

References to the Messiah in the Pentateuch, Isaiah and Daniel: A Zimbabwean Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Are there messianic expectations or messianic characters in the Pentateuch, Isaiah and Daniel? This research will examine if there can be messianic expectations in the Pentateuch linked to the priest in circumstances that do not presuppose an obvious crisis. The role played by an “anointed” priest in the Pentateuch seems to come about as the perpetrators of sin sought atonement (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22 6:15). Are the priests intervening as “anointed” one due to indirect crisis by sin? This research will examine as to whether reference to “messiah” in Isaiah 9: 44:28-45:1-8 and Daniel 9:25-27 come about as a response to social, economic, political and religious crises that emanated from the failure of Israel to uphold Yahweh’s instruction. If that be so these findings may help to examine why Mugabe had gained messianic characterization during the past decade. The researcher as a citizen of Zimbabwe queries if such characterization emanate from his involvement in the liberation struggle or dependence on scriptures as trusted source for rhetorical propaganda to legitimize his role in a bid to legitimize his authority while the country was experiencing socio-economic crises.

INTRODUCTION

Messianic expectations in the Pentateuch, Isaiah and Daniel can be investigated by exegesis of selected texts. This research can assist or facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of messianism in the Old Testament and in its theological implications. Investigation on the development of the messianism in ancient Israel may help to reflect on how it is applied to a postcolonial context like the present-day Zimbabwe. The researcher examines if the term Messiah developed from its embryonic stage in the Pentateuch and how such expectations can be manipulated in a Christian society like that of Zimbabwe.

The major question is what actually stimulates the emergence of messianism (messianic expectations and messianic figures) in a community like ancient Israel? It seems messianism emerged as a prophetic response to social, economic, political and religious crises (Musendekwa 2011). The message of prophets could have been to create hope for Israel during crisis circumstances. However some scholars consider it to be a result of resistance to oppression (Portier-Young 2011). While various views can be found, the examination of how Mugabe was messianized could have been

emanating from dependency on biblical principles of hope to restore the lost support.

A literature study of existing scholarly research on messianism as well as exegesis of relevant biblical texts can be of significant importance to confirm the significance of messianism in biblical times and their circular use of including related biblical messianic titles which are being rendered to the political figure in question are also considered.

REFERENCES TO THE MESSIAH IN THE PENTATEUCH

The featuring of the phrase *הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשֻׁחַ* “anointed priest” in the Leviticus (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22 6:15) needs a closer look. While Leviticus reflects on what can be referred to as pre-messianic, the term ‘messiah’ was derived from its verbal meaning “he anointed” or its use in its adjectival form to complement the noun priest (Rose 2001:565). This presupposes the early stages in the development of Messianic expectations which I may call embryonic stage. While some biblical texts were not intended to be messianic in their initial purpose, they contribute to the later development of the idea under the influence of subsequent historical circumstances (Klausner 1955:27).

It is significant at this point to make it clear that the term is used to describe 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 priest was apart from seen as having a special obligation, also 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 the divine by providing in all his needs and worshipping in the house where the gods dwelt. Israel's priests held a similar task. The greatest duty among all was to offer sacrifices. He was the only one allowed to approach the altar carrying out rituals while putting on special religious 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 a purification offering 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 and also some situations which do not involve sin. These can be for example the purification of a mother after birth, purification of a person who recovers from an unclean flow and several other community rituals involving purification offering and consecration of the Tabernacle. The sacrifices rectified various situations that defiled the sacred space and disrupted an 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 forgiving was to come from Yahweh. However, forgiveness did not mean exemption from being punished but reconciliation with God. All in all, atonement was made by God while the priest acts on behalf of the offender (Houston 2003:106). Were the priests acting as messianic figures? From above discussion priests could be indirectly messianic for the perpetrators of sin or those ritually unclean are the ones who sought the services of the priests. They were also divinely appointed ones to offer sacrifices to ensure the purity of the entire community.

REFERENCE OF THE MESSIAH IN ISAIAH 44:28-45:8

Besides the use of the term "messiah" in the Pentateuch concerning the anointing of the

priests, it is also associated with the anointing of kings and prophets. Although mostly used in connection with the Davidic dynasty, it was also used for non-Jewish kings. One of the kings was Cyrus the king of Persia. The prophetic allusions to Cyrus could refer to the period between 549 BCE and 538 BCE. It was also a time when the nation of Israel was in exile. Cyrus had become king of Persia in 559 BCE. He eventually conquered Babylon in 539/538 BCE. Later on he permitted the Israelite exiles to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple through his decree of 538 BCE (Groningen 1990:393). In Isaiah 44:28 Yahweh points to Cyrus as רֹעִי "My Shepherd". Yahweh's representatives are described as shepherds elsewhere in the scriptures e.g. Moses, Joshua, David and later prophets. Cyrus' task here alludes to Isaiah 7-11 where a shepherd was to restore the people of God to their own land. (Goldingay 2001:261).

"My shepherd" רֹעִי was a traditional metaphor for king. Therefore Cyrus was actually portrayed in terms of the royal ideology of Israel. He played a restorative role in Israel's history. Cyrus made a decree for all exiles to return to their homeland after conquering Babylon (Collins 2010:33). Apart from being a shepherd, Cyrus is Yahweh's "messiah". The clause כֹּה יֹאמֵר יְהוָה לְמָשִׁיחוֹ לְכוֹרֵשׁ "Thus said the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus" depicts Cyrus to be the messiah of God who offered a temporal solution to the problem of Israel (Isaiah 45:1). Cyrus delivered Israel from bondage to their land and gave them permission to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. What Yahweh previously intended to accomplish through the Davidic monarchy, he could do through the gentile king (Goldingay 2001:262). "Taking hold of right hand" in 45:3 gives an impression of choosing and having intimate relationship. Cyrus' conquest was going to be in accordance with Yahweh's providence (Watts 1987:157). Yahweh was going to support Cyrus.

This calls for an understanding that the revolution in the Middle East affairs were rooted in Yahweh's involvement with Cyrus "for the sake of Jacob" (Goldingay 2001:262). The exegetical analysis of this prophetic oracle about Cyrus can be considered as prophetic rhetoric to convince the Diaspora Jews that Yahweh had a plan with them even within their present predicament. By being in dispersion God was intending to extend his kingdom even to the gentiles. The prophet could have been aimed at ensuring that the Diaspora Jews do not have to

resist the plea by Cyrus to return to their homeland to rebuild Jerusalem. Cyrus was unknowingly pursuing the mission of Yahweh. Cyrus was therefore the Shepherd of Israel and an anointed one of Yahweh.

REFERENCE TO THE MESSIAH IN DANIEL 9:25-27

The return from exile and rebuilding of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem did not culminate in the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. This is evident in Daniel's prayer for the fulfilment of the promises made in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10. Jeremiah promised that the desolation was going to end after seventy years. Thereafter the kingdom was going to be restored to Israel. The response of Yahweh did not have any clear historic fulfilment. Prophetic message continued to be thrown into a distant future.

Hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty was still alive after exile. Initially their hope was on the figure of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. This idea was supported by Haggai and Zechariah. There was also increased influence from the priestly class. It is convincingly evident that the priests were only anointed in the post exilic period. The high priest took over the function of the king at the Temple (Jagersma 1982:198-199). There was a rise of messianic movements during the Persian Empire. They can be categorized as those who wanted to regain independence through armed rebellion under a Davidic ruler and those who sought divine intervention through their fidelity to the laws (Blenkinsopp 1984:245).

Collins (2010:42) notes that the term "messiah" is used twice in Daniel 9:25, 26. Both references follow after Daniel's prayer requesting when Jeremiah's prophecy about the end of the seventy years of desolation was going to be accomplished. The prediction is reinterpreted as a period of seventy weeks of years. The first seven weeks end with advent of an anointed ruler (9:25). Most probably refers to Joshua the high priest referred to in Zechariah as one of the two "sons of oil". Then after sixty-two weeks "the anointed one will be cut off" which is mostly regarded as the murder of Onias the High Priest around 171 BCE. Daniel 9:25 and 9:26 are widely interpreted as presenting an eschatological messiah. Daniel 9:25 is the first incident in the Old Testament to designate the Messiah as having a future connotation. מָשִׁיחַ "Prince" could mean either a king or priest. The occurrence of מָשִׁיחַ נָגִיד may presuppose a kingly Messiah; probably Zerubbabel especially

considering the second century context. This could also be a priest since they were also anointed. The clause יִקְרַת מָשִׁיחַ וְאֵין לוֹ עֹזֵר "an anointed one shall be cut down without anyone to help" in 9:26a does not refer to the anointed Prince of verse 25 since the Anointed One in verse 26 appears after sixty-two weeks. Most scholars presuppose this to be Onias III who was removed from the office of High Priest and assassinated in 171BCE (Fitzmyer 2007:61, 63).

According to Pierce (1989:211) Daniel is used to be 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 concerning the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes during the period 167 to 164 BCE. The other view is that of the conservatives who find a distinct Christian element. They treat Daniel as a sixth century BCE prophecy which focuses on the postponement of the restoration which resulted from the poor condition of the remnant by the end of exile. Daniel's seventy weeks of years have ended up being used to interpret various predicaments and expectations in Israel's religion and in Christianity. We come to recognize that the Messiah was depicted by various characters within various interpretive frameworks. The vision of Daniel concerning the coming of the messiah prince after Seventy times seven years have been interpreted in various periods to instil hope in dealing with social, economic, political and religious crises.

REFERENCE TO THE MESSIAH IN ZIMBABWE

The Zimbabwean interpretation gives the term "messiah" a new meaning. The title becomes a rhetorical term to designate President Robert Mugabe as a means to legitimize his leadership amidst mounting opposition.

Zimbabweans have been living in a fragile socio-economic situation for the last decade and messianic expectations related to a political figure are very high. This resuscitates memories of the pre-liberation struggle when the nation was expecting the coming of a political liberator to set the nation free from political oppression. The independence attained in 1980 was the climax when President Robert Mugabe was elected as leader of the new government. However, the country has been once again immersed into a political crisis. This is when the loyalists of President Mugabe declare him the Messiah so as to gain political mileage. President Robert Mugabe has been characterised as a "messiah" in both religious and political

circles. Rev Obadiah Musindo, president of Destiny for Africa Network claimed that the president is a “black political Moses”, a “God given leader Godfery Nzira, a self-proclaimed prophet claimed that President Robert Mugabe is “appointed king” of Zimbabwe and none should dare to challenge him. Paul Mwazha leader of the African Apostolic Church claimed that he preaches President Mugabe in all his sermons.¹ The president at some time in 2010 attended the Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church Passover feast putting on church vestments which are strictly meant for members. In this instance the president stood to be above the rules and regulations of the Church.² Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi of the Zion Christian Church, who earlier on praised the president and assured support from him, called President Mugabe a “God given leader.”³ Politicians also referred the president as a messianic liberator. Zanu PF secretary for administration, Didymus Mutasa was quoted as saying Mugabe was “Zimbabwe’s Messiah” who was sent by the Almighty to lead Zimbabwe.⁴ Defence minister, Emerson Mnangagwa could not be out done. He likened the President to the biblical King Solomon. He claimed President Mugabe to be “King of Kings” likening him to the biblical king Solomon.⁵ A view of Solomon as a messianic figure is rooted in the understanding that Solomon was a successor to the Davidic throne.

The minister of housing and local government, Tony Gara called the President “God’s Other Son”.⁶ He regarded him as a son of God in the close lineage with Christ as if Christ left any successor. Edward Raradza, Muzarabani Member of Parliament claimed that the first name Gabriel was given in the order of Angel Gabriel, therefore President Mugabe to be the

real Angel Gabriel.⁷ The words of Christian songs have been changed for political ends by replacing the name of Jesus with that of the President.⁸ In an era of crisis such typologies have been common even during the new dispensation in Zimbabwe which cannot be discussed in this paper.

Though most of the characterisations are not strictly messianic, they have an impression of someone set apart by God for a special purpose. Such references call for a reflection on the previous discussion on the biblical development of the term “Messiah.” That is adapted to interpret the need for messiah amidst social, economic, political and religious crises.

CONCLUSION

References to the Messiah in the Pentateuch have revealed that this term was used for priests as representatives of those who had shortcomings before the Lord. In this instance it seems the priestly office indirectly responds to crises as the offender or the ritually unclean sought priestly sacrifices to atone for their shortcomings. The prophets like Isaiah had direct confrontations with the kings who were the anointed ones especially when there was a crisis. Yahweh appointed a new king to deal with the crises after having subjected Israel to retributive justice.

He created hope by promising the coming of a new king through his mouthpiece- the prophets. Cyrus for instance was anointed by God to deliver Israel from the Babylonian exile. Because Cyrus redemption was incomplete Daniel wished to know when the prophecy of Jeremiah could be fulfilled. Yahweh’s response cast the messianic expectations to a distant future.

The need for a messiah had been triggered by the underlying crises. The characterisation of President Robert Mugabe as a messianic figure depicts him as the bringer of political independence. However, in this instance messianism is used for rhetorical political propaganda amidst current opposition in order to legitimize his authority as the leader. Such rhetorical strategies are only applicable to a country facing social economic, political and religious crises. It seems many have shifted their

¹<http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/news/37835/mugabe-god-given-church-leaders.html> Retrieved May 16, 2011.

²<http://geoconger.wordpress.com/2008/03/14/bishop-says-mugabe-is-moses-cen-31408-p-8/> Retrieved May 17, 2010.

³<http://www.zimeye.org/?p=29244> Retrieved August 22, 2011.

⁴<http://www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=11687> Retrieved January 07, 2011.

⁵<http://allafrica.com/stories/201103211453.html> Retrieved August 25, 2011.

⁶<http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/zvobgo21.14983.html> Retrieved May 16, 2011.

⁷<http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/angelgabriel120511.htm> Retrieved May 15, 2011.

⁸http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2007/07/letting_barabas.html Retrieved October 27, 2009

attention like in Daniel from the present leadership to a hopeful future. The role of the anointed priest in the Pentateuch, The Anointed king in Isaiah and the Prince Messiah in Daniel developed as a result of some kind of crises.

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