer to phenomena that arose in the late period of the Old Testament. These *Messianic expectations* were further fully developed about a century before or after the birth of Jesus Christ. The Jewish context of expectation hailed Jesus

Christ as the Messiah. The verbal form is widely used in the Old Testament for *anointing of kings, prophets and others* for a divine responsibility. Originally the term was generally a deliverer but eventually became the focus of hope for postexilic Jews (McConville 1995:9).

#### **1.5.1.15 D. Juel**

Juel (2000:889) defines the term messiah as an adjectival form with passive sense derived from the Hebrew verb meaning to anoint. This term is on some occasions used for prophets and priests but, in principle, it is used for kings. Its use in the New Testament presupposes that it underwent a period of interpretation which can be reconstructed from post-biblical literature. While the term is also used in the Old Testament, it should be considered as having developed within Israel. Without knowledge of biblical traditions, references to the Messiah make not much sense. The Messiah actually refers to a future royal figure that will have a crucial role during the last days. Old Testament traditions projected to a future Davidic ruler.

Juel (2000:889) also distinguishes between the terms “messianic” and “eschatological”. He claims that messianic refers to a promised future. Jews hoped that a descendant of David would redeem Israel from her enemies and establish an ideal kingdom “characterized by justice and peace”. He is also of the opinion that the term “eschatological” embraces all future expectations for royal figures. Eschatological traditions reveal the existence of prophetic and priestly figures. The Christian tradition merges the royal, priestly and prophetic traits into a single individual.

Juel (2000:890) concludes that:

....the interpretation of the biblical material was influenced by a variety of factors including social situations and historical events. “The Messiah” exists in particular contexts. The precise meaning of the term therefore depends upon those various contexts and can be determined only by attending to such particulars.

#### **1.5.1.16 W. Rose**

Messianic expectations is defined by Rose (2001:275) as, “expectations focusing on a future royal figure sent by God – someone who will bring salvation to God’s people and

the world and establish a kingdom characterized by features such as peace and justice".

#### *1.5.1.17 D. Bock*

According to Bock (2005:503-506), the term "messiah" simply refers to "the anointed one," but in theology it refers to the "promised one" hoped for by the Jews, not necessarily the eschatological figure. It is rooted in the hope for an ideal king as in Psalms 2:2. Only in Daniel 9:26 is the term messiah used in a more technical way. While Jewish hopes were there during the time of Jesus, Judaism had four major portraits of a messiah as can be traced in other ancient records. These were 1) a David like figure; 2) a transcendent figure in the likeness of "the son of man", a priestly figure and, 4) a prophetic teacher. Most of Bock's discussion focuses on Jesus as the Messiah which seems to be his main point of reference.

#### *1.5.1.18 S.T. Porter*

Firstly, the term messiah is defined by Porter as a future figure that has an authoritative role in the end of time, normally the eschatological king. Secondly, the term may also mean a present religious and political leader who is appointed by God, especially a king or a priest and sometimes a prophet. Lastly, a messiah could be a future royal figure sent by God to bring salvation to the people of God and to establish the kingdom of peace and justice in the world (Porter 2007:36).

#### *1.5.1.19 K. M. Heim*

Messianism may also be defined as a set of expectations which focus on a future royal figure that is sent by God to bring salvation to God's people (Heim 2008:619).

#### *1.5.1.20 J. J. Collins*

In a society like ancient Israel, the noun "messiah" referred to contemporary human kings, priests and prophets. The English word "messiah" is derived from the Hebrew  $x;yv'im'$  which means "the anointed one". The verbal form  $xv;m'$  (to anoint) appears more frequently than the noun. Anointing was imparted on kings, priests and sometimes

prophets as a process of setting them aside for a special task in ancient times (Collins 2009:59).

#### *1.5.1.21 J. Derrida*

In an exploration of Derrida's work in the Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Reynolds (2010) observes the late Derrida as a well-known philosopher of the twentieth century. According to Derrida, the Messiah is the wholly other "to come", who is not a fixed or identifiable "other" of known characteristics, His "wholly other" cannot be determined and can never actually arrive. He claims that even when the Messiah is "there", he or she is still regarded as "yet to come". The *messianic* structure of existence is open to the coming of an entirely ungraspable and unknown other, but the concrete, historical messianic expectations are open to the coming of a specific other of known characteristics. The messianic refers predominantly to a structure of our existence that involves waiting in ceaseless openness for a future.

Most definitions of messianism have a thin allusion to a crisis situation which raises the expectation of salvation. Such human consciousness of a better future is triggered by a crisis which could be social, economic, political and religious in nature. This type of definition will be considered in this research.

#### *1.5.1.22 C. Aufarth*

Aufarth (2010:290) defines messianism from the perspective of the history of religions. The term messiah referred generally to an anointed one. The term derived a new meaning in the sixth century when Jews expected the Messiah who would deliver them from foreign rule and establish an eschatological age of salvation. The meaning of the word was further expanded in the thirteenth century when it was used as a technical term in Christian theology. During the twentieth century, the term messiah became applicable to all other religions. In this instance, a redeemer could be an expected political leader while political religion and cults of personality become the main subjects of messianism. Messianism is associated with a social movement within a specific historical situation which envisions the eschatological culmination of history. Such is the view of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, in a situation which colonial powers

enforce social, economic, political and religious norms accepted by the elites, the social groups that do not benefit from the privileges respond by seeking an alternative to the existing leadership. In this instance, the messianic figure becomes a charismatic hero leader of a movement who is designated as the messiah. The concept messiah developed a new meaning as it portrayed movements which developed in the late colonial and post-colonial periods. The prophecy against the colonial masters would be '*the first shall be the last*'.

### 1.5.2 Prophetic Response

*Prophetic response* is related to various Hebrew terms in the Old Testament. The Hebrew term *הַנְּבִיא* refers to the prophet as the one who proclaims or one who is called. The other term is *רֹאֵה* "seer" which stresses the receiving of visions by the prophet. The *חֹזֵה* "seer" refers to the visionary character of the prophet. A prophet was a mediator between God and Israel and his task took the form of soul possession in which the divine *took over the psyche of a medium*. Disagreements among prophets proved the existence of true and untrue prophets (Redditt 2008:1-9).

The prophetic books can be divided into the early and later prophets. The early prophetic books are Joshua, Judges, the two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings. The major corpus is the later prophetic books which consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the Book of the Twelve made up of books from Hosea to Malachi (Vanhoozer 2005:626).

In terms of genre, the early prophets are not prophetic in nature but can be described as history like narratives. Daniel is sometimes not included on the list of prophetic books by both ancient and modern scholars who designate it to the division in the Hebrew canon which is known as the Writings. They also associate it with the apocalyptic writings of a later date (Rogerson 2008:385).

Biblical prophets influenced the development of both Judaism and Christianity and later became the paradigm for identifying authentic divine messengers in the Western thought (Wilson 1996:885).

According to Seitz's analysis of Blenkinsopp's *History of Prophecy in Israel*, prophecy may also be described as one of several forms of religious life in Israel based on the accumulative process of appropriation, assimilation, adaptation, recycling and reinterpretation of prophetic material (Seitz 2007:22, 23). Seitz (2007:89) himself suggests a canonical appreciation of the prophetic books especially when dealing with Isaiah and the book of the Twelve where he claims that the canonical ordering of the books suggests an interpretive process by final redactors.

Prophecy brings with it messianic expectations in a community facing social injustice and oppression. Following the trend of prophecy in ancient Israel, we would realize that time and context determined the nature of prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecy was quite eminent when the monarchy was not restored after exile. Similarly, messianic expectations which led to the rise of Black messiahs who also acted as divine prophetic figures in Africa, serve the function of rhetorically mobilizing people to fight for their independence from the elite colonial masters. The rise of the new elite society appeals to a new dimension of prophetic messianism (Assemeng 1969:1-19).

Prophecy was a divinely given message to address the situation of Israel and the world in response to the social, political, economic and religious crises within a certain period in history. This calls for a kind of messianic prophecy or messianic figures in a situation of crisis.

### **1.5.3 Socio-economic and Political Crises**

The word crisis, according to Louw (2004:95), is derived from the Greek word *krinein* which means "to separate," "to sift," "to screen," and "to thresh out". A crisis "is an opportunity to screen life events against the background of or our quest for meaning and sense for purposefulness: to shift one's experience and pose the question about destination and destiny".

A crisis situation is quite eminent in Africa, escalating from political, socio-economic to religious crises. Crisis situations are always accompanied by many prophetic voices which emanate from suffering communities. Such situations call for discernment when engaging with modern messiahs in order to determine true prophecy. This could be

done by reflecting on messianic expectations in the Old Testament prophetic literature as well as in secular messianic expectations. In this regard, this thesis would also touch on issues of human dignity.

#### **1.5.4 Close reading**

Deist (1984:46) defines close reading as “conducting a detailed and subtle analysis of the interrelationships among the component parts of literary work, paying special attention to artistic and linguistic structure of the work including the role of literal and stylistic devices.” Clines (1983:33) similarly defines close reading as careful and minute scrutiny of all aspects of a text’s language, style, metaphor, images and their relation to one another.

The above definitions seem to concentrate on literary study. However, the meaning is much broader if we consider the definition by Brummett (2010:9) in his book *Techniques of Close Reading*. He defines close reading of a text as a “mindful, disciplined reading with a view to deeper understanding of its meaning, often that understanding is shared with others in the form of criticism or critical analysis”. Furthermore, he claims a that close reading must take into consideration historical and textual contexts – historical, not only in the sense of what happened in the past, but also what is going on socially and politically at present.

This last definition of close reading is the closest to what this research aims to achieve. One may note that biblical history may not be regarded as history for its own sake but history which has a theological goal. In this regard, the research will consider close reading as a literal historical and theological analysis of a biblical text.

#### **1.6 Structural layout of research**

The second chapter of this research will focus on the historical background of ancient Israel especially the social, economic, political and religious history which had influenced the rise of prophetic messianism.

The third chapter will consider the rise of recent expectations amid social, economic, political and religious crises. In this respect, the Zimbabwean situation provides a good example.

The fourth chapter examines three messianic texts from the prophetic books – one from the late period of the monarchy, one from the exilic period and the last from the postexilic period. In this way, we would realize the trend of prophetic messianism as a rhetorical tool to create messianic expectations in times of crises.

The last chapter serves as the conclusion of this thesis.



## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

#### 2.1 Introduction

The survey of messianism in chapter 1 shows that the term messiah developed in a particular historical context in and beyond ancient Israel. It went through what we may call evolutionary dispensations amidst various human calamities. This may be confirmed through a survey of the social history of Israel during the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic community of Israel. With the background understanding that the figure of the messiah was reinterpreted in the inter-testamental period and in the New Testament, the term can be reinterpreted in today's context with a much newer meaning. In the survey, it is also important to consider how social, economic, political and religious crises played a role in the development of this term. This chapter will deal with the three stages of development in the history of ancient Israel (i.e. the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods). The next chapter will deal with the Zimbabwean context and its influence on a new understanding of messianism.

When and where did messianic expectations originate? The fact that Jesus could be widely seen and accepted as the Saviour was because his appearance fitted into certain expectations that were raised in the Old Testament times and the inter-testamental period. The reference of the coming Saviour as Messiah is much older than that of the 'Son'. The term 'Son' concerns Jesus' eternal background, that is, God's plan to serve his world. God's intention was to bring his son to the earth to redeem the world. It is quite clear that originally, the rule in Israel was theocratic in a pure sense. God himself would be Israel's king.

Messianism in the Old Testament could have developed over a period from one stage to another. In reflecting on the meaning of the word, we would recognize that its

reference changed from royal king to priestly and eschatological royal king. The word מָשִׁיחַ “messiah” could not have a constant but a progressive or developmental meaning. Initially, it simply meant an ‘anointed one’ for the reason of being set apart for a particular purpose. Eventually it developed to mean a future eschatological human divine king.<sup>1</sup> The king was anointed to rule and lead the people into war. Biblical evidence reveals that when Israelites realized that they were being conquered by their enemies, they asked for a king who would help them to subdue the enemies. Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel but his kingship did not last. This could have been a transition towards the establishment of the monarchy through the house of David. David was anointed in place of Saul and eventually took over and completed the conquest of Canaan. He then unified the kingdom before his son Solomon succeeded him as king.

When David was anointed king of Israel, the nation was at peace. There is no evidence of any messianic hope in Israel. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom divided into two kingdoms with Judah in the North and Israel in the South. However, the fall of the two kingdoms led to the development of new messianic hopes. The centralized cults went into dispersion. Hope was placed on the coming of an eschatological royal figure and the return from exile created hopes for the re-establishment of the royal kingdom.

## 2.2 The monarchy

### 2.2.1 Social history

During the time of the monarchy, Israel shifted from being a hunter-gatherer society to an agrarian society. The emergence of horticultural societies was characterized by domestication of animals, use of digging sticks or hoes and slash-and-burn agricultural methods. Later on, the discovery of the plough resulted in increased productivity. Increased productivity promoted religious hierarchy and the emergence of the state

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<sup>1</sup> In his book, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007, pp. 80-86), John Barton claims that words do not maintain a constant meaning over a period and in context. Meaning is bound by history; therefore, words change their meaning with time. Meaning is conditioned by history so that what a word used to mean centuries ago would not be the same when it is written today. Words could have different meanings at different periods.

which legitimized surplus through sacrifice and taxation. The traditional lines of influence and authority were broken (Carter 2008:914).

The rise of the monarchy in Israel led to the loss of family and tribal significance. The social organization based on solidarity and collective responsibility faded away (Jagersma 1982: 88). The long history of Israel's development led to the development of classes. The major classes were the rich and the poor but the rich exploited the poor. This is evident in the messages of the prophets. The poor were forced into debt slavery. Inequality could have been advanced by the population growth. Involving people in military service widened the fissure which had already been created among class groups. While acknowledging that the monarchy was not a direct contributor of the class society, it made it irreversible when the monarchy allied with the emerging upper class. This could have resulted in kings supporting the poor and in the commitment of the law to writing. The book of the law is dotted by rules for the institution of slavery (Kessler 2008:108-116).

The state's intention to carry out building projects called for a rise in taxation which intensified debts. As a result, class and economy differentiation grew. On one hand were central prophets who developed close relationship with the monarch and became part of the ruling structure. On the other hand were peripheral prophets who were outside the ruling structure. They frequently protested or opposed the monarch and its policies (Carter 2005:916).

In his book, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, Gerstenberger (2002:161-203) exhaustively explores the kingdom theories of the Southern and Northern kingdoms of Israel. In these bureaucratic societies, the powerful oppressed the weak for their selfish ends. This called for a liberation theology in which the right of the weak was sought. Therefore, Gerstenberger (2002:195-197) attends to "the prophetic oppositions during the time of monarchy came predominantly from the marginal social peripheral groups or represented their interests". The prophets accused the ruling groups of violating their duty to take care of the weak and the poor.

The prophetic voice was triggered by the social demise which found many poor, widows and orphans being marginalized and oppressed. The prophetic voice denounced all injustices by the monarchy. They anticipated divine retributive justice upon the unjust government. They also created hope and expectation for a change of leadership and the institution of the new Davidic king who would rule with justice and righteousness.

### **2.2.2 Economic history**

The subsistence level economy could not produce surplus for villagers. The extended family cooperated in the land preparation by building terraces. However, the rise of the monarchy led to the development of land tenure policies which favoured the elite few. Ancestral property was taken by elites due to increased debts or slavery which emanated from abuse of power (Carter 2008:116).

Israel operated on a basic family unit structure. The development of the monarchy and city resulted in the breakdown of kinship structure. Every household possessed its own piece of cultivable land. There was also an area for public grazing of sheep. The king had his own estate. 1 Kings 21:2 alludes to the story of Naboth who was rebuked by Prophet Elijah for demanding Naboth's vineyard. This shows that family ownership was respected during the nomadic life and early settlement of Israel. This could have been diminished by the pressure from the royal house because of royal prerogatives, the economic interest of the king's officials, urban development, commerce and usury. The situation was conducive to oppression and injustice towards strangers, the fatherless and widows (Ndiokwere 1994:144).

Agricultural life depended on the climate and weather. Failure to have rain at the right time, too much rain or locusts could result in drought. At such times, the local patron was obliged to distribute surplus or the result could be that people would incur debts, their land would be forfeited and they would be taken as slaves (Davies 2006:19).

During the late period of the monarchy, the economy flourished and it was based on trade and money. Land was considered private property and in the hands of few absentee landlords who lived in cities. Such were royal officials and ministers, corrupt

judges, merchants, creditors and usurers. The majority were small farmers who became poorer and poorer because of debt. During times of natural disasters and war, the small farmers accrued debts which they would eventually fail to pay. As a result, they were pushed from their land because of debt or were subjected to debt slavery. The family land and communal grazing land fell into the hands of the minority who constituted five percent of the populace (Bendor 1996:209-211).

In a state where family property rights were dishonoured, the prophets called for economic justice but it was to no avail. The plight of the vulnerable was in the hands of the prophets. The prophetic voice proclaimed that the end of such injustices would come about by the fall and rise of the Davidic kingdom. Prophetic messianism created hope in the coming deliverer who would restore property to their right owners. Later in this research, it will be shown that when elite Jews were taken into exile in Babylon the poor were left to possess some of the property.

### **2.2.3 Political history**

Political identity in ancient Near East was based on the rule of the city-state whereby a people were divided into multiple states. People could feel that they were superior to other nations which resulted in the designation of other nations as strangers, foreigners and inferior. However, there was no motivation for ethnic political conflicts in Mesopotamia because it was a multilingual state. The state was territorial in nature in the sense that individuals belonged to one state since they resided in the same territory (Liverani 1992:1031-1032).

The need for a king in ancient Israel could have been within human consciousness as much as in any other nation in socio-economic and political crises. Wise (1999:1-2) alludes to the incident in the mid 1960s when a group of Islanders in New Hanover, Papua New Guinea raised one thousand dollars to buy the American president Lyndon Johnson to become their president. They were attracted to his profound contribution. This could have been the reason behind Israel's need for a human king.

In his book, *The One Who is to Come*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer (2007:8-25) describes anointing as the ancient Canaanite practice was exercised on kings as a method of setting someone apart for a divine mission. It was used in the Old Testament on Aaron and his sons and on David and his predecessor. Often the kings functioned as priests. After the deportation brought an end to the dynasty, the title was attributed to the heirs of the kings. The title was also used on the patriarchs and the prophets. When the title was attributed to the Davidic dynasty, it could also refer to the future messiah who would come from the house of David. In the Hellenistic province with its capital in Jerusalem, hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty grew.

Do we have anything like the Samaritan version of messianism? When the kingdom of Israel became divided, the royal kingship was attributed to Judah. The messiah concept was closely bound with the monarchy that the Samaritans did not share; indeed, the Samaritans were constituted in the period of the Second Temple.

During the post-exilic period, the title of messiah was attributed to Cyrus as the anointed of God. Many other references are made in the royal Psalms in relation to Israel's king.

The concept of messiah was developed in three stages in the narrated history of Israel. The first two stages were during the period before the monarchy and the third stage was during the fall of the Davidic kingdom and the subjection of the nation of Israel to exile.

Kessler (2008:63-91) notes that, Judah extended north and united all the tribes of Israel under David. The state is believed to have developed over a period of time in the wake of the monarchy. Israel and Judah were located where the late states were established. The monarchy could have been established because of recurring external attacks by foreign people during the period of the Judges which ended when Saul became king. Another line of thought attributes the emergence of the monarchy to internal difficulties during the time of the Judges when there was no king. The situation could have incited the Israelites to desire to be like other nations.

Between the pre-state and state epochs could be the kingdom epoch, early states or incomplete early states. This could point to the time of David and Saul. History guides

us into suggesting a gradual development of statehood in which Saul took up kingship as a transitional figure from the period of the judges. His son took over but was overthrown. David was anointed king, and he ruled over a successful kingdom until his death. After his death, his son Solomon took over. Solomon's rule characterized by state building which included the building of the temple resulted in the establishment of the central community of the temple. The death of Solomon resulted in the split of the kingdom. Solomon's servant Jeroboam was made king. Later, numerous changes of kings made it impossible for the elites to establish themselves in a stable monarchy. One major step in the establishment of the stable dynasty was the creation of residence in Samaria. The monarchy allied itself with parts of the local class.

Kessler notes the difference between the kingdom of Judah and of Israel. Firstly, the Davidic dynasty was stable. There was never a dynasty change and the Tell Dan inscription designated it as **בֵּית דָּוִד**. The second is its weakness in social relations, for the kings of Judah continually paid enemies from the Temple and palace treasury which eventually laid serious burdens on the citizens. The Davidites united themselves with the "people of the land" and created a civil service aristocracy. This group later on oppressed the poor. For Kessler, it appears that both the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah were fully developed by the eighth century.

Condemnation of injustice in governance was the reason why the prophetic voice denounced the monarchy and predicted its destruction and rise through a new Davidic ruler. The prophet Isaiah gave the people hope by announcing the birth of a new child who would take up the throne (Isaiah 9:1 ff). Although it may be rather difficult to identify the figure of a deliver within the historical context, the prophetic message could steer hope for the coming of a messianic figure. Even much later, when the Jews were subjected to foreign rule, hope continued to linger among the exiles for the return and restoration of the kingdom. Such hope is echoed in the prophetic voices of that time.

#### **2.2.4 Religious history**

Messianism actually surfaced after the Babylonian exile when fresh expectations arose. The first stage was that God's concession to grant Israel a king was not for him to deny

his divine kingship but to make it transparent in his policy (1 Sam 8:6-90). According to Becker (1980:14-15), from the very beginning, the notion of messiah had a special relationship to kingship. The theocratic statements of both Gideon and Samuel did not explicitly reject kingship but aimed *'to relativise kingship within the context of Yahweh'* (Becker 1980:16). Kingship in Israel was more than divine response to Israel's request for a king and for it to become like other nations. However, it was God's earlier plan to deliver his people through a human messiah (Becker 1980:32).

The second stage is the covenant which God made with David's household that was meant to last forever (2 Sam 8-11). Becker (1980:18) depicts Saul as the transitional figure in the establishment of the Davidic dynasty. In fact, David himself was the founder of the empire. By securing the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem, David made the temple the focus of Israel. When God promised David that his offspring would build him the temple, he was looking much beyond the physical temple built by Solomon, but the establishment of the Kingdom of God through his son Jesus Christ. The Davidic kingship possessed a permanent royal protocol as cited in 2 Samuel 7:9, 14 (great name and divine sonship), Isaiah 9: 5 (divine birth and throne names) and 2 Kings 11:12 where the king's son is enthroned.

At this point, it is important to note that the messiah concept was progressive and developmental in nature. This could have been triggered by the gradual criticism of the kings by the prophets which resulted in the transfer of the title to the figure of a future king (Charlesworth 1992:90-01).

One may ask whether there were messianic expectations during the pre-exilic period of the monarchy. Becker (1980:37-8) highlights some passages which need serious consideration namely Isaiah 7:10-16, 8:8, 8:23-9:6, Micah 1:1-5, Psalms 2, 45, 72, and 110. He further alludes that such messianic expectations at this stage were contrary to the sacral kingship, since the saviour king was present. However, the above texts express the yearning for an ideal king that found fulfilment in the coming of Christ. Becker (1980:39) defines the sacral king as the bearer of blessings and an incarnate representative of the deity who is begotten as the 'Son of God'.



The replacement of judges by the kingship was not the result of shifting from theocracy to human kingship but was founded on God's own kingship. Yahweh's kingship over Israel was revealed as early as the covenant at Sinai. The central actuary by that time was the Ark of the Covenant. Moses and the judges were administrators of the law of God (Martin 1964:3).

It is interesting to note that the concept 'the people of Israel' was concentrated in one messianic figure that eventually represented the whole nation. He could represent the people as the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 42:4, 53). When he failed to represent, the prophet became the servant (Isa. 49:1-6). If the prophet was incapable, he (the prophet) predicted that a future figure would take away the sins of the people (Rose 2001:277).

In Judges 8:22, Israel proposed to enthrone Gideon as king and make his household a dynasty. Gideon declined since Yahweh is Israel's ruler. Even Yahweh revealed his kingship through an earthly dynasty in Israel. The earthly kingship over Israel was in the framework of the kingship of Yahweh in Israel. Israelite kings were therefore different from any other kings because they were not at any time to realize human or national desires and ambitions. In this regard, Martin (1964:5) notes a tension between God's gracious will and human desires and ambitions. The people of Israel's desire for a king like other nations to realize their dreams and aspirations could mean gross apostasy. Notwithstanding, a king in Israel was a representative of God who was advised by a prophet. Israel was actually asking for a political king rather than the divine representative in the power of God's anointing (Porter 2007:60).

The crisis over kingship in the early chapters of Samuel is linked to Israel's request for a ruler in the midst of a military crisis (1 Sam 8:20, 12:12), a request that ended with a kind of military statute (9:2). In the former prophets, the insignificant boy named David came in the name of the Lord of hosts to take on the giant Goliath and so qualified for kingship in Israel (1 Samuel 17).

Martin (1964:6) notes the tension between old traditions and the institution of kingship. This is because Saul's kingship was in the twilight of human choice. The kinship of

David was different because Yahweh was with him even from his humble beginning (1 Samuel 11:15). The fact that Yahweh was with him anticipated the Emmanuel in Isaiah 7:14. Therefore, God made an everlasting covenant with his household. Divine promise goes beyond David, Solomon and their descendants to the eschatological Messiah.

David was anointed king and his throne was established in Jerusalem. In 2 Samuel 7, Nathan prophesied noting that David had subdued his enemies and the kingdom was at rest. This was the time when the king had finished building his palace and intended to build a temple for Yahweh. Nathan approved the king's plan which God later reversed. Instead of David building the temple, the Lord would build the king's house. God himself pledged to make David an everlasting dynasty. The Lord swore to remain faithful even though David's successors failed to fulfil this promise. Though we may not clearly say that the prophetic oracle was messianic, it could be the background in which all messianic expectations are developed (Rose 2001: 282).

Although most traditions have espoused messianic interpretations, Becker (1980:38) ascertains that no widespread movement involved messianic expectations. The reason is that, geographically the texts especially Micah and Isaiah refer only to the Southern kingdom. Becker refers to the records of Isaiah as pre-exilic which do not bear the mark of royal ideology and which may have been developed by Isaiah in the Jerusalem court. He advocates for pre-exilic messianic expectations because the saviour king was present. However, messianic expectations are confirmed in respect of the exilic and post-exilic periods.<sup>2</sup>

Kessler (2002:103-108) further discusses the formation of ancient class society. The transitional development of the state in the north was interrupted when in the eighth century Samaria was captured by Assyria and integrated into the Assyrian empire. It was a different issue in the south because they subjected themselves to the Assyrians. Josiah's reforms came in 639 BCE when Assyria was losing grip of the Near East. Josiah focused on purifying the cult which centralized worship in Jerusalem. In his

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<sup>2</sup> Not only the prophetic writings but also the Psalms predict the future redemption as Cohn-Sherbok (1997:16) shows in his book, *The Jewish Messiah*. Numerous references to divine deliverance occur in the Psalms.

attempt to expand the kingdom northward, he was stopped by the Egyptians. The battle of Carchemish caused Egypt to withdraw and Babylon controlled Judah. The Babylonians captured Jerusalem and the first group of Israelites was sent into exile.

Fitzmyer (2007:33-55) examines texts that point to the development and understanding of the Davidic dynasty. God declared through Nathan that David could not build him a house but God himself would build a house for David. This meant God would create a dynasty that will endure in Israel. After the captivity, the restored kingdom was continued by Shealtiel, Zerubbabel and several other names not familiar in Old Testament. Isaiah had at one time reassured Ahaz a Judahite of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty. When the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III invaded Zebulun and Naphtali provinces of the Northern kingdom, Isaiah prophesied that God would restore the land's former glory (Isa. 9:1-7). The prophet Isaiah again made a similar promise in which he described the future heir of the throne (Isa. 11:10). It is also noted that prior to the exilic period, some prophets such as Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah and Ezekiel had stirred hope on the eventual restoration of the Davidic dynasty. However, this hope was based on the continuity of a Davidic kingdom.

The kings did not only aim to fulfil their divinely appointed mission, that is, of being representatives of Yahweh, they also pursued their prestigious desires. The poor were now in the service of the rich. Temple sacrifices turned many people into debtors. Such an unstable condition made people to raise their voices especially the peripheral prophets who denounced the sacrifices which were done at the expense of the poor who remained poorer while the rich got richer. Hope for the betterment of the present predicament was cast into the future with prospects of the coming of the Messiah.

## **2.3 The Exilic Period**

### **2.3.1 Social history**

Forced displacement would likely have caused psychological trauma among exiles. They were actually far from their homeland and were among strangers. Judah could certainly have experienced shock for being taken away from its homeland, the Temple and the Lord. Such predicament is echoed by Ezekiel who, in reference to the Northern

kingdom declared that its people were far from the Lord (11:15). The temple as the focus of worship was replaced by Yahweh. However, some exiles possibly assimilated and adapted to their new situation (Matthews 2002:107).

When the Judahites were exiled, some of the poorest people were left behind. They were then given some of the property of those whom they depended on through debt overload. Some others could also have been taken by the Babylonians.

Kessler (2002:118-123) speculates that the Judahites and Israelites could possibly have dwelt together in exile under the ancient name Israel. There is also evidence that the exiles of Judah had regular conduct with their homeland. They could even have had the status of leaseholders rather than free landowners. They likely had stronger kinship status strengthened by setting up the central symbols of identity such as observing the Sabbath and circumcision and maintaining belief in Yahweh. Those exiled in Egypt even built a Temple.

The groups of exiles were administered by elders as in Palestine (Ezekiel 13:1). This leads to the conclusion that the old village administration was continued but limited only by the higher authority of the 'imperial administration'. Alongside the elders, spiritual leaders made up of priests and scribes were appointed (Gerstenberger 2002:209).

Life in exile was psychologically traumatic. The loss of land, king and temple, as well as being brought into total subjection to strangers, resulted in phobia for the exiles. Their hope was the restoration which was prophesied earlier. For instance, Isaiah prophesied of the rise of Cyrus as a messianic figure who would allow the exiles to return to their land, and restore the temple where they would once again worship Yahweh.

### **2.3.2 Economic history**

As we reflect on exilic literature, we perceive that God stood for the weak and the deprived in the exilic communities. Many of the legislations supported the poor and helpless (Gerstenberger 2002:249).

The exiles possibly enjoyed economic freedom to some extent. Some exiles were in a position to buy property (Jeremiah 29:5) and slaves (Ezra 2:65). The report in Ezra 1; 6 and 2:68-69 which reveal that the exiles sent expensive gifts to Jerusalem provide evidence of the economic condition of the exiles. In addition, the Marashu texts which were business documents of the Marashu firm excavated at an ancient site of Nippur include some Jewish names. This would suggest that many exile Jews were much involved in the economic sphere especially in agriculture (Gitay 1981:51).

The early days of the exile could have also led Israel to a state of despair. The people had lost all their lucrative property and possessions. Those who remained in touch with Jerusalem would have known that other people were enjoying the fruit of their labour. Those who became rich in exile, however, could hardly hope to return. This can be perceived by the eventual existence of Jews all over the world after the return. This can be established, for instance, through the discovery that other temples were probably established in Egypt after the return from exile.

### **2.3.3 Political history**

The political history being examined here covered the period in which the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were in exile, the Syro-Ephraimite war of 732 led to the deportation of the inhabitants of the Northern kingdom and the kingdom fell in 722. During that time, Israel was subjected to Assyrian lordship which ended when the Assyrian empire collapsed. Egypt briefly dominated before being overcome by Babylon. Jehoiakim's attempted revolt was repelled and Jerusalem surrendered under his son Joash. Zedekiah was installed king by the Babylonians. However, when he tried to rebel, he and the members of the courts and of the upper class were exiled. Jerusalem was then destroyed and Gedaliah a Judahite was installed governor of Babylon but he was executed. When Evilmerodach ascended the Babylonian throne, he called Jehoiachin to the royal table. The Persian king, Cyrus seized the capital of Babylon and ended Babylonian rule. After Assyria seized power, Zerubbabel the nephew of Jehoiachin was installed governor of Judah (Lucas 2002:37-38).

The exiles could have enjoyed political and religious autonomy to some extent. It is likely that Jehoiachin, the exiled king preserved his title as King of Israel. Archaeological discoveries of some cuneiform tablets reveal that Jehoiachin and his five sons received food allocation from the royal storehouse. He could have been recognized as the leader of the Jewish exiles since literature of that period reveals that the Jewish exiles continued to recognize the Davidic descendants as their political leaders. Zerubbabel is a good example of a leader of one of the groups which returned from exile. However, the Davidic descendants were aided by elders in conducting the affairs of the people (Gitay 1981:50).

### 2.3.4 Religious history

After the decay of the royal house and the subjection of the people to foreign powers, messianic hope had four possibilities: 1) there was a possibility of announcing its restoration after the exile. 2) It could be reinterpreted to mean the promise was being fulfilled in a different form. 3) The people could ignore it under the assumption that God had made new plans for Israel. 4) They could cast it into an indefinite future and give it a transcendental quality (Mason 1998:339-340).

We may now examine the prophets from Haggai to Malachi as the last phase of prophetic body. The expectation of the coming Elijah in the book of Malachi reveals that Elijah had a prominent place in the messianic mystery. Ultimately, he became representative of the Priestly Messiah. The prophet Elijah had an experience during the time of Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Elijah cried to God because the children of Israel had forsaken the covenant of God by throwing down his altars and slaying the prophets. God answered that there were seven thousand prophets in Israel who had never bowed down before Baal (1 Kings 19:10, 18) (Schonfield 1998:22).

At the time of the exile, Hebrew was continually used for liturgical purpose in synagogue worship. As a result, the exilic community was able to maintain its religious and cultural identity especially in the sense that the people studied the original words of Yahweh (Matthews 2002:109).

Dependence on Yahweh held the exiles together giving them confidence and hope for the future. The idea of Divine Warrior and state God could be used in the hope for restoration and victory against the enemy (Gerstenberger 2002:220). Despite their dependence on Yahweh, there were feelings of despondency among the exiles. They could hardly find any hope for their future. They felt utterly rejected by Yahweh who seemed to have disappeared from the historical scene. As a result, the exiles assimilated with the foreign nations in areas such as language and writing. They changed from using the Hebrew square script to the Aramaic cuneiform (Gitay 1981:52).

The Jewish exilic community composed writings which assured them of the presence of God. The elites of the new community collected traditions which eventually became 'the supreme authority' in the community. The collection and reshaping of the Hebrew Scriptures was done by scribes who were actually spiritual leaders (Gerstenberger 2002:210-211).

As a result of the destruction of the temple and the deportation of the people into exile, there was a shift from sacrifices which were done by priests to keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the only weekly holiday on the cultic calendar. Exiles could withdraw to private places and carry out devotions. It is presumed that these meetings were formalized into synagogues. They could also have maintained their identity by male circumcision (Matthews 2002:109-110).

Malachi refers to Elijah the prophet and angels as the messenger of Yahweh (Malachi 3:1, 2) The Hebrew prophets were associated with the divine council of the angelic hosts. Moreover, Elijah did not die but ascended to heaven to come back as a heavenly human prophetic figure. The prophet called for the ministry of repentance or reconciliation, before the coming of the great day (Porter 2007:68).

We have already noted that during the exilic period, the exiles worshipped in synagogues and the worship was marked by remembering and putting into writing the Jewish traditions. However, some later generation comprised of the rich felt Yahweh

was present through synagogue worship and honouring the Sabbath rest. Even when the hope for restoration was high, some were not willing to return. Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus could have been meant to convince the exiles that it was Yahweh who called him to be their shepherd.

## **2.4 The Post-exilic Period**

The return from exile did not restore the Davidic kingdom. As a result, messianic expectations focused on the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. When they failed to restore the kingdom, they were forced to throw their hope into a distant future where a divine being would deliver them. However, the centralization of the temple brought the priests to the fore.

### **2.4.1 Social history**

Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 8-10 allude to the circumstances which confronted Israel. The people of Israel engaged in intermarriage with other nations. Ezra's first mission was to prohibit and dissolve mixed marriages (Jagersma 1982:202). Mixed marriage resulted in Jewish culture being influenced by outsiders. All Jews were encouraged to practice endogamy or marriage within a specifically defined group. This is because the mother as the first teacher of the child would impart the child with knowledge which would drift the child away from Judaism if she were a foreigner (Matthews 2002:111).

It is notable also that some of the rich elites did not return since they were now involved in lucrative business. However, those who returned possibly desired to relocate in their family land. Nehemiah shows that the rebuilding of the temple faced resistance from the people around them. They knew that the re-establishment of the Temple cult would eventually result in the repossession of the land once the nation became strong again.

### **2.4.2 Economic history**

The rebuilt temple in Jerusalem was not only the centre of worship but an administration centre where loans were offered and revenue from real estate was controlled and collected. There were also Temple servants who worked as bakers, herders of sacrificial livestock and much more. The temple was administered in the capacity of the



successor of the Persian Empire. Royal authority was regulated by governors whose responsibility was to manage finances and ensure political stability. The governor received assistance from the priests whose task was not only to serve in religious but also economic and political activities (Blenkinsopp 1984:228).

It is assumed that Nehemiah 5 gives the impression that there was great poverty during those days. Some starved and others loaned their fields and vineyards. This could have resulted from high taxes being raised for the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem coupled with the introduction of money economy which led to the rise of capitalism. Small farmers in Judah were subjected to a critical situation. As a result, Nehemiah intervened and forced the nobles and leaders to restore to the poor the fields, the vineyards and the houses which they possessed through profiteering (Jagersma 1982:205).

During the early Persian period, there was economic oppression. The central government charged heavy taxes but it provided little or no benefit to the provinces. As a result there was high inflation rates and insolvency among farmers who were eventually forced from their land. Only moneylenders benefitted. The situation became worse especially during Xerxes who charged high taxes to finance his crusade in Europe (Blenkinsopp 1984:245).

The Yehud administrator was primarily expected to collect taxes to insure that the economic situation in his unit was vibrant and to be loyal to the Persian government. Consequently, the imperial government aimed at establishing local elites who would become loyal to their patrons. This caused the priestly office to be supported predominantly by the Persian Empire (Matthews 2002:118).

The phenomenon which has already been noted during the pre-exilic period surfaced again after exile. The prophetic voice was raised again over the treatment of the poor, widows, orphans and slaves. Again, the newly instituted leadership comprising of governors and high priests remained loyal to the royal authority of the gentile nations. Such an environment could have incited the apocalyptic prophecy such as in the book

of Daniel. Daniel raised hope for the coming of an anointed figure that would bring about the end of the times which would be marked by judgment and consummation. The figure anticipated by Daniel emanated from a divine response to his prayer for the fulfilment of the message of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had prophesied that after seventy years, the kingdom would be restored to Israel. The response of Yahweh did not have any clear historic fulfilment and the prophetic message continued to be thrown into a distant future.

### 2.4.3 Political history

Renewed hope for the return of Israel and the subsequent restoration of the temple and state was high among the exiles. This is echoed in the reconstructions of Deutero-Isaiah which ambiguously associated these hopes with the Persian king, Cyrus who was the anointed of Yahweh. The Persian king possibly abandoned the practice of deportation, and allowed the exiles to return to their land in order to win their support. He ensured that local communities had better living conditions to contain rebellion (Lemche 1994: 186,188).

Messianic expectations in the postexilic period could have been occasioned by the absence of a king in Jerusalem. When the monarchy of David failed to continue after the exile, expectations of the coming future king began to grow (Rose 2001:283).

Hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty remained alive after the exile. Initially, the people's hope was placed on the figure of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. This idea was supported by Haggai and Zechariah. There was also increased influence of the priestly class. It is convincingly evident that the priests were only anointed in the post-exilic literature. The high priest took over the function of the king at the temple as well as other matters (Jagersma 1982:198-199).

Various messianic movements arose during the Persian Empire which can be categorized into two main groups: 1) those who wanted to regain independence through armed rebellion under a Davidic ruler and, 2) those who sought divine intervention through their fidelity to the laws (Blenkinsopp 1984:245).

In the third chapter of the book *The Messiah in the Old and New Testament*, Porter (2007:35-74) reviews Mike J. Boda's *Figuring the Future: The Prophets and Messiah*. The figure of the Messiah as the ideal king who was to come does not occur in the Old Testament. Most Old Testament texts focus on a present figure as messiah while few focus on a future figure (Isa. 45:1, 61:11; Dan. 9:24-26).

The Dead Sea scrolls also provide some insight into messianic expectations. There are great records concerning kings and kingship in the scrolls. It is important to note that the term "king" is not commonly used with reference to a messiah but only two times depicting an eschatological figure. The terms (king and kingship) are used to refer to non-Israelite kings, Israelite kings and God. As for the biblical evidence in the scrolls, very few manuscripts of the biblical history remain. This implies that accounts of acts of the kings were not popular or edifying for the Qumran society. Scrolls with records of David do not concern his kingly status but rather his position as a psalmist. Solomon is never mentioned in the scrolls; perhaps he was viewed as a character with mixed blessings. Moreover, it is shown that the blessings promised to Moses came to pass during the time of David and Solomon. No king of the second temple featured at all in the scrolls (Brooke 1998:436-437).

The messianic expectations were revived during the first century BCE. The Hasmoneans had restored kingship but they were not David's descendants. As a result, opposition groups reacted by proclaiming that the Lord would restore Davidic kingship (Collins 2009:62). Since the divine promise had failed, the Jews believed in the necessity to restore the Davidic throne in Jerusalem (Carter 2005:619). This corresponds with the interpretation of Numbers 24:17 and Amos 9:11 in which the sceptre is referred to as the prince of the whole congregation. This prince is figured by Rabbi Akiba as Simon Bar Kasba who led a revolt against Rome in 132 CE. He was later known as Bar Kochba, 'Son of the star' (Collins 2009:62-63).

The Dead Sea scrolls makes reference to God as 'King of goodness', 'King of holiness', 'King of heavenly beings', 'King of all', 'King of princess', 'King of majesty' just to mention a few. There are actually two methods of focusing on messianism in the scrolls,

that is, the typological and the historical. The typological method does not restrict the label of messiah to these figures because interest is in function rather than titles. Messiah can be used in reference to angels who have a prominent role in the things of the end. The historical method focuses on the term messiah itself as an office in the end times; for example, messiah designates a double picture of a kingly and priestly figure. There is consensus that every Qumran messianic text presupposes a priestly and a royal messiah (Brooke 1998:440-443).

Collins (2009:62) suggests that the texts about the son of God parallel the 'son of God' text in Luke 1:32. He refers to Josephus who claimed that messianic expectations based on a misinterpretation of Scripture were significant factors in the outbreak of the revolt against Rome in 66 CE.

In other compositions, the texts regarding the son of God remain debatable. Several theories surround this figure. Some scholars suggest that the son of God figure was King Alexander Balas, the son of Antiochus Epiphanus. He was possibly identified as the son of God as written on the coins. Some scholars even suggest Antiochus Epiphanus himself while others point to a member of the Davidic royal family (Brooke 1998:445:446).

The Qumran society alludes to the messiah as the Suffering Servant prophesied in Isaiah 53:4-13. They claimed this messiah was the leader of the Essenes who was later killed by Roman soldiers in a revolt after the death of Herod the Great. It is recorded in the *Oracles of Hystaspes* that his body was left in the open for three days and he ascended to heaven. This background explains the consciousness of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Fitzmyer 2007:112).

The idea of a Davidic messiah gained popularity during the last century of the Qumran's existence. Kingship was emphasized outside the temple setting as from 63 BCE onwards as the Romans dominated and the Herodians held power. Aspirations for a Davidic messiah were high. We may also be able to date the manuscript to the last part of the first century BCE. Apart from the Davidic messiah, pre-eminence was given to

divine sovereignty. The idea of a Davidic messiah became more prominent because of the political circumstances of the time (Brooke 1998:453-455).

In summary, the Qumran documents disclose how messianic expectations intensified as the Jews waited for the messianic figure to restore the kingdom to the royal house of David.

#### **2.4.4 Religious history**

There was potential conflict in Jerusalem after the rebuilding of the Temple. The source of the conflict was based on who qualified to be a priest. The Chronicler believed that only the repatriates qualified to be priests. Conflicts did not only erupt between repatriates and the natives but even much more among the repatriates themselves. A more outstanding concern had to do with the control of the cult and the status of the Temple staff. Conflicts between the priestly ranks resulted in the institution of Levites who served as minor clergy but did not perform in the central cult (Blenkinsopp 1984:229).

Porter (2007:40) alludes to Boda who states that the use of the word messiah in the Deuteronomistic History may have been influenced by the final redaction of the text in the exilic period. During that period, the texts were adapted to encourage future hope in a later era. Later prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi provided records of post-exilic events in the midst of reformulation of faith, religion and society. The books appeared independently before being part of the Book of the Twelve, and portray self-awareness of their place in the history of revelation in general and of prophecy in particular.

The books have also been used as a source of understanding the coming of Jesus. They serve to set the eschatological and messianic context of the second Temple Judaism. For example, Zerubbabel who was born in exile and a grandson to Jehoiakin was affirmed to be the inheritor and representative of the Davidic dynasty. Zerubbabel was considered as a royal messianic figure which advanced the relationship between the priestly and royal figures of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Haggai is orientated to the

future hope of cosmic upheaval which would result in the fulfilment of the promise to David and the dawn of a new utopian age (Collins 2010:34-35).

Zechariah offered vision oracles which promised the renewal of the whole community. This is portrayed in the cry of the Angel for divine mercy after seventy years (Zec.1:12). He also had a remote temporal perspective of the expansion of Jerusalem to exclude gentiles. Zechariah 9-14 conveys hope of return from exile for both Israel and Judah. Yahweh is portrayed as a divine warrior and a human king was considered as a vice regent. The crises over kingship in Israel were related to Israel's request for a human ruler (Porter 2007:54-64).

Blenkinsopp (1984:280) suggests that Zerubbabel was sent to govern Yehud, yet the daily administrative tasks were carried out by the priests. Upon the return of the descendants of the exiles, the priests became more powerful in the economic, political and religious spheres. This idea was earlier expounded by Jagersma (1982:200) who claims that the high priest was seen as increasingly representing spiritual and secular authority in Judah. He even exercised the role of a king during the Hasmonaean period.

On the other hand, Malachi is primarily rooted in the historical circumstances of the community. The prophet focused on the priestly and prophetic role of confronting misappropriation of sacrifices and insufficient offerings. He attacked the priests for defiling the cult by unrighteousness and insufficient tithes. He also attacked foreign marriages and divorces. He predicted the coming of the Lord which would be prepared by the messenger Elijah. This prediction has eschatological implications. The prophetic books of Haggai to Malachi are thought to offer a perspective of messianic expectation in the final phase of the Old Testament (Porter 2007:67-72).

The expectation of the coming Elijah in the book of Malachi shows that Elijah had a prominent place in the messianic mystery. He ultimately became representative of the Priestly messiah. The prophet Elijah had an experience during the time of Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Elijah cried to God because the children of Israel had forsaken the covenant of God by throwing down his altars and slaying the prophets. God answered

that there were seven thousand prophets in Israel who had never bowed down before Baal (1 Kings 19:10, 18; Schonfield 1998:22).

Malachi sees the messenger of Yahweh as Elijah the prophet and Angels (Malachi 3:1, 2). The Hebrew prophets were associated with the divine council of the angelic hosts. Further, Elijah did not die but ascended to heaven to come back as a heavenly human prophetic figure. The prophet called for the ministry of repentance or reconciliation before the coming of the great day (Porter 2007:68).

## 2.5. Conclusion

Messianic expectations slowly emerged in ancient Israel and the assumption is that they were triggered by social, economic, political and religious crises. Messianic type of prophecies was rare during the early days of the Davidic Dynasty. The centralization of the kingdom had drifted from the family centred administration to the monarchy. The centralized administration brought with it principles that ignored Yahweh's intention for Israel. Territorial expansion led the kings to forge coalitions with foreign nations. Furthermore, elitism grew as those closer to the king in rank became rich by monopolizing resources. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor grew to such an extent that the poor were robbed of their meagre property and were taken as slaves. Eventually, Israel lost her kingdom to other nations.

Expectations for the newly born Davidic king were born out of the crisis situation. The prophetic message came to give hope for a new Davidic king who would rule with justice and righteousness. The new king would have divine attributes rather than merely being an anointed one. The character of this new Davidic king cannot be clearly traceable since the latter kings of the time of Isaiah's prophecy did not fully restore the monarchy.

The monarchy ended or was terminated when Israel was taken into exile in Babylon. However, the Babylonian exile created a new dimension of messianic expectations. Rather than consider the messianic figure as one who would restore the social status of the nation, the people expected someone who would restore them to their land and

rebuild of the Temple. The exilic community had suffered mainly because they had lost their land, Temple and kingship. They probably faced the challenge of losing their true identity through intermarriages. However, they desired to return to their homeland.

The return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple were the major concerns of the exiles. The return from exile led to the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls, but the kingdom was not restored to its fullness. Zerubbabel, in whom they could have invested their hope as king disappeared from the scene when he was just a governor. Hope for restoration was thrown to a distant future. However, the messianic role was played by Cyrus of Persia.

After the return from exile and the subsequent rebuilding of the Temple, the Jews expected that they would be given total power to rule themselves. Instead, they remained under the jurisdiction of foreign powers. Jews revived their expectations for a Davidic kingdom when the Maccabees who were not of Davidic descent ascended into power.

The history of Israel seems to suggest that messianic expectations were triggered by the crisis situations which confronted Israel.



## CHAPTER THREE

### ROOTS OF MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS IN ZIMBABWE

#### 3.1 Introduction

Having surveyed the history of ancient Israel, one notes that it was embedded in crises which led to the development of messianism. The current situation in Zimbabwe is postcolonial. The country went through a colonial period and acquired independence through a much-desired political hero who sacrificed for this independence. It is supposed that the President of the state as the leader embraced most of the powers of liberation. However, neo-colonialism raised new expectations when the most needed expectations were not met.

Zimbabweans have been living in political crisis since the last decade and messianic expectations are very high. The expectations have resuscitated memories of the time of the pre-liberation struggle when the nation hoped for the coming of an anointed political liberator to set the nation free from political oppression. The independence attained in 1980 was the climax in which the new president Robert Mugabe was elected as the leader of the new government. However, the country once again has become immersed in political crisis. This began when the supporters of Mugabe declared him the messiah to downplay any opponents, and legitimize him as the sole anointed leader of the nation.

The expectations for a liberator may have emanated from the faith traditions where all social crises were associated with some external spiritual forces. The situation could be countered by some diviners who liberated people from spiritual and social bondage. The recent economic and socio-political crises in Zimbabwe have triggered the emergence of a new phase of messianic expectations. The situation in Zimbabwe is an interpretive situation for messianic texts. This chapter will therefore explore the idea of messianic expectations from a Zimbabwean perspective.

### 3.2 Social Crisis

Christianity among Africans often points to a dialogue between the Gospel and the African culture. The proclamation of the Gospel by people of a different cultural context provides new lenses for understanding Scriptures. It is however difficult to separate the Gospel and culture, for the Gospel can only be proclaimed from and to a people of different cultural backgrounds.

Culture has been defined as the manifestation of a people's way of life and their self-understanding (Mugambi 1995:30). Culture may also be defined as the total process of human activity and the total results of such activity (Moyo 1996:1). It comprises of language, habits, customs, social organization, inherited artefacts, technical process and values of a people. Both definitions complement each other for a people's way of life is not static but continues to change through experience.

The social changes brought by colonization resulted in the marginalization of the natives. They lost their fertile tribal land to the white minority elites. As a result, there was a rise of native movements which desired to seek transformation through spiritual agencies. The movements were of two types. The one is the nativistic type which sought to return to earlier modes of life which promised stability, happiness and social security. This group aimed at the restoration of land to the owners and created a sense of satisfaction. The other is the syncretistic type exemplified by the African Watchtower movements and the African Independent Churches (Assimeng 1969:8-12).

The Land Tenure Act of 1969 aimed at eliminating racial friction which emanated from the ownership, occupation and use of land. The act was accomplished by dividing the country almost "equally" with 44,952,900 acres of land allocated to the 250 000 European population, while 44,944,500 acres were reserved for the approximately 5 million Africans. It is undeniable that most of the best farms with the best water supply, soil, terrain and transportation were owned by Europeans (see figure 2). The scenario was spearheaded by the Land Tenure Act which aimed to force Africans to work harder for subsistence in an unfamiliar cash economy (Creighton 1972:302-303).

Under this Act, the minister may authorize persons of one race to occupy land in the area of another race or prohibit them from doing so. The Act specified that regular attendance or employment at a school, hospital, clinic, hotel, etc. did not constitute occupancy. The minister of lands explained in Parliament that patronizing a store or attending a theatre did not constitute occupation. However, in some cases, admission to such a place may be controlled to avoid racial friction (Creighton 1972:302-303).

### 3.3 Economic Crisis

Economic crises have always been perceived as a hive for messianic expectations in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. In this regard, countries hard hit by economic crisis deterioration are compelled to yearn for a change for the better.

The Zimbabwean social, economic, political and religious environment during the colonial rule of the 1960s triggered the liberation struggle which resulted in political independence in 1980. It was after a decade that the situation started to deteriorate. The ruling government introduced policies that led to the development of an elite community of those loyal to the ruling party with the majority of the population languishing in poverty. Therefore, hope for a better future was invested in the election of a new multi-party government.

It is well understood that political freedom or independence should be accompanied by economic and social justice for it to be meaningful. Even in those countries that boast of economic independence, one would often find that the few native aristocrats replaced the foreigners. Such practices of economic disparity were condemned by the Old Testament prophets in their contemporary society. Yahweh explicitly denounced such economic injustice and he desired equitable distribution of natural and national resources as clearly shown throughout the Holy Scriptures (Banana 1979:419-420).

The Smith regime in Zimbabwe claimed to be a Christian government on a civilizing mission, yet, it denied Africans equality with Europeans, treated them as sub-human, and deprived them the rights of free citizens in their own country (Zvarevashe 1982:13).

During the time of the federal government (before 1965), Zimbabwe which had a black population of about 3.6 million people was ruled by whites with a population of about 221 000 people, which accounted for less than 1% of the country's population. Due to internal and external criticisms, the government adopted a principle of partnership which Lord Marvin likened to "partnership between a black horse and a white rider". This principle was of course linked to multiracialism and political gradualism. Black Africans could only share fully in the government as they attained higher educational and economic standards. This paved way for great resistance that resulted in the formation of indigenous opposition parties (Harpen 1963:1141).

Sundkler (1961: 330) observes that, "The burning desire of the African for land and security produces the apocalyptic patterns of the Zionist messianic myths, whose warp and woof are provided by native led policy and Christian or at least Old Testament material".

The formation of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) became a great threat. A petition was written through its executive chairman Ndabaningi Sithole which outrightly rejected multi-racialism because it hid the inequalities between the Blacks and the Whites. Partnership was rejected because it did not involve the consent of all concerned parties. Gradualism was rejected for it aimed at educating black Africans at a time which made education unthinkable and impossible. Economically, the principle of 'equal pay for equal work' could not be universally applied. This also showed that Africans were to develop at the pleasure of their colonial masters (Hapern 1963:1141).

In 1971, a government publication announced that the maximum which the country could afford for African education was 2% of the Gross National Product. Equal pay for teachers with the same qualifications was the rule in Rhodesia until mid-1971 when the government announced a new teachers' wage scale, with a difference of up to \$1,764 in favour of white teachers. At once, churchmen condemned this ruling as unfair, unjustifiable, and immoral. If Africans were to accept this position of permanent inferiority in society, they would in effect have no desire to rise according to ability, character and integrity (Creighton 1972:302).

The ZANU-PF government which was inaugurated in 1980 would soon follow a similar path. The local national elite community inherited the injustices of the colonial economy which excluded other members from economic wellbeing. They claimed that Zimbabwe inherited injustices which the natives needed to address in the name of black empowerment. However, such programmes conferred privileges on certain individuals - an environment that compensates natives who were previously excluded from accumulating wealth would now not permit all natives to become entrepreneurs. The challenge is how to determine who should benefit from group empowerment. The Zimbabwean experience reveals the danger of privileging individuals while pursuing group agenda (Davies 2004:37-39).

On this point, Mutumbuka (1981: xiii) has this to say:

The transition from colonialism in the third world countries is the temptation and pitfall. One of the most obvious is the entry of colonialism in a new guise – in the guise of neo-colonialism. This is a more subtle guise and will mean the growth of the black Zimbabwean comprador class which will entrench neo-colonialism. It is this sad truth that African countries are often worse off after independence because of the cruel and ruthless exploitation of neo-colonialism. Corruption and self-enrichment replace the search for freedom and truth; the masses continue to suffer as before.

The crises in Zimbabwe are multifaceted. However, some scholars are of the opinion that the February 2000 referendum was the watershed in the downward shift of the political, economic and social landscape. The first twenty years of independence was encouraging. Land redistribution was carried out through the 'willing seller, willing buyer' approach. Although it was accompanied by substantial constraints, it was remarkably successful. Later, resources were unevenly distributed. The adapted economic policies crippled the economy. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which called for workers to bargain for salaries ended up in public protests. The 1990s were characterized by growing public protest because of series of corrupt scandals brushed aside by those in power in an authoritarian fashion. In contrast, there was a positive response to the lobbying for political recognition, progress in land redistribution and compensation by members of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWA). The decision to involve the country in the war in Congo also exacerbated the already fragile economy. The unplanned land invasion led the country

which used to be the breadbasket of Africa into abject poverty (Hamar, Raftopoulos & Jensen 2003:1-7).

Consequently, the social, economic, political and religious problems gave birth to voices of protest in favour of the marginalized groups. Most striking is that the opposition rose mainly from among leaders and prominent members of the church. This presupposes that the church leaders were the bearers of the prophetic voice that raised hope for future liberation.

### **3.4 Political Crisis**

Acquisition of political independence in African countries has caused political leaders to be conferred with messianic powers. In Ghana, for instance, Kwame Nkrumah became the messiah to his followers most of whom were alienated from leadership by former colonial masters. He was inaugurated based on his dream that Mother Ghana was bathed in the blood and wounds of her sons and daughters who were fighting to prevent her from colonial domination. He claimed that in the dream he heard a voice saying, "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto it". After the acquisition of political independence, he promised to usher in an earthly millennium paradise through technological projects (Assimeng 1969:16, 17).

Zimbabwe experienced a period of stability after independence under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. The situation later changed and in the past decade, Zimbabwe has experienced economic and socio-political crises. The independent Zimbabwe has been on top of the world record of inflation. Moreover, gross human rights abuse has led thousands of Zimbabweans into exile.

The liberation struggle which led to the independence of Zimbabwe earned those who were at the forefront the status of heroes. It is important for this study to reflect briefly on the situation which led to the political struggle in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe, as it is known today, came into being as a result of the endeavours of Cecil John Rhodes who championed British supremacy in Africa. The country, named after Rhodes, was then known as Southern Rhodesia. He subjected under British rule the area north of the

Limpopo which covers the present Zimbabwe and Zambia (named Northern Rhodesia). He aimed at acquiring land-by-land purchase contracts and illegal expropriation under the British South Africa Company (BSAC). Initially, the British government was not enthusiastic about colonizing the territory; therefore, the BSAC ruled until 1923 when Southern Rhodesia finally became a British protectorate. With the rising call for independence in Africa, Southern Rhodesia was joined with Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (present-day Malawi) to form the Central Africa Federation in 1953. The federation collapsed when Northern Rhodesia gained its political independence from the British as Zambia and Malawi (Van Dijk 2006:176-177).

The national movement dominated by Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African Union split. Ndabaningi Sithole led the new group called Zimbabwe National Union (ZANU). However, it did not take long before Nkomo and Sithole were detained, and both parties were banned. The ZANU survived under the leadership of Robert Mugabe who subscribed to a more militant form of politics. Eventually, both the ZANU and the ZAPU went into a liberation struggle (Freund 1984:279). The liberation struggle was initially hampered by the rivalry between the ethnic groups of Ndebele under Joshua Nkomo and Shona under Robert Mugabe each of which struggled for supremacy. At the same time, both groups faced the well-equipped white minority government (Van Dijk 2006:177).

Makunike (2009) observes the expectations of Zimbabweans for divine intervention in their present challenges. This "messiah complex" in which an individual provides the solution to complex challenges applies not only in politics but also in many other aspects of national life. He discusses how various religious sects have emerged in the recent past and many churches have leaders whom the followers virtually relate to as god. One is left to wonder whether the followers worship God or an anointed religious leader.

Various articles in the mass media have been referred as hailing President Robert Mugabe as the political messiah for Zimbabwe. Rev Obadiah Musindo, president of Destiny for Africa Network, is referred to as having claimed that the president is a black



political Moses. He is also quoted as having described the president as a God-given leader who cannot be driven out of office even by election (Mugabe God Given-Church Leaders 2011).



Figure 4: President R.G. Mugabe Illustrated as Angel Gabriel

Figure 4 above was posted online after publications revealed Edward Raradza; the Muzarabani Member of Parliament as claiming that Robert Gabriel Mugabe is “the real Angel Gabriel” (ZANU-PF oiling its violence machinery, targets churches in propaganda drive, 2011).

The late minister of housing and local government, Tony Gara called the President “God’s Other Son” (Mugabe Praise Singer Tony Gara Dies, 2011). With reference to Ezra Chitando’s article in the *African Sociological review* of 2002, Olsen (2007) claims that the words of Christian songs have sometimes been changed for political ends. The name of Jesus has been replaced with “vaMugabe” Olson (2007) also referred to Chenjerai Hove’s publication on Pambazuka News as saying:



First they used to call him “the son of God”, and then one minister publicly said “Mugabe is our Jesus Christ”. Next the minister of education and culture has recently designed and installed a ‘throne’ in parliament, for ‘King Mugabe.’ Then the minister of local government would not be outdone. He has decided to build “a shrine” in Mugabe’s home village. A shrine is a place of worship. So the president has become a god who deserves a “shrine.” Thus, from “VaMugabe ndibaba” (Mugabe is our father) to “the son of God” to “Jesus Christ” to a “shrine” a place of worship, God.

A British Broadcasting Cooperation correspondent, Kunene (2002) revealed that in Matabeleland North, villagers were living in fear during the period before the 2002 elections because of the war veterans who were regarded as the disciples of the messiah, meaning President Robert Mugabe.

The late Madzibaba Godfrey Nzira, a self-styled prophet who was once detained on seven counts of rape charges in 2003 was recently pardoned by the President Robert Mugabe coerced members of the Apostolic Sect and other churches in the Muzarabani district to support ZANU (PF) ahead of possible elections in 2011. He is said to have claimed that President Robert Mugabe is the appointed king of Zimbabwe whose authority cannot be challenged. In mid-2010, the president attended the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Sect where he adorned himself in church vestments (Zanu PF activates its brutal campaign, 2011).

The deification of political leaders reminds one of the former President Canaan Banana who called for the rewriting of the Bible to fit the Zimbabwean context where we acknowledge our own heroes rather than the Western heroes. He suggested replacing names such as the name “Abraham” in the Bible with the name of the spirit medium “Mbuya Nehanda” (Reed 2009).

### **3.5 Religious Crisis**

On the religious level, various problems arose even from the colonial period. For instance, the Shona traditional thought does not permit direct communication with God. The Shona people believe that the departed are a little higher than the living; hence, they act as intermediaries between the living and the supreme. The death of a beloved is not an end but simply a change of status and of form (Moyo 1996:6). Therefore, the living dead participate in family rituals. Whosoever does not participate in these rituals

brings misfortune to oneself and the entire family. This belief puts pressure on every family member to participate in the rituals. It implies that those who become Christians while others remain traditionalists, are regarded as creating serious problems for their communities.

Further, although missionaries protested against the actions of the colonial government, they identified with their policy of separate congregations and separate ministry for the converts based on race. Moreover, indigenous communities in mission stations were separated from the elite missionaries. Even if the missionaries employed the natives as domestic servants, they did not entertain them in their dining rooms (Mutumburanzou 1999:113). As a result, the native church members participated in the liberation struggle.

The rise of African Independent Churches is an expression of resistance to the idea that accepting the Gospel means completely rejecting traditional cultures (Moyo 1996:27). African Independent Churches originated in South Africa and spread among the Shona people. They continued to multiply because Africans feel at home with the idea of expressing their Christianity in African symbols and images (Moyo 1996:28).

Another factor that contributed to the establishment of African Independent Churches was the translation of the Bible into African languages. This marked the beginning of translating the Gospel into African culture and developed the indigenous African spirituality which is evident in the African Independent Churches (Moyo 1996:28-31).

The reluctance of missionaries to relinquish top leadership positions to indigenous people, disagreement on faith healing, prophecy and speaking in tongues and their negative attitude towards polygamy, ancestor veneration and use of traditional religion are some of the other factors that helped to create a conducive climate for Africans to seek the kind of worship that could relate to their own political ambitions (Moyo 1996:32).

### 3.5.1 The Rise of Ethiopianism

In 1896, Ethiopia resisted the Italian colonial power and this action impressed black people in other African countries. A similar scenario emerged also in the church in Africa. Some black leaders resisted the Western mission churches and formed the Ethiopian Church. An Ethiopian church was founded in South Africa by a Methodist minister, Mangena M. Mokone in 1892. The church manifesto was based on Psalms 68:31 which says, *“Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God”*. To Mokone, this meant self-governance of the church in Africa under African leadership. The Ethiopian churches had no messianic or prophetic elements in them. While messianism started as a religious movement, it ended up being political (Ndiokwere 1981:28).

The rise of Ethiopianism triggered off the spirit of African nationalism in the mission churches. The Wesleyan minister N. Sithole, who became one of the leaders of African nationalism in Zimbabwe claimed that nationalism in Africa is based on biblical principles. He also understood that the Bible which liberated the nation from spiritual bondage could also liberate the nation from colonial bondage (Martin 1964:154).

Ethiopianism was probably brought to Zimbabwe from South Africa by migrant labourers during the period before 1910 and it started to spread among the Ndebele and the Shona speaking people. Among the Shona, Mupambi Chidembo established the First Ethiopian Church. He once worked as a migrant labourer in Transvaal and he established churches in Bikita, Gutu and Zaka (Daneel 1987:52-53).

### 3.5.2 The Rise of African Independent Churches

African Independent Churches (AICs) probably originated as revolutionary movements which had quite a variety of secularized forms of biblical hope of God's kingdom rooted in messianic movements. In Zimbabwe, as in many African countries, the movements were political. As political liberators, the leaders led their people from slavery to the promised freedom. They could achieve their goals either violently or non-violently (Martin 1964:151).

This research will briefly discuss four Independent Churches in Zimbabwe which have been described by some scholars as messianic. These are the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) which was founded by Samuel Mutendi, the African Apostolic Church founded by Johane Marange, the Apostolic Church of John Masowe and the City of God Church (Guta raJehova) founded by Mai Chaza.

Originally, the ZCC in Zimbabwe was a branch of Lekhanyane's church in Transvaal. Mutendi, the founder, had also worked as migrant labourer in South Africa. He expanded the church through faith healing and performance of miracles (Daneel 1987:14).

Mutendi was a Christ-like figure to his followers. As a result, many of his followers expected the death of their leader to be followed by signs for them to be reassured of his presence. Some of his followers gave testimony that he had also promised that his death would be followed by a sign. It is a popular belief among the Zionists that, three days after his death, Mutendi went into a star which reflected his appearance. The month after his death was a period of waiting for the comfort of the Holy Spirit. His followers testified that during that time the Holy Spirit descended upon them with power (Daneel 1988:270).

Johane Marange was different from Mutendi and his African Apostolic Church has been a nationwide movement since 1930. It originated in Mutare after Marange broke from the Apostolic Methodist Mission. He identified himself with biblical figures especially Joseph and Moses (Daneel 1987: 56).

John Masowe was originally known as Shonhiwa. In 1932, he fell ill and died. While his grave was being prepared, he resurrected and told the people that he had stood before God. He then went up to the mountain to pray. When he returned, he claimed to be John the Baptist proclaiming the gospel of the hour. He has won many adherents among the Shona and the Ndebele. He believed that the dead would wait for him at the gate of heaven to allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven (Sundkler 1961:324). His

followers believed that John Masowe was a secret Messiah who was not known to many though he was in their midst (Ndiokwere 1981:42).

The messianic church of Mai Chaza was founded by a married woman, *Mai* (Mrs.) Chaza. According to the story, in 1953, she became ill and later on died. She was resurrected by God on account that her death was premature. When she went up to the mountain to pray, she became a faith healer. The Spirit renamed the mountain, Sinai; because that was the place Mai Chaza the new Moses received power and revelation from God. Her village was renamed the city of God and people travelled there from as far as South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi for healing (Ndiokwere 1981:42).

The role of a leader among the independent and Ethiopian churches is akin to that of a tribal chieftain. Mutendi's leadership was even higher than that of a tribal chief. He had established the church over a wide area with many tribal chiefs. Mutendi could then be likened to a Rozvi king. In any case, he dressed himself like a king. He also served as a prophetic leader (Daneel 1988:15).

While the Bible plays a significant role in the independent churches, a liberation theologian and politician Canaan Banana argued for the re-writing of the Bible so that it could be relevant to post-colonial societies. He called for oppressive texts to be removed from the Bible. Banana was also concerned that the biblical revelation related to only one nation. Therefore, he advocated for the inclusion of the religious experiences of other nations (Reed 2009).

One is compelled to understand why some preachers are inclined to support President Mugabe to the extent of claiming his supremacy and that he is the carrier of the blood of Jesus Christ. They also use the same propaganda by some of the Mugabe loyalists who claim that he is anointed by Mbuya Nehanda (spirit medium and former liberation heroine (ZANU-PF oiling its violence machinery, targets churches in propaganda drive, 2011).

Sometime ago, the president and a delegation from his political party graced the Apostolic Church of Marange Passover festival putting on religious vestments. In spite of the fact that they are not members of that church, they stood to address the congregation (Mukwatira 2010). After the visit of the president to the Passover meeting, some leaders of the same church urged all members to buy membership cards of the ZANU (PF) as a reciprocal gesture for the two tractors donated by the president at the meeting. At a church service at one of the churches in Tshabalala, Madzibaba Shadreck Kwembeya is quoted as telling his members that at the Passover meeting, the church leaders had agreed to support the ZANU (PF) by ensuring that all members are in possession of party cards. Failure to co-operate could lead to the expulsion of such members from the church (Jackson, 2010).

President Mugabe also visited the ZCC shrine where he officially opened an 18 000 seater multi-purpose conference centre at Mbungo Estate. Nehemiah Mutendi who earlier on praised the president and assured support from his huge following, declared President Mugabe a leader sent by God (Catholic Bishops Liars and Puppets – Mugabe, 2011).

An Anglican Church bishop, Dr. Kunonga, said that Mugabe is the prophet of God. Dr. Kunonga is also well-known for saying that President Robert Mugabe is a better Christian than him. Dr. Kunonga is one of the beneficiaries of the land redistribution program. He recently broke away from the Anglican Church and he has refused to surrender the church property. He is also quoted as saying that President Mugabe is an instrument of divine justice (Conger 2008).

As the church we see the President with different eyes. To us he is a prophet of God who was sent to deliver the people of Zimbabwe from bondage... God raised him to acquire our land and distribute it to Zimbabweans; we call it democracy of the stomach. There is no Government without soil.

Messianic figures were always associated with a Christ-like character. We have noted the close relationship between the spiritual and the political leaders in the Zimbabwean context. The religious groups became political leaders within their various realms. The

Bible which is used to liberate people from spiritual bondage is the same Bible used to raise the spirit of expectation for political deliverance.

### 3.6 Conclusion

Messianic expectations and messianic type of characters in Zimbabwe emanated from social, economic, political and religious crises. As already explored in this chapter, the rise of messianic expectation was founded on the need for liberation from the minority rule of the colonial powers which robbed the majority of the native community of their dignity. The once united nation became divided into tribal trust lands which comprised of poor soils while the great productive land was possessed by a few commercial farmers. Politically, the natives had no right to vote, and had limited right and access to education. Consequently, the liberation spirit was stirred from the religious understanding that Scriptures recognize the need for a human liberator who could assume a messianic position. While the spirit started in the church, it proceeded to advocate for political liberation which led to the attainment of independence.

In particular, the Zimbabwean context could influence the attitude of Zimbabwean natives to the theme of messianism. The fact that some religious and political figures have depicted President Robert Gabriel Mugabe as a messianic figure, suggests a response to the crises which the nation is encountering.

In Chapter two of this study, we have considered the history of Israel, which is the background to prophetic messianism. The trend continued in Israel's pre-exilic, exilic, and postexilic periods. From this background, one may see the need for a close reading of prophetic texts from the three dispensations. Prophecy was actually used to respond to various circumstances which surrounded the prophetic worldviews. In this regard, the circumstances surrounding an event create a lens for a reader to approach the text. However, exegesis enhances understanding of how one may interpret to the text in a contemporary context. While one needs to be as faithful as possible to the Scripture, the background of the reader plays a part in its understanding.

Zimbabwe shares with ancient Israel similar social, economic, political, and religious crises which form the background to the prophetic voice of that historical moment. In order to address such a crisis environment, a close reading of the texts on messianic expectations will prove useful as will be shown in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXEGESIS OF MESSIANIC TEXTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The messianic expectation which is embedded in the historical context of ancient Israel triggered the prophetic office to raise hopes of a new kingship over Israel to usher in a new age. Various texts in the prophetic books reveal the dark side of Israel when it failed to fulfil Yahweh's expectations and hope for a better future ushered by a messianic figure. This calls for a close reading of at least three prophetic texts, which is one from each historical setting in ancient Israel (namely the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic).

Messianic texts can be either explicit or implicit in nature. The explicit texts use the term messiah and the implicit texts do not use the term but the message they deliver is aimed at instilling hope for a kind of future deliverer. Hope was raised by the prophets mostly when the kings failed to maintain their calling. As a result, the nation of Israel was subjected to foreign rule as divine retributive justice for their failure to exercise justice and their disloyalty to Yahweh.

The study of the theme of messianism has been broadly explored but for the sake of this research, some exegetical analysis of three biblical texts will be conducted. These texts are simply examples of prophetic texts which may help us to explore the magnitude of messianic expectations during the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods. Therefore, this chapter will entail the *close reading*<sup>3</sup> of three prophetic texts which have been popularly regarded as messianic in nature. In this regard, literary, historical and theological aspects will be taken into consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> A definition of *close reading* has been provided in the introductory chapter of this study.

#### 4.2 Background of Messianic Expectations in the Pentateuch

In the opening chapter of his book, *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament*, Becker (1980:11-12) claims that since the Messiah was expected, the New Testament reveals the expected Messiah of the Old Testament. According to Becker, most scholars ignore many messianic passages. Such passages include Genesis 3:15 which refers to the first redeemer. Rose (2001:565) also identifies other passages such as Genesis 49:8-12 which mentions the sceptre coming from Jacob, Numbers 24:17-19 which refers to the sceptre from Judah, and Deuteronomy 18:18-19 which talks about a prophet like Moses. However, many scholars since the mid-eighteenth century became more cautious about their messianic meaning. Porter (2007:14) refers to a line of the promise that runs from Noah to Abraham as suggested by Romans 4 and Galatians 3:16ff. The line continues to Judah the son of Jacob (Gen 49:8-12) from whom it is predicted the messiah would come.

Recently, Alexander (1995:20-21) reveals that the majority of scholars claim that Genesis cannot be associated with any messianic expectations because of the following reasons: Firstly, no word in the book denotes a royal figure. As a result, texts which had been widely accepted as messianic are generally regarded as not messianic in nature. Secondly, the expectations for a future king or messiah were a late development in Israel. However, Alexander understands that even if the word messiah is not used of royal persons in Genesis, the text raises expectations of a divinely appointed mediator of divine blessings.

In the Pentateuch, anointing is linked to the ritual of consecration especially of the priests who were anointed to carry out special service to God. Porter (2007:14) mentions a couple of biblical references to anointing. He points out the root word which appears in Genesis 32:13 where the ritual of anointing was carried out by Jacob when he anointed a rock. He also notes the oil which was kept in the tabernacle for consecration rituals (Ex 25:6).

In addition, Exodus 30:26, 40:9, 10, and 11 indicate that the tabernacle and its furniture were consecrated (Porter 2007:14). To Porter, this act is unique because only priests

were anointed in Leviticus 4:3-4, 16, 6:20, 22; 8:12 and Numbers 3:3; 35:40. Porter therefore concludes that one who is anointed is set apart by God for a divine mission.

The featuring of the phrase “anointed priest” in the Pentateuch needs a closer look. In the survey on messianism, it has already been noted that the word messiah was derived from its verbal meaning ‘to anoint’ or its use in the adjectival form to complement the noun ‘priests’ (Rose 2001:565). This presupposes its embryonic stage. Though some texts may be considered messianic by error, they contribute to the later development of the idea under the influence of subsequent historical circumstances (Klausner 1955:27).

Generally, it may be said that the term ‘anoint’ is used in the consecration of the tabernacle and priests. They were made sacred for the Lord and could not be treated as ordinary things and people. They were set apart for a divine purpose. The tabernacle especially the most holy places was not approached by just anyone. The priest, apart from having special obligation, was considered to have special status. Once one was anointed, he gained special favour (Oswalt 1997:1125-1126).

In ancient Near Eastern religions, a priest functioned as a minister to god by providing all his needs and worshipping in the house where the divine dwelt. Israel’s priests also had similar tasks. His greatest duty was to offer sacrifices. He was the only one allowed to approach the altar carrying out rituals while putting on special vestments. The priest was the mediator of sacrifices to Yahweh on behalf of the perpetrator of sin or guilt (Schuffman 1996:881-802).

The high priest made purification offerings to remove or to get rid of the impurities that defiled the tabernacle. It was a sacrifice in response to the guilt and impurities which were associated with sin but also some situations which did not involve sin; for example the purification of a mother after birth, the purification of a person who recovered from an unclean flow, and several other community rituals involving purification offering and the consecration of the tabernacle. The sacrifices rectified various situations that defiled the sacred space and disrupted the orderly life of the community (Gorman 2000:145).

The outcome of the sacrifice by the priest was that the offender was forgiven. The priest's role was to sacrifice but forgiveness came from Yahweh. However, forgiveness did not mean exemption from punishment but reconciliation with God. All in all, atonement was made by God while the priest acted on behalf of the offender (Houston 2003:106).

After the exile, there was no king and the high priest held a central role because of the absence of a king. Anointment was an outward sign of empowerment so as to become God's representative that could be traced back to Aaron (Martin 1991:952). The "anointed priest" referred to Aaron or the current presiding high priest (Kaiser 1994:1034).

In summary, we have noted that the notion of messianic expectation is found initially in the Pentateuch. God promised the institution of a mediator. This mediator could come as the anointed priest or king. Moreover, Israel's leaders were prototypes.

#### **4.3 Isaiah 9:1-7**

Messianic expectations before in Isaiah 9:1-7 were results of the failure of the authorities to uphold justice and righteousness. Israel hoped for the rise of a New Davidic king who would restore the dignity of the people of God.

##### **4.3.1 Background to Isaiah**

We can only understand the messianic expectation in the book of Isaiah if we put into consideration the social, economic, political and religious world of Isaiah as found in the five introductory chapters of Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied to the house of Judah, denouncing Judah's rebellion against God (Isa. 1:2b). There was no justice for the rich, the oppressed, the poor, the orphans and the widows (Isa. 1:16, 17). Justice and righteousness had actually departed and the people had become murderers (Isa. 1:21). The rulers were on the side of the rich elites who robbed the poor through bribery and they did not judge the cases of the widows (Isa. 1:23). Judah then engaged in the practice of divination like foreign nations such as Philistia (Isa. 2:6b) which worshipped idols (Isa. 2:18, 20). The poor were being exploited (Isa. 3:14, 15).

As a result of such injustice and unrighteousness, Yahweh became angry and he promised a future time when he would punish Judah. This is clearly depicted by the multiple use of the imperfect form 'I will'. God promised to use other nations as instrument of retributive justice (Isa. 1:24) and Judah would be taken into exile.

Isaiah uses the phrases 'in that day' to explain the period of the intending disaster. That day would be associated with divine judgment (Isa. 2:17), humiliation of those in power, elevation of the despised (3:4), the exaltation of the Branch of Yahweh (Isa. 4:2), and hope for a glorious future for the remnant (Isa. 4:2-6). Judgment is pronounced in the text with the expression 'Woe' which is used eight times in the first five chapters.

Most scholars assert that there are no messianic prophecies before the collapse of the Davidic kingdom and the subsequent Babylonian exile. The fall of the monarchy could have triggered messianic expectations. However, the division of the monarchy and the collapse of the northern kingdom incited hope for the restoration of the glorious Davidic kingdom with a new David in power (Strauss 1995:37).

The selected text is part of a larger context of chapters 7-39 which focus on the issue of trusting either God or the nations. At that time, when Tiglath-Pilezer III ascended to the throne of Assyria in 745 BCE, Israel and her neighbours were facing profound crises. The small nations on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea could hardly avoid direct confrontation with the Assyrian imperial power. Those nations stood in the way of a renewed Assyrian drive toward Egypt. Egypt persuaded her northern neighbours to resist the Assyrians. This happened over a period of 60 years in which Isaiah kept calling Israel and Judah, and later on Judah alone, to trust in God. The larger context can be divided into three parts: Ahaz's refusal to trust God and the implications of that decision (chapters 7-12); the reasons for trusting God (chapters 13-35); and Ahaz's willingness to trust God in the face of more serious threats (chapters 36-39) (Oswalt 1991:155).

Much earlier, a discussion of Ahaz's rejection to trust God was carried out by Bornemann (1955:334-336). He dealt with the popular passage of Isaiah 7:1-9:7 which depicts the threat to Judah because of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition between Rezin of

Syria and Pekah of Israel against Assyria. On the advice of Isaiah, Judah refused to join the coalition but the prospects of war could force it to join. Isaiah 7:1-6 contrasts Ahaz and his advisers who trembled in fear with Isaiah who was confident and fearless in the face of the northern threat. Isaiah reassured Ahaz of victory if only he believed (Isa. 7:7-9). Ahaz was given an opportunity to ask for a sign (Isa. 7:10-12), but he refused. In fact, this was a refusal to trust Yahweh and to take heed of the word of Yahweh through the prophet Isaiah. In this way, he betrayed his office as the anointed one of Yahweh. Isaiah then offered the sign (7:13-16) of a young woman who was about to bear a child. The whole danger would pass before that child was aged two or three. The child was to be named Immanuel, which implied that God would be with Judah. The same message was given to the people in the form of another sign, that is, in the symbolic name Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4). However, neither the people nor the king believed; therefore, they would be subjected to divine wrath (7:17-25). When Ahaz failed to uphold God's purpose, Isaiah promised the birth of a true king, an Anointed of Yahweh through whom Yahweh would accomplish his purpose (9:2-5). The whole passage is regarded as messianic because it deals with the covenant figure of a king messiah.

#### **4.3.2 Textual Criticism of Isaiah 9:1-7**

There is a difference in versification between the English and the Hebrew of Isaiah 9:1-7. Verse 23 of chapter 8 in the Hebrew text is verse 1 in the English text which is a translation from the Septuagint. This suggests a link between chapter 9 and the end of chapter 8 which pictured a time of divine silence as a time of 'darkness' drawing a contrast with chapter 8 which provides hope through the light (Watts 1985:130, Tucker 2001:122).

Tucker (2001:123) makes some critical reflections on the passage. Firstly, the contrasting images between light and darkness are metaphoric. While darkness symbolizes depression and death, light is a metaphor for life and joy. Secondly, the prophet establishes a scene of celebration usually had during thanksgiving festivals after a bumper harvest or after victory in war. Thirdly, contrasts the pictures of war associated with the war instruments with the burning of those instruments in fire. Fourthly, the theme of the birth announcement is cardinal. This is within the context of

the symbolic birth of a child in chapters 7 and 8. Birth signifies Yahweh's saving acts on behalf of his creation. Lastly, the scene leads to the enthronement of the grown up baby as a Davidic king who will administer justice and righteousness.

It is also important to note that this text was possibly meant for the particular historical installation of a new king. However, it could be used to interpret later situations in which a new king was installed. It possibly referred to the enthronement of Josiah who became the king of Judah at the age of eight and led the people into repentance and renewal while embarking on major worship reforms (Bartholomew & Goheen 2004:104).

The book does not indicate who this son is and it does not give any hint or provide any clue to the contemporary fulfilment of the coming of this figure. The assumption that the text is messianic is therefore questionable since the Old Testament does not seem to use the term messiah in an eschatological sense (Goldingay 2001:71).

The NIV of Isaiah 9:1-7 reads:

*9 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—*

*<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.*

*<sup>3</sup> You have enlarged the nation  
and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as men rejoice  
when dividing the plunder.*

*<sup>4</sup> For as in the day of Midian's defeat,  
you have shattered  
the yoke that burdens them,*

*the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor.*

<sup>5</sup> *Every warrior's boot used in battle  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.*

<sup>6</sup> *For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty  
God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

<sup>7</sup> *Of the increase of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.*

The NRSV of Isaiah 9:1-7 reads:

**9** *But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations*

<sup>2</sup> *The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.*



<sup>3</sup>*You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.*

<sup>4</sup>*For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Median.*

<sup>5</sup>*For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.*

<sup>6</sup>*For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

<sup>7</sup>*His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

The above translations are slightly different from each other. The NIV is more of a direct translation from the original Hebrew script than the NRSV which have simple English. In verse 6, the NIV states that *the government will be on his shoulders* but the NRSV translates this as *authority rests upon his shoulders*. The reading of each translation has

implications for the naming of this son as *Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace* in verse 7. The rendering of the NIV uses the word “*government*” which implies human authority based on the running of political affairs. It implies that the names in verse 7 are just titles. The NRSV rendering as authority has a broader meaning than government. This may imply that the son is a divine figure with the names in verse 7 as his attributes.

#### 4.3.3 Exegesis (Isa. 9:1-7)

The selected passage links with the preceding and the following context. Therefore, it can be understood within its literary context. In chapter 7, the prophet reflects on the judgment of Syria and Ephraim which is the main point of the message. In this instance, we encounter the symbolic names of the sons of Isaiah. One of his sons was Maher-Shalal-Hash-baz which means, “The spoil speeds, the spoil haste”. In Chapter 8, “*walking in darkness*” refers to trusting in the evil powers and forgetting Yahweh. After judgment, people will however turn their faces upwards (8:21) and in Chapter 9, they would see the great light. The light in 10:17 is Yahweh himself (Rignell 1955:33).

According to Laato (1988:173), the heading to this passage (Isa. 9:1-7) is *Immanuel is born!* It therefore suggests that the passage is the continuation of the “Immanuel expectation” in Isaiah 7. Blenkinsopp (1984:110) suggests that Immanuel (God with us) be widely identified with Hezekiah’s son and heir to Ahaz.

Verse 1 is centrally located between “former times” and “later times” within the context of chapters 6-8. The “former time” was the time of Ahaz which in a larger context depicts the pre-exilic period of suffering. Ahaz may reflect the embodiment of a failed state. The “latter time” refers to the period after Ahaz, that is, of Hezekiah which in a larger context was the time of homecoming and restoration. Hezekiah should be the subject oracle as the divine agent of the restoration of Judah. A Christological reading would contrast BCE and CE since the coming of Christ marked the turning point for restoration and salvation. It shows that Yahweh had the capacity to create a wondrous new possibility without extrapolation from the former things (Brueggemann 1998:81-82).

In verse 2, הָהֵלֵךְ בְּחֹשֶׁךְ the participial form of הָלַךְ indicates an ongoing condition of being defeated. The phrase *those dwelling* adds to the state of being conquered and the subjection to oppressive powers. The terms *darkness* חֹשֶׁךְ and *shadows of death* צִלְמוֹת מָוֶת describe the condition of the people in the land and the environment. Although they were in such a state of despair, the prophetic voice gave them hope, the hope that they would see a great light – רָאוּ אֹרֶךְ גָּדוֹל – . The participle indicates the prophetic certainty. Though the effect of that light was not yet fully realized, it was a certainty. Darkness would not actually last (Groningen 1990:540-41).

In verse 3, in the statement לֹא הִגְדַּלְתָּ הַשְׂמֵחָה הָאֵל “indeed you have increased their joy”, לֹא is not in this instance negative but provides a strong assertion that together with the light, comes joy. Grief and despair are indeed replaced by gladness and happiness. Such joy is compared to the joy of harvest or of victory in battle when the people come together to share the booty (Groningen 1990:541).

Isaiah 8:4, 5 and 6 all begin with כִּי “because”. Some scholars suggest that they are parallel responses which give three parallel reasons for rejoicing (Groningen 1990:143). Verse 4 states that the reason, as indicated by the use of כִּי is that God had removed the yoke of defeat as in the days when the Midianites were defeated. The victory referred to here echoes Gideon’s victory over the Midianites. Isaiah was acquainted with Israel’s history and the story of Gideon who employed a tactic commanded by Yahweh to throw the Midianites off guard before they turned on one another. Gideon then pursued them and killed their commanders (Judges 7:14-8:12).

All that reminds one of war would be destroyed (v.5) to ensure that there would be no hope of resuscitating the war (Kaiser 1995:162). This also suggests that the enemy would be totally defeated and disarmed (Groningen 1990:145).

In verse 6, the verb is fronted בְּיֵלֶד יֵלְדֵנוּ “Because the child is born to us” which indicates that the subject is the centre of attention. This may attract our attention to the words of Isaiah to Ahaz (Isa. 7:14) that the child would have a prominent place in the house of David and in the nation of Israel as a whole. The reason was that the child

would be born for the people as in the phrase בֶּן נִתַּן-לָנוּ “a son is given to us” (Groningen 1990:544).

The heir to the throne of David was going to be more effective than his predecessors who became the cause of celebration, partly based on joy and partly as royal propaganda. The series of the royal names are also literally hyperbolic (Brueggemann 1998:83).

Most commentators agree that the statement, a *son has been given to us* refers to Hezekiah. The context of Isaiah 9:1-6 indicate that the prophet was referring to events in his lifetime. In addition, the expression meant that this person was alive already (Hayyim 2009:4).

The son is also referred to in the phrase וְתָהִי הַמְּשָׁרָה עָלֶיךָ שְׂכֵמוֹ “*and the government shall be upon his shoulders*” as the king who would have dominion over the nation. The expression וְיִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ “*and his name shall be called*” here does not give the personal name Immanuel as in Isaiah 7:14 but it is replaced by the pronoun “his” which stands for his name (Groningen 1990:544). Four titles are subsequently given to the son namely Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace.

*The Wonderful Counsellor* in the Hebrew text is פֶּלֶא יוֹעֵץ. The root for *Wonderful* in Hebrew פֶּלֶא means one who does difficult, hard or miraculous things. This portrays him as someone to whom nothing is too difficult to do. The emphasis here is on Yahweh as one who designs and implements his plan and purpose. There is the anticipation of the description of Yahweh as “*wonderful in counsel*” in Isaiah 28:29 (Kaiser 1995:163).

The phrase *Wonderful Counsellor* evokes the birth of a child who would guarantee that the line of succession of the Davidic kingship would continue, and this is often associated with the coming of a Messiah. Revelations 12 depicts the imagery of a woman giving birth and one should note that birth pangs of the Messiah were popularly known in the first century BCE (Collins 2010:76).

The title *Mighty God* is the description of One going out to battle (Isa. 10:21, 43:13). This phrase is difficult to understand because it is repeated in Isaiah 10:21 with

particular reference to Yahweh. It could not have referred to a contemporary of Isaiah from the Davidic dynasty. Not even Ahaz, Hezekiah or Manasseh had hope of restoring Galilee or Ephraim, to the Judean monarchy. None of them could be called God without sounding blasphemous (Oswalt 1991:157).

The title *Everlasting Father* shows Yahweh as being committed to the Davidic lineage as father forever (Ps. 89:26, 29). The book of Isaiah also opens with Yahweh as One who brought up children and had to watch them run away (Goldingay 2001:71). The heir to the Davidic throne would therefore have generative power to control (Brueggemann 1998:83).

The *Prince of peace* suggests an army commander. Isaiah 10:8 describes Israel as *Yahweh's armies*. The prince would aim at bringing peace which would guarantee the end of war as well as joy, fairness and blessings (Goldingay 2001:71). He would also preside over, maintain and make order out of the chaos of Ahaz's regime (Brueggemann 1998:83).

Interestingly, the titles described above are not applied to Jesus in the New Testament. However, Christian exegesis usually takes them as phrases that describe the Messiah and relates them to the incarnate Christ. Jewish exegetes on the other hand regard the first three of the four phrases as referring to God as the one who names (Goldingay 1999:239).

Verse 7 refers to the establishment of the kingdom "from now until forever" *מעתה ועד-עולם*, and one which will have "no end" *אין-קץ*. The verse suggests the establishment of the kingdom in the present age and that it will continue forever (Wegner 1992:4).

The song then turns into the imperfect describing how the one who would be born will grow. It concludes by affirming that the zeal of the Lord would accomplish all those things (Tucker 2001:122).

Isaiah 9: 1-7 announces the birth of a royal child who would be related to the enthronement ceremonies of ancient Judah. Psalms 2 and 110 make similar announcements of the enthronement of a king. They probably suggest the birth of a

king who would sit at the right hand of God and who would have an everlasting priesthood (Collins 2010:75).

One may recognize that the basic understanding of messianic expectations in Israel was grounded on the expectations of a Davidic dynasty. When the monarchy started to fail as later kings failed to play their role as leaders of the people, new hopes developed under the rubric of an expected newly born child or son who would advance the messianic role in Israel. This messianic figure would exhibit many attributes that would point to divine election. The messianic figure would be responsible for the restoration of Israel's social economic, political and religious order.

The fulfilment of the prophetic message of Isaiah is rather difficult to establish. It was difficult to confirm that any of the later leaders of Israel was the prophesied messiah. It is possible therefore, that the prophecies were a rhetorical message meant to instil hope in Israel during a hopeless moment.

#### **4.4 Isaiah 44:28-45:8**

Isaiah's prophecy in which Yahweh claims Cyrus to be a messianic figure require attention especially when dealing with the exilic period. Hope for Israel's deliverance was always associated with the Davidic dynasty. However after the fall of the Davidic kingdom hope for deliverance shifted to Cyrus the king of Persia. Cyrus is the one who facilitated the return from exile and the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Temple and encouraged the worship of Yahweh.

##### **4.4.1 Background**

The text of Isaiah 44:28-45:8 falls within what most scholars refer to as Second Isaiah. This is because Isaiah is regarded as a composite book which is organized at three separate points. The idea of dividing Isaiah into three separate books namely First Isaiah (1-39), Second Isaiah (40-56) and Third Isaiah (57-66) emanated from the notion that the book of Isaiah is not a product of a single witness. Some scholars refer to the three divisions as Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, respectively (Seitz 2007:29).

#### 4.4.2 Textual Criticism of Isaiah 44:28-45:8

In this instance, both NIV and NRSV versions do not make clear where the prophetic formula ends and where the words of God begin. The messenger formula lacks participial qualification which may suggest that it is not a straightforward new beginning. However, in such a phrase which appears subsequently after Yahweh's bold address in 44:28, Cyrus, Yahweh's addressee, was the 'anointed' one just like Saul and David (Goldingay 2006:19).

Both the NIV and NRSV link Cyrus to 'his anointed'. The LXX expression τῷ χριστῷ μου might imply לְמָשִׁיחַו would be the opening words of Yahweh's actual words, "To my anointed, to Cyrus..." The MT is quite conservative and avoids associating "his anointed" with Cyrus. In the MT, the *zarqa* accent separates the words "Yahweh" from "to his anointed" and "to his anointed" from "to Cyrus". Such accentuation would suggest that the last expression signifies "of Cyrus" (Goldingay: 2006:20).

The NIV of Isaiah 44:28-45:8 reads:

**44**<sup>28</sup> *who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd  
and will accomplish all that I please;  
he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"  
and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'*

**45**<sup>1</sup> *This is what the LORD says to his anointed,  
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of  
to subdue nations before him  
and to strip kings of their armor,  
to open doors before him  
so that gates will not be shut:*

<sup>2</sup> *I will go before you  
and will level the mountains  
I will break down gates of bronze  
and cut through bars of iron.*

<sup>3</sup> *I will give you the treasures of darkness,*

*riches stored in secret places,  
so that you may know that I am the LORD,  
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.*

*<sup>4</sup>For the sake of Jacob my servant,  
of Israel my chosen,  
I summon you by name  
and bestow on you a title of honor,  
though you do not acknowledge me.*

*<sup>5</sup>I am the LORD, and there is no other;  
apart from me there is no God.*

*I will strengthen you,  
though you have not acknowledged me,*

*<sup>6</sup>so that from the rising of the sun  
to the place of its setting  
men may know there is none besides me.*

*I am the LORD, and there is no other.*

*<sup>7</sup>I form the light and create darkness,  
I bring prosperity and create disaster;  
I, the LORD, do all these things.*

*<sup>8</sup>“You heavens above, rain down righteousness;  
let the clouds shower it down.*

*Let the earth open wide,  
let salvation spring up,  
let righteousness grow with it;  
I, the LORD, have created it.*

The NRSV of Isaiah 44:28-45:8 reads:

*<sup>44:28</sup> who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd,  
and he shall carry out all my purpose”;*



*and who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be rebuilt,"  
and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."*

**45** *Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,  
whose right hand I have grasped  
to subdue nations before him  
and strip kings of their robes,  
to open doors before him—  
and the gates shall not be closed:*

<sup>2</sup> *I will go before you  
and level the mountains,  
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze  
and cut through the bars of iron,*

<sup>3</sup> *I will give you the treasures of darkness  
and riches hidden in secret places,  
so that you may know that it is I, the Lord,  
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.*

<sup>4</sup> *For the sake of my servant Jacob,  
and Israel my chosen,  
I call you by your name,  
I surname you, though you do not know me.*

<sup>5</sup> *I am the Lord, and there is no other;  
besides me there is no god.*

*I arm you, though you do not know me,  
<sup>6</sup>so that they may know, from the rising of the sun  
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;  
I am the Lord, and there is no other.*

<sup>7</sup> *I form light and create darkness,  
I make weal and create woe;  
I the Lord do all these things.*

Verse 4 of the NIV contains an interpretive clue, “*I... bestow on you a title of honor*”. Such translation would call for a reference to 44:28 where Yahweh calls Cyrus “*my shepherd*” and 45:1 where he is called “*Yahweh’s anointed*”. This would suggest that “*his anointed*” is the title of honour which attributes messianic characteristics to Cyrus. The NRSV on the other hand prefers the expression, “*I surname you*” suggesting that the name Cyrus was his new name from Yahweh which implies that the term “*his anointed*” simply attributes Cyrus to the Davidic throne.

#### 4.4.3 Exegesis (Isa. 44:28-45:8)

Yahweh’s appointment of Cyrus as an agent of restoration and deliverance was totally unexpected (Groningen 1990:593). The commissioning of Cyrus (Isa. 44:28-45:1-8) is analogous to that of the servant in the Servant Song (Isaiah 42:1-13) in the sense that both are called in righteousness (Isa. 42:2, 42:6), and both are called to accomplish Yahweh’s will (Isa. 44:28, 53:10; Schultz 1995:158). The difference is that the Servant Song is in two sections, i.e. the presentation of the servant as the divine counsellor and the divine commissioning of the servant (Seitz 2001:393).

The prophetic allusions to Cyrus confirm that the time referred to is the period between 549 BCE and 538 BCE. It was also a time when the nation of Israel was in exile. Cyrus had become the king of Persia in 589 BCE. He eventually conquered Babylon in 539/538 BCE. Later on, he permitted the Israelite exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem through his decree of 538 BCE that set free the captives (Groningen 1990:393).

Yahweh had called Cyrus to capture Babylon to set free the Jews who were in Babylonian as exiles. Some Babylonian sources reveal that Cyrus maintained local culture in order to rule as a successor of local Babylonian kings. He opted to keep local customs undisturbed. In this regard, his decree permitted the exiled Jews to return to their native land, restore their capital Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of their God (Young 1992:1232).

Historical sources also give further evidence that Cyrus was brought up by a shepherd. His grandfather who was king of Media dreamt that Cyrus would succeed him as king. He then ordered for his execution but the officer spared his life by sending him to stay

with a shepherd. At old age, Cyrus revolted and ascended the throne (Mitchell 1991:328).

In Isaiah 44:28, the phrase *הָאֵלֹהִים לְכוֹרֵשׁ רֹעֵי* “The One saying to Cyrus, ‘my shepherd,’” Yahweh points to Cyrus as his shepherd. The role of Yahweh’s representative is described as that of a shepherd elsewhere in the Scriptures and used to describe Moses, Joshua, David and later prophets. Some kings such as Ahaz did not represent God as faithful shepherds (Isa. 7-11). Cyrus’ task as a shepherd was to restore the people of God to their own land. The title ‘shepherd’ was also attributed to David through whom Yahweh accomplished his plan and purpose for his chosen nation of Israel (Goldingay 2001:261).

The Hebrew word *רֹעֵי* in the Masoretic Text is defective and gives room for the word to mean shepherd or to be associated with friendship (Koole 1997:425). The expression Cyrus *רֹעֵי* “*my shepherd*” could also mean “my friend” because in Isaiah 48:14, Cyrus is “he whom Yahweh loves” (Knight 1984:87). Cyrus could save as a shepherd whose intimate relationship with Yahweh is demonstrated by the holding of his hand by Yahweh (Oswalt 1998:201).

The term *רֹעֵי* “my shepherd” was a traditional metaphor for the king. Therefore, Cyrus was actually portrayed in terms of the royal ideology of Israel. Cyrus played a restorative role in Israel’s history. He made a decree for all exiles to return to their homeland after his conquest of Babylon. However, he was not the only gentile king chosen by Yahweh. The exilic prophet Jeremiah designated the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as the servant of Yahweh whom all nations should serve. Nevertheless, Cyrus played a more positive role for he was to set the exiles free and rebuild the city of Jerusalem (Collins 2010:33).

The verb *יָשַׁלְמָה* “*fulfil*” is the verb from which the word peace is derived. It therefore suggests that Cyrus would bring about peace according to the will of Yahweh. In addition, the verb *תִּקְחֵהוּ* “to take pleasure” is used to express Yahweh’s will. Jerusalem is the focus of the will of Yahweh (Watts 1987:156).

The name Cyrus in Isaiah 45:1 is in apposition to “my anointed”. This phenomenon of adding more words than necessary (also called *pleonasm*) is known by rhetoricians as a means of stressing or focusing attention. Furthermore, the continuity between 45:1a and 45:2 is broken by 45:1b and c. Such interpolation (known by classical rhetoricians as *digressio*) functions as a way of handling some matters with which we may digress for the cause of praising (Gitay 1981:185).

Apart from being a shepherd, Cyrus would be Yahweh’s מָשִׁיחַ “messiah” described as מְשִׁיחוֹ לְכוֹרֶשׁ “his anointed, Cyrus,” one who offered a temporal solution to the problem of Israel (Isa. 45:1). Cyrus was to deliver Israel from bondage and give them permission to return to their land to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Nonetheless, the servant is another saviour who accomplishes his work by prophetic proclamation, teaching and by atoning, suffering and death (Schultz 1995:159).

What Yahweh previously intended to accomplish through the Davidic monarchy, he could do through the gentile king (Goldingay 2001:262). While many modern scholars attribute the concept of messiah to the exilic period, Wegner (1992:1-2) believes that the roots of messianic expectations were present earlier on and were later developed in a different way. He further dismisses the claim that the complete concept arose during the post-exilic period. He notes that very little attention has been paid to the background and development of the concept.

As Yahweh was holding Cyrus’ hand, he was walking before Cyrus and preparing the way for him. The hyperbole “*level the mountains*” before Cyrus only emphasizes that he would not experience any obstacle because he was Yahweh’s instrument (Knight 1984:87).

Any expectation for the rise of the Davidic kingdom was thwarted. Zerubbabel who was a descendant of David could have raised hopes for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. His early disappearance from the biblical text could have been due to dismissal by the Persians to prevent any messianic expectation. Power was invested on the priestly and lay elites who gathered around the Jerusalem Temple (Römer 2007:166).

According to Hugenberger (1995:125-126), the account on Cyrus has many details on Cyrus that reminds us of Pharaoh. For example, in Exodus 5:2, Pharaoh dismissed Moses' request to let Israel go saying, לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־יְהוָה, "I do not know Yahweh". Twice in Isaiah 45:4, 5 Cyrus is described as not knowing God – לֹא יָדַעְתָּנִי. Apart from this, Exodus 7:5 shows that Yahweh's purpose of delivering his people was, that יִדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם "the Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh". This ultimate purpose is used with respect to Yahweh's dealings with Cyrus. Isaiah 45:3 reveals that Yahweh's dealing with Cyrus is לְמַעַן תִּדְעַ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה "... so that you may know that I am Yahweh".

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to consider Motyer's (1999:283) remark on the abovementioned purpose. He claims that the implication of Yahweh's purpose was to provide all the evidence to make such knowledge possible. In addition to the purpose of Yahweh's dealing with Cyrus are two other purposes which are also introduced by לְמַעַן "so that", "for the sake of". The first one is לְמַעַן עֲבָדֵי יַעֲקֹב "for the sake of Jacob" (v. 4), and the other is לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ... כִּי־אֵין בְּלַעֲדַי כֵּן... "so that they [men] may know... that there is none besides me" (v. 6) (Oswalt 1998:201). That could be interpreted, as that Cyrus may know Yahweh, so that Jacob may know Yahweh, and so that the world may know Yahweh.

While the verbs used in the description are perfect<sup>4</sup>, the statements that indicate the purpose and the goal of Yahweh's choice of Cyrus open with the verbs in the perfect. Here the prophet uses the prophetic perfect to demonstrate to his audience that the subsequent events were already accomplished (Gitay 1981:186).

According to Groningen (1990:595), there are three specific promises which are given to Cyrus as Yahweh's anointed shepherd:

1. הֶחֱזַקְתִּי בְיָמֶינִי "I will give you strength by taking a strong hold of your hand" (Isa. 45:1).  
The verb was also used to describe Yahweh's support of his servant in Isaiah 41:9a. Cyrus was given power to subdue גוֹיִם "nations". Cyrus would subdue all the מְלָכִים "kings". דְּלָתַיִם וְשַׁעֲרֵי־לֹא יִסָּגְרוּ "Doors and gates shall not be shut" meaning that Cyrus

<sup>4</sup> A prophetic perfect is a verb used by prophets for a complete event to indicate that the event is certain.

would not be conquered since Yahweh would be holding his hand. Cyrus would become more of a divine military commander. He would become more of His child or son (Isa. 9:1-7).

2. אָנִי לְפָנֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ “*Before you I will go*” (Isa. 45:2). Yahweh made a promise to lead and guide Cyrus. The way would have no obstacles for Yahweh would level the mountains. No doors or gates would prevent Cyrus because Yahweh would be in front of him breaking all obstacles.
3. Yahweh promises to enrich Cyrus – וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ אוֹצְרוֹת הַשֵּׁךְ “*I will give you the treasures of darkness*” (Isa. 45:3). These are valuables and wealth in secret places. Such places could be the houses and cities whose gates would be broken by Yahweh.

The idea of taking hold of him by the right hand in verse 3 gives the impression of being chosen and having an intimate relationship with Yahweh. Cyrus’ conquest would be in accordance with Yahweh’s providence (Watts 1987:157). Yahweh would support Cyrus. This calls for an understanding that the revolution in the Middle East was rooted in Yahweh’s involvement with Cyrus “for the sake of Jacob” (Goldingay 2001:262).

Seitz (2001:394) argues that it was not for Cyrus to know Yahweh in order to accomplish Yahweh’s mission. Verse 4 says אֲכַבְּרָךְ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּנִי “*I surnamed you though you do not know me*”. Here Cyrus is depicted as having no knowledge of Yahweh, showing that Yahweh could use gentile kings to accomplish his own purpose. Yahweh’s commission did not require Cyrus to know him at all. Surprisingly, Cyrus would ensure that the God of Israel is known from the east to the west. However, the royal commissioning raises concern because the one commissioned did not know the one who commissioned him. If we contrast that with the knowledge which others would gain because of him, it becomes ironical. This can be considered rhetorically powerful as it shows God’s generosity and kindness.

The expression מִמְּזֶרְחַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ וְעַד־מַגְרֵבָה “*From the rising of the sun to its setting place*” in verse 6 would demonstrate the scope of Yahweh’s territory and activities which include the activities of Israel as divine messenger (Watts 1987:157).

A relatively good number of texts can be interpreted as messianic. However, we rarely find actual historical figures in who such hopes are invested. In Isaiah 45:1, Cyrus who

was called “my anointed” by God was obviously not meant to restore the Davidic dynasty. He was only regarded as an agent of deliverance of the exilic Israel. A closer figure to the messianic calling up to the Roman era is that of Zerubbabel. Zechariah suggests that “the two sons of oil” referred to a dual leadership with both priestly and kingly authority. (Collins 2010:360).

God’s determination to save his creation in this instance is demonstrated as he appointed a foreign king as his messiah. He was not merely saving the people from the exile which came as a result of sin, but also from sin itself. The most significant messianic promise was not merely political but also spiritual. If it was merely political, Cyrus would have been the only one necessary. However, Isaiah envisions something more than political restoration. The restoration was not a solution to the problem of sin which caused the exile. Rather, the Davidic Messiah was envisioned as one who would rule in truth and righteousness. His reign would lead the earth to the knowledge of Yahweh (Oswalt 1991:153).

The exegetical analysis of this prophetic oracle about Cyrus can be summarized as the rhetoric of the prophet as a means to convince the Diaspora Jews that Yahweh had a plan for them even in their present predicament. Through the dispersion, God intended to extend his kingdom even to the gentiles. The prophet probably tried to ensure that the Diaspora Jews did not resist the plea by Cyrus to return to their homeland to rebuild Jerusalem. Cyrus was not, knowingly or unknowingly, pursuing his mission but the mission of Yahweh. Cyrus was therefore the shepherd of Israel and the anointed one of Yahweh.

While the time of the prophecy is disputed, the prophecy could either be a confirmation of what was happening in the latter days of the exile or a prophetic message which predicted the rise and influence of Cyrus. Although Cyrus was not actually involved in the complete restoration of Jerusalem and the temple, his decree made it possible for his predecessors to complete the task.

#### 4.5 Daniel 9: 25-27

Daniel 9:25-27 serves as divine response to Daniel's concern over the continuation of domination by foreign powers after the return from exile. We have already observed that the return was facilitated by Cyrus and that the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt. However the Davidic kingdom was not yet restored. The response of Yahweh through the Angel Gabriel focused on apocalyptic expectation in which hope was pushed to a distant future.

##### 4.5.1 Background

The Jews who returned from exile formed a small province called Yehud which was under the Persian Empire. It was not administered by the monarchy and as a result, it raised questions concerning continuity, identity and authenticity (Rose 2000:15). The book of Daniel which is the last book in the Hebrew Scriptures tries to deal with such questions. This book is one of the biblical sources, apart from the Septuagint, that provides in part some of the developments in the post-exilic period. The book of Daniel was probably handed down in its final form around 165 BCE, the time when Antiochus was about to Hellenize Judah and was defiling the temple. The post-exilic period was a time of high aspirations for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, a time Judah believed in the coming of a Davidic national messiah as the future realization of an ideal king (Fitzmyer 2007: 56-57).

One major question asked in Daniel's prayer was when the promises of the prophet Jeremiah would be fulfilled (Dan. 9:1). Jeremiah's prophecy had promised that after seventy years of exile, Israel would be restored (Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10). It claimed that the time of Babylonian dominion over Israel would last for seventy years. This could not have been accurate because a period of seventy years did not lapse before the Jews were restored. However, of serious concern was the fact that the desolation of Jerusalem was not over then. Daniel 9:25-27 was Yahweh's response to Daniel's prayer (Collins 1998:108).

The author of the book Daniel used specific prophetic texts to bring his work together with his commentary. His opening verses which claim that God subjected them to



Babylonian exile would identify the author with prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah. His consideration of Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10-11 in relation to the duration of the exile makes it possible to associate his work with prophetic books (Anderson 1984: xiv).

Collins (2010:42) makes it clear that the book of Daniel dates from 168-164 BCE. This was the time of the Maccabean revolt. However, chapters 2-6 contain older Aramaic stories which can be dated back to the period of the Diaspora in the east.

The book of Daniel contains two kinds of material meant for two kinds of audience, the first in the exilic period (Chapters 1-6), and the other, the oracles concerning the period after the exile. The first half narrates the experiences of the Jewish heroes in exile and while the visions were revealed within the same timeframe, they penetrated beyond the historical horizon to the final kingdom of God (Davies 1985:1-2).

Many scholars agree that the exile lasted for about forty-nine years, that is, from 587 BCE the departure to exile to 538 BCE when the first group returned. Wright (1992:21) however estimates that the period from the destruction of the temple to the completion of its building was approximately seventy years. Smith-Christopher (1996:121) has a different view of the matter. He actually considers that proper calculations would render the period of the exile to be 597-515 BCE. He suggests that seventy years was just a tradition. Various exegetical analyses of Daniel 9:24-27 have also produced various explanations of the period in question.

When studying the book of Daniel, one may realize that it is placed differently in the various biblical versions. Owens (1991:335) notes that Daniel appears between Esther and the Writings and not in the Law and the Prophets. He also recognizes that in the Septuagint Daniel is placed in the prophetic books along with other apocryphal books. The Christian church follows the pattern in the Septuagint but excludes the apocryphal books.

Owens (1991:336) further draws our attention to two possible stances on the book of Daniel. Firstly, Daniel could have prophesied of visions in the future in which he gave

the description of contemporary history of Babylon, Media and Persia and also of the future Greek, Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Maccabean and Roman history, consecutively. Secondly, the scribes used the name of an ancient hero to describe past history in order to bring a message to the later generation. In this instance, Daniel would be depicted as a hero and not as the author. The author is therefore unknown but he might have lived before 164 BCE, that is, before Antiochus Epiphanes.

In the second volume of their book, *The Book of Daniel's Composition and Reception*, Collins and Flint (2001:296) suggest that firstly, the text may be a product of units that were independent of each other. Secondly, it is possible that the author deliberately composed the literary work.

#### 4.5.2 Text Criticism of Daniel 9:24-27

The text of Daniel 9:24-27 has been debated for centuries. There are actually various numerical interpretations of the passage. McComiskey (1985:18) suggests that the clausal structure of the Masoretic tradition provides the foundation of a view that “answers to exegetical demands of the text”. He claims that in the clausal arrangement of the Masoretic tradition, the *'atnach* between *שָׁבַעִים שָׁבַעִים* and *וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה* would create a different reading. The RSV reads:

*From the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty weeks it shall be built again.*

However, the NASB reads, “*There will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks*”. This calls for the lapse of a period of sixty-nine years before the appearance of the Messiah. The Masoretic accentuation has been rejected because the Syriac, Theodotion and Vulgate combine the numerical elements.

This view was taken up later by Pierce (1989:212-214) who emphasizes the strength of the *'atnach* which is the strongest disjunctive Masoretic marker between the verse dividers. He strongly supports McComiskey by claiming that the separation of seven

weeks and sixty-two weeks perpetrates the idea that the phrase “an Anointed Ruler” cannot be associated with the “Anointed Prince”.

Meadowcraft (2001:426), in his exploration of Montgomery’s work, observes a problem in considering the “Anointed one” in verse 25 and the “Anointed One” in verse 26 as the one anointed in verse 24. This is because there are two possible readings of קָדְשׁוֹ קְדָשִׁים at the end of verse 24. It could be rendered as either an individual or a community, and the messiah also may be interpreted in the individual or communal sense. He therefore calls for caution in order to avoid twin traits namely 1) a strong messianic or eschatological interpretation may result in fragmenting the literary integrity of these verses; and 2) historical interpretation may lead to the pitfall of an overly literal understanding of the history that is being conveyed.

The Septuagint renders Daniel 9:26 thus:

kai. meta. e`pta. kai. e`bdomh,konta kai. e`xh,konta du,o  
avpostagh,setai cri/sma kai. ouvkh e;stai kai. basilei,a  
evqnw/n fqerei/ th.n po,lin kai. to. a[gion meta. tou/  
cristou/ kai. h[xei h` sunteleia avtou/ metV ovrgh/j kai.  
e[wj kairou/ suntelei,aj avpo. pole,mou polemhqh,setai.

The English translation is rendered by Tanner (2009:183) as:

*And after seven and seventy and sixty-two the Anointing will be taken away and will not be and the kingdom of the Gentiles will destroy the city and the Temple with the Anointed One.*

Tanner claims that the rendering by the Septuagint seems to be intentionally bent to say what the translators wanted the text to say. The sum of the years would become 139 which when subtracted from the era of the Seleucids (311-310 BCE) would actually cause the date to fall between 172 and 171 BCE which is approximately the year of the murder of the High Priest Onias III during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes.

The NIV however reads:

<sup>24</sup> ‘Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.<sup>25</sup> Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. <sup>26</sup> After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. <sup>27</sup> He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

The NRSV reads:

<sup>24</sup> “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. <sup>25</sup> Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. <sup>26</sup> After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. <sup>27</sup> He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.”

The NIV translation considers “*the Anointed One*” (9:25, 26) as a personal name which might have been influenced by the understanding of *the Anointed One* as Jesus Christ. The NRSV simply translates the phrase as “*an anointed prince*” in verse 25 and “*an anointed one*” in verse 26. Such rendering would consider this figure as a common person like one of a priestly descent. The translations are based on the context of the reader.

#### 4.5.3 Exegetical Analysis of Daniel 9:24-27

The message which was delivered to Daniel by the angel of the Lord comprises of a series of six actions to be taken. He used infinitives to express each of them. Infinitives in this instance have two effects: 1) The agent of the action is not given, and 2) the source of the command to the watcher is not given. The employment of the prefix  $\text{?}$  drives the reader backwards in the passage to search for a verb in the indicative mood.

For the chosen pericope, the infinitives are dependent on נִקְרָא “are decreed” which is a *niphal*. Unfortunately, the source of the decree remains unstated. However, the subject of the decree is given as שְׁבַעִים שָׁבָעִים “seventy sevens”. The final infinitive וְלִמְשַׁח “and to anoint” is linked to the anointing of the Holy of Holies (Meadowcroft 2001:436).

The seventy weeks, שְׁבַעִים שָׁבָעִים literarily, “weeks seventy” in the NIV reads, “seventy sevens” and it is also commonly rendered as “weeks of years” consisting seven years each. With the analogy of seventy years in 9:2 and in contrast with the three weeks of years in 10:2, we may consider the years as sabbatical years. However, in 9:24, “the seventy weeks” is not followed by “of years”. It is difficult to ascertain if this refers to an exact period of seven years or an unspecified period (Hoekema 1988:427).

The predicted period שְׁבַעִים is from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the appearance of מְשִׁיחַ נִגִּיד “the anointed Prince”. The appearance is then followed by a period of הַשְּׁבַעִים שָׁשִׁים וּשְׁנַיִם “sixty-two weeks”. The terminus quo is not only found in the appearance but also in the time predicted by Jeremiah for the restoration of Jerusalem, that is, after seventy years of exile. If 9:2 refers to Jeremiah 29:10-11 which specifically refers to the end of the desolation of Jerusalem, the prophetic oracle would be the determinant rather than the royal decree (McComiskey 1985:25-26).

What is odd is the absence of the definite article on דְּבָר which renders the meaning as “a word” or “a decree”, an indefinite noun, instead of “the word” or “the decree”, a definite noun (Poythress 1995:142).

Hoekema (1988:427) identifies four exegetical problems with the interpretation of the decree of Yahweh through the angel in relation to the New Testament period. Firstly, when Gabriel made a decree of seventy weeks, it was not indicated that a gap of 1900 years would intervene between the sixty-ninth and seventieth year but it was obviously taken as consecutive weeks. Secondly, the prediction given in verse 24 is not followed up by what is predicted in verse 26. Thirdly, the blessings in verse 24 have been fulfilled in Christ and there is no longer any point in waiting for a future fulfilment. Fourthly, the

view that the one who would confirm the covenant with many in verse 27 is the Antichrist does not have a textual basis.

Generally, the book of Daniel is treated in two different ways. The one view is that Daniel is taken as a second century BCE Pseudo-epigraphic history that relates the events of the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes during the period of 167-164 BCE. The other more conservative view finds a distinct Christian element in the book. They treat Daniel as a sixth century BCE prophecy which focuses on the postponement of the restoration because of the poor condition of the remnant by the end of the exile (Pierce 1989:211).

Jewish interpretation was eventually altered after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Tanner (2009:184), in the first part of his work, tries to determine whether Daniel's seventy weeks refers to prophecy or to messianism. He uses Josephus' work to clarify how the fulfilment of the prophecy was altered to focus on events leading to the destruction of the Temple rather than during the Maccabean Empire. Josephus seems to connect the period with the "cutting off" of Ananus the High Priest who was murdered by the Idumeans in the Temple about CE 66-68. This also ended in the destruction of the Temple and the sanctuary. Since the Messiah had not come in 70 CE, the Jews adopted a non-messianic interpretation of the prophecy.

In his second work on the same period, Tanner (2009:319) claims that many scholars unanimously agree that Daniel's prophecy is fulfilled in the person of Christ. However, such interpretation does not go unchallenged by some scholars who maintain that it is not predictive prophecy but an allusion to the Maccabean Empire at a time Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian ruler sought to Hellenize Judea. He aimed at suppressing the Mosaic Law. However, the sceptics associate the Messiah with Cyrus, Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest.

Conservative scholars also suggest that the seventy weeks of Daniel began with the first decree of Artaxerxes in 458 BCE. As a result, the four hundred and eighty-three years of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks were completed during the early days of

Jesus' public ministry marked by his baptism. The climax of Jesus' ministry was marked by his crucifixion which occurred in the first three and half years of the seventieth week. At that period, for Israel, time was dormant up till the end of the church age which included the transitional period beginning at Pentecost and culminating in the rapture of the church. The next three and half years is identified as the time of Jacob's distress or the great tribulation which will end at Jesus' second coming (Matheny & Matheny 1990:491).

Daniel's seventy weeks of years have been used to interpret various events relating to Israel's religion and to Christianity. The Messiah has been depicted as various characters within various interpretive frameworks. Originally, it was believed that Daniel's seventy weeks provided historical evidence of what came to pass at various periods of Israel's history which culminated in its prophetic fulfilment of the ministry of Jesus and which would be finalized by his second coming. Such understanding would potentially leave loopholes in any further use of the text to accommodate any figure who came to deliver the people from their predicaments.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

After a close reading of the three biblical texts, with special attention to the literal, historical and theological elements, one would realize that messianism underwent a developmental process. The most basic messianic trait which incited the prophetic voice was the failure of the monarchy to rule with righteousness and grant justice to the marginalized groups. The prophetic message offered hope for the birth of a new king who would come and correct all the injustice. Failure to identify that candidate in the Old Testament may mean that the prophetic expectations were rhetorical in nature with the purpose of inciting hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty.

During the exilic period, messianic expectations shifted to a gentile king, Cyrus who made a decree for the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple and of the city of Jerusalem. Although Cyrus decreed the return of the exiles, and his predecessors supported the building project, the kingdom of Judah was not completely restored. The kingdom was under the jurisdiction of a foreign nation. However, the

ability of Cyrus to maintain peace with the governors was a drastic measure compared to the Babylonian rule.

The continuous exchange of power among gentile leaders led to new expectations. Such expectations are sounded by Daniel who referred to previous prophecies which gave hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. Divine response through the angel made the matter more complex. The “*seventy years*” in exile became “*seventy weeks of years*”. As a result, the timeframe became quite uncertain. This scenario requires further theological evaluation which goes beyond the scope of the Old Testament. The New Testament identifies the messianic figure with Christ. However, those in social, economic and religious crises would ask like John the Baptist, “Are you the one who is to come or shall we wait for another?”

Exegetical analyses of the above biblical texts reflect that, despite their use as prophecies for the future, they were rooted in the historical situation of ancient Israel as discussed in chapter two. These texts represent interpretations of later predicaments which may be likened to Zimbabwe’s situation today.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary

Messianic expectations slowly emerged in ancient Israel and they appeared to be triggered by social, economic, political and religious crises. Israel lost her kingdom to other nations. Messianic types of prophecies were rare during the early days of the Davidic dynasty. The centralization of the kingdom had drifted from the family centred administration to the monarchy. The centralized administration brought with it principles which ignored Yahweh's purpose for Israel. Territorial expansion led the kings of Israel to make coalitions with foreign nations. Elitism grew as those closer to the king in rank became rich by monopolizing resources. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor grew to such an extent that the poor were deprived of their property and were taken as slaves.

The situation was probably the basis of hope for the future which was bound to the restoration of the glory of the earlier Davidic dynasty. In Isaiah 9, hope for a better future marked by righteousness, justice and peace was focused on the birth of a child divinely appointed to inherit the Davidic throne and rule with Yahweh's guidance. Nevertheless, such expectations were not fulfilled in Israel's history. No clear historical figure in Israel had ever assumed the position of a messiah. Even if they did, they were only messianic in the sense of being set apart for a limited responsibility.

The subsequent disaster of the destruction of the temple and the exile was one of the worst events in Israel's history. While hope of a Davidic king would have been embraced, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus would be the messiah who would deliver Israel from exile. Isaiah's prophecy also guaranteed restoration. Cyrus allowed the exiles to return but it was not enough. He was not from the Davidic dynasty;

therefore, his deliverance was inadequate. Israel remained a province of the Persian Empire paying tribute through the local governors.

The exilic community suffered mostly for the loss of their land, temple and king. The people were also being threatened by the loss of their true identity through intermarriage. However, they desired to return to their homeland. The return from exile led to the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls, but the kingdom was not restored to its fullness. Zerubbabel, whom they could have invested their hope for a king disappeared from the scene when he was just a governor. Thus, hope for restoration was thrown to a distant future.

Daniel challenged the fulfilment of Jeremiah's promises of Israel's restoration after seventy years in exile. The return from exile, the rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the temple, and the re-establishment of the worship of Yahweh were not enough as long as Israel remained under foreign powers. The declaration by the angel of God even complicated the matter the more. One may also argue that the author of Daniel complicated issues by pushing the time of restoration further. The period became "*seventy weeks of years*". Attempts to interpret the promised messiah as a particular figure in Israel's history cannot be proved. Messianic expectations remain regardless of whether the messiah has come or not. The hope of a better future is built in human consciousness especially when the people are in a crisis.

The present reader of the Old Testament would also be able to perceive the trend in messianic type of prophecies. As discussed in chapter 3 above, a close look at the causes of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe shows that the crisis resulted from the marginalisation of the indigenous black communities by their colonial masters.

Messianic expectations in Zimbabwe have been influenced by the people's need for liberation and by their understanding of the Old Testament. Spiritual oppression and the consequent liberation found in the Scriptures are being mirrored by the political oppression and freedom in Zimbabwe. Opposition to the *status quo* and the call for liberation began with ministers of religion. These began in the church when the

independent and prophetic type churches began to demand independence from the mission churches whose gospel did not address the concrete problems which were engraved in the social, economic, political and religious situations of the people.

Furthermore, the growing gap between the colonial masters and natives on the right of land ownership, the right to education, the right to vote and the right to political leadership resulted in the rise of various political movements. Thus, a liberation struggle began which led to the change of government in 1980.

The early days of independence marked the beginning of a new challenge since there was no equal representation in parliament between the Shona and the Ndebele. Eventually, peace was restored in the first ten years. When a new elite community emerged, another resistance gained ground in the name of opposition parties. The current designation of those in power as messianic figures is an attempt to legitimize the sole leadership of the country to those who brought about political independence.

The historical background of Zimbabwe assimilates that of ancient Israel in the sense that it triggered prophetic messianism. The Zimbabwean experience calls for a close reading of Scriptures in order to come up with a literal, historical and theological understanding; otherwise, one can be lured to believe the false prophets who are trying to gain political mileage. The close reading also shows that prophetic messianism in ancient Israel was embedded in the nation's history which was characterized by various crises.

In addition, a close reading of selected biblical texts in Chapter 4 of this study, with special attention to their literal, historical and theological elements, shows that messianism underwent a developmental process from pre-exilic and the exilic to the post-exilic period, respectively. The most basic messianic trait which incited the prophetic voice was the failure of the monarchy to rule with righteousness and grant justice to the marginalized groups. The prophetic message gave hope for the birth of a new king who would come and correct all the injustice. The failure to identify that

candidate in the Old Testament may mean that prophetic messianism was a rhetorical means of inciting hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty.

## 5.2 Evaluation

What stimulated the emergence of messianism (messianic expectations and messianic figures in prophecy) in a society as ancient Israel? The development of this research leads to some possible hypothetical conclusions.

This research has revealed that the world behind messianic texts was faced by social, economic and religious crises. The study of the history of ancient Israel has proved the applicability of the messianic oracles to such historical moments.

The present context in Zimbabwe has incited the messianic characterization of the President and it has been observed that such characterization is a rhetorical strategy to legitimize his authority. It has been made clear that the characterization is based on the present crisis in the country, and on the understanding of the Bible.

Finally, one could agree that messianism emerged as a prophetic response to social, economic, political and religious crises. Messianic expectations gradually developed as Israel drifted from a family centred society to a state society. The emergence of the state resulted in elitism which gradually marginalized the majority. The expectation of a messiah was therefore rooted in the political, socio-economic and religious crises which were encountered during this process. Behind the context of high expectations, could be a crisis situation which actually incites a prophetic voice. The biblical text has helped us to evaluate the true and false prophetic voices. The true prophetic message would not legitimize a government which neglects the rights of the poor, widows and orphans, women and children.

After studying the context of the prophets and their messages, it is perceived that prophecies addressed kings when they failed to uphold justice. They equally legitimized those whom God had anointed and raised expectations for a future messiah. In the case of Zimbabwe therefore, emphasizing the legitimacy of the current president without

addressing the issues of poor economic policies cannot go unchallenged. The legitimization of the president results in maintaining his dignity by manipulating the people. By contrast, the human dignity of the masses who are suffering from the socio-economic challenges is severely compromised.

While so many scholars have dealt with the theme of messianism, this research has developed a new dimension of approaching messianism, that is, as being rooted in social economic, political and religious crises.

### **5.3 Related Topics**

This thesis did not address the link between the messianic expectations in the Old Testament and Messianic Christology. However, the following questions may need to be addressed in future research: The first question is what elements of Messianic expectations can be interpreted as being Christological? It seems that not all elements portrayed in the Old Testament are Christological. The second question is, can there be Trinitarian messianism in the Old Testament studies considering the diversity of messianic characters?

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