

The OT Messianic Expectations as fulfilled in the Incarnation of Jesus – Points for Reflection for Christians

Rev. Fr. Dr. Emmanuel U. Dim

Dept. of Religion & Human Relations, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University
Igbariam Campus – Nigeria

Citation: Dim E. U. (2022) The OT Messianic Expectations as fulfilled in the Incarnation of Jesus – Points for Reflection for Christians, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.10, No.7, pp.15-30

ABSTRACT: *That Jesus is the Messiah is acclaimed and professed by Christians right from the early times. That he is the Messiah who has been expected right from the OT times could also be said to be common knowledge for many Christians. But what this statement actually means as well as its full implications are not clear to many people, Christians and non-Christians alike. This paper, therefore, sets out to explain how the OT messianic expectations are fulfilled in the Incarnation of Jesus, a term that encompasses Jesus' earthly life, ministry, death and resurrection, i.e. the entire mystery of Christ's redemptive work. The method employed in this work is historical-theological, augmented with the Historical Critical method, when necessary, in the analysis of pertinent biblical passages. The information is that the people of Israel in the OT were, in different epochs, always expecting a Messiah, a liberator to be sent by God. They associated this Messiah with the successive kings of the Davidic dynasty through the Oracle of Nathan in 2 Sam 7:12, on the one hand, and with other historical and messianic figures, on the other. But after the exile, during the last pre-Christian centuries of Palestinian Judaism, these expectations narrowed down to an individual liberator and ultimately to Jesus, in the NT, as is amply explained in many NT passages. The recommendation is for all Christians to recognize and cherish the depth of our Christian heritage in the OT and in the lives of the people of Israel, a depth which gloriously highlights God's universal plan of salvation as one. All this would invariably lead Christians to the greater appreciation of their faith and its praxis as well as further enhance Jewish Christian relationship as one commonly founded on a single divinely instituted history of salvation. This work is also a very useful tool for all teachers and students of religion, as well as biblical scholars and researchers, in the pursuit of their various endeavours.*

KEY WORDS: Messiah, Davidic dynasty, Incarnation, Christians

INTRODUCTION

The discussion as to what the relationship between the OT and NT is or should be, has occupied many Christians right from the early decades of Christianity. In these modern times, that hermeneutical concern has seen many scholars favouring, in that regard, the relationship of promise and fulfillment concerning YHWH's unified plan of salvation for humankind as expressed

in the two parts of the Christian Bible. It is in that understanding that this paper has investigated how the OT messianic expectations are fulfilled in the Incarnation of Jesus in the NT.

All through their history, the Israelites had lived with the hope of having a Messiah who would be sent by YHWH to liberate them, stemming from the oracle of Nathan to David in 2 Sam 7:12, that his dynasty would last forever. Hence, they associated this hope with the successive kings of the Davidic dynasty as well as with other historical and messianic figures at different stages of their history. This paper goes to a considerable length to study these developments.

After the exile, when the Davidic dynasty had ceased to exist, that hope of a Messiah narrowed down to an individual. John strongly emphasizes the incarnation of Jesus while Matthew and Luke, interpret Jesus' birth, through their infancy narratives, as fulfilling that messianic oracle of the OT. These have also been closely looked at in this paper.

As the Incarnation also encompasses Jesus life, death and resurrection, the end result is that Jesus' Messiahship clearly goes beyond any singular expectation of the Messiah in the OT. Jesus is the Messiah because he uniquely unifies in his person all the ideas that are called messianic right from the OT, a unification that has transformed some of those ideas. This is the emphasis of this paper. To understand this, Christians have to try to understand the OT and appreciate its proper relationship with the NT.

The Word Messiah

The word "Messiah" is the translation of the Hebrew word *māšîaḥ*, which, in the OT, means an anointed person. Hence, "the Messiah" in Hebrew is *hammāšîaḥ*, meaning "the anointed one." This is translated with the Greek words *ho Christos*, "the Christ."¹ In other words, "Messiah" is the Hebrew word and "Christ" is its equivalent in Greek.

The title "Messiah", in the OT, describes the person, the "anointed one", whom the Jews expected God to send as their liberator. This is mainly the product of the post exilic period.² Throughout the troublesome history of the people of Israel, the hope gradually grew that God would, one day, send a great Messiah-king who would establish his universal and everlasting kingdom. By the time of Jesus, many Jews were longing for that day to come. So when they heard of his teaching and miracles they were asking whether he was the Messiah³ (John 4:29; 7:26-27).

The Messiah in the OT

Even though there was the expectation of the Messiah among the Jews in the OT, as already said, two distinctions have to be made in that regard: a) The specific notion of the Messiah in the OT and b) Other messianic figures in the OT.

¹ M. DE JONGE, "Messiah", in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 777.

² D. WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989) 348.

³ P. ALEXANDER – *al.*, ed. *The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Tring: Lion Publishing, 1986) 152.

The Specific Notion of the Messiah in the OT:

In the OT, the Hebrew noun, *māšīah*, “anointed,” is used only of persons, particularly of kings and priests, high priests. For example, in Ps 105:15, the term “my anointed one” is used in parallelism with “my prophets” in a context speaking of the patriarchs. In a particular way, however, “YHWH’s anointing of the king denotes the exclusive, intimate relationship between the God of Israel and the king whom he has appointed and given the power to reign in his name. The king is God’s representative on earth and is thought to participate in God’s sovereign rule.”⁴

From the explanation above, two further specifications also emerge: the case of Cyrus, on the one hand, and royal messianism, on the other.

Cyrus

The best example of this anointed person in the OT happens also to be a non-Jew: the Persian king Cyrus who is called “God’s anointed” in Isa 45:1. Cyrus is chosen by God (Isa 41:25), appointed to redeem God’s people (45:1-19) and to judge them. He is given authority over the nations, and is God’s agent in all his actions (45:1-19).⁵

Given what has been said of the anointing of kings in Israel, the application of the term “messiah” to the Persian king Cyrus in Deutero-Isaiah becomes quite exceptional: “Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus” (Isa 45:1). But this development is explained from a specific background – that it is for the sake of Israel: “For Israel’s sake, YHWH calls this mighty king who does not even know YHWH by name. Cyrus gets the commission and the power to secure peace and freedom for God’s chosen people (Isa 45:1-7); he is God’s shepherd (44:28) where Davidic kings have failed.”⁶

These factors, which were attributed to Cyrus, would also be true of Jesus Christ in the NT, who saw himself as the fulfilment of OT Messianic hopes⁷ – signaling an important connection to Jesus, early in the history of Israel, with regard to Israel’s messianic expectation. But this thought would still be explored in detail later in this work.

The Royal Messianism

The Jews expected a Messiah from the royal dynasty of David – the anointed king of the Davidic dynasty who would establish in the world the definitive reign of YHWH, an expectation that is also the product of a long-time development, as already said. McKenzie outlines three developmental stages of this expectation which actually involves the salvific role of men in the framework of the monarchical institution of Israel⁸ as follows:

⁴ DE JONGE, “Messiah”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4, 779.

⁵ Cf. WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 348.

⁶ DE JONGE, “Messiah”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 4, 779.

⁷ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 348.

⁸ J. L. MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1994) 1310-1312.

The First stage

The first stage concerned the early days of the Davidic monarchy. The tribe of Judah was expected to provide a great ruler (Gen 49:9-12) and this was fulfilled, in some sense, by David with whom all succeeding kings were compared (cf. 1 Kg 11:4-6;⁹ 15:3-5). As time went on, David's days glowed brighter in Israel's memory and Nathan's general prophecy (2 Sam 7:12-17) became crystallized into a hope for a single 'Davidic' king (e.g. Ezek 34:23).¹⁰ It is most probable, therefore, that the first literary record of the messianic character of the dynasty of David is found in that oracle of Nathan which is preserved in the OT in three forms: 2 Sam 7; Ps 89 and 1 Chr 17.¹¹

Despite the on-going scholarly debate as to which of the three texts mentioned above is the most original one, this writer would, for the purposes of this article, consider 2 Sam 7:12-17 as the basic text. This is in agreement with Anderson who also thinks that Ps 89 and this present text may both, possibly, "go back to a common original."¹² Above all, this text is a part of 2 Sam 7:1-29 which, as a unit, is itself divided into two parts: vv. 1-17, dwelling on the oracle concerning the Davidic dynasty and vv. 18-29, made up of David's prayer regarding that oracle. The importance of that whole chapter on messianism is very evident to scholars: "The unit is fundamental in Israelite, Jewish, and Christian royal messianism."¹³

In that oracle, therefore, YHWH had assured David, through the prophet Nathan, as follows:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

The most important aspects of this oracle, with regard to our topic of consideration, are expressed in vv. 12b and 13b (establishing David's son's throne "forever") and 16 (David's house and

⁹ Here, for instance, Solomon was compared to David: "For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father."

¹⁰ Cf. WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 349.

¹¹ MCKENZIE, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1310.

¹² A. A. ANDERSON, *2 Samuel* (Word Biblical Commentary 11; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989) 113.

¹³ A. F. CAMPBELL – J. W. FLANAGAN, "1-2 Samuel", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1994) 156.

kingdom being made sure forever before YHWH, as well as his throne being established forever). The word “forever” (*‘ad ‘ôlām*) is used three times in those two verses. Therefore, “the main feature of this kingship will be its permanent stability: it will last forever (vv 13b, 16). The same theme is also echoed in the Prayer of David (vv 24, 25, 26, and 29).”¹⁴ The conclusion of v. 16 is also important on another note: “it is through his son (and the latter’s descendants, by implication) that David’s royal house will be established.”¹⁵

It needs to be emphasized, however, that even though there was the expectation of the royal messiah from this oracle, the expected salvation to be accomplished by David and his house does not “here go beyond the political salvation to be achieved by the king.”¹⁶ The same applies to the psalms that focus on this royal messiah. Hence, he (the Messiah) meets world opposition victoriously (Pss 89: 22-29; 110:1); by God’s activity he establishes world rule (18:43-50; 110:1-7) based on Zion (2:6) and marked by a concern for morality (72:2-14); his rule is everlasting, peaceful and prosperous (72:5,7,16); he is called by an everlasting name and is the object of unending thanks (72:15,17); he is the heir of David’s covenant (89:28-37); he belongs to God (89:18), is his son (2:7) seated at his right hand (110:1) and is himself divine (45:6).¹⁷

The Second Stage

The writings of the 8th century B.C. show further development in royal messianism. Wicked and inept kings, like Ahaz, who had brought the Davidic dynasty into disrepute dimmed the optimistic expectation that each king would be a savior of his people. But the prophets Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah endeavoured to rejuvenate the hope that YHWH would restore an enduring Davidic dynasty in Israel. Isaiah, particularly, emphasized that YHWH would revive that dynasty and ensure its permanence. He would raise up a worthy successor to David who would restore the name of the Davidic dynasty – he, being an example of charismatic power as David had been when the royal line was instituted.¹⁸

From that standpoint, Isaiah saw the approaching threat of Assyria as transitory (7:7) yet also decisive for God’s people. He called for reliance on God (7:4), offered a sign that would virtually compel faith (7:10-13), and when this was rejected by Ahaz, he offered still the greater sign of Immanuel (7:14-16). This figure would be born of a virgin/young woman (*‘almâ* [hm'l.[]; in Hebrew). The discussion on the proper identity of this woman would be continued with, in the later part of this work. But in the present context, that of First Isaiah, she is “a young woman who

¹⁴ ANDERSON, *2 Samuel*, 122.

¹⁵ ANDERSON, *2 Samuel*, 123.

¹⁶ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1310.

¹⁷ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 349-350.

¹⁸ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1311.

is apparently present or contemporary, but not yet married (i.e., a virgin).”¹⁹ This explanation helps to engender greater understanding regarding the strong inference of virginity in the other biblical uses of this passage.²⁰

This child, to be born, would be a sign that God was still with his people (Immanuel) in the person of the Davidic king. He will be wonderful in all its significance and be a prince of peace. His government will increase in abounding peace and in the establishment of the kingdom of David “from this time forth and for evermore” (Isa 9:6-7). Even though Hezekiah, the successor of Ahaz, may be seen to have largely fulfilled these expectations from Isaiah, these “Isaian passages are describing an ideal for restoration rather than a reality; and this permitted them to be used by later generations who also looked forward to divine renewal of the monarchy.”²¹

In Isa 11:1-16, the prophet even goes further to project this expected restoration of the Davidic dynasty into the remote future. This king will bring about the return of the conditions of paradise (11:6-9) – an enduring attraction to all peoples: “In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious” (Isa 11:10). The conclusion is clear: “These two ideas, the restoration of the dynasty of David and the universal and religious scope of the salvation of which the dynasty of David is medium, probably appear here for the first time in the OT.”²²

The hope for the resurgence of the dynasty of David under a new and ideal ruler, as already hinted above, was also expressed by Micah (cf. Mic 5:1-6) as well as Jeremiah (cf. Jer 23:5; 30:9,21).

The Third Stage of Development

This third stage is mainly in the postexilic period and, on account of the paucity of written evidence, the development of messianism in this period is rather difficult to trace. The Babylonian exile dealt a heavy blow to Israel as a nation and to its institutions. The Davidic dynasty ceased to be in existence. Hence, before the exile, the ideal king who was expected to restore the vigour of the Davidic dynasty was normally thought of in consideration of the next generation of a reigning dynasty. But after the exile, that was no more possible because there was no more ideal king until, perhaps, the indefinite future when the Davidic throne would be restored.²³ The consequence was this definitive turn-around in messianic expectation:

¹⁹ J. D. W. WATTS, *Isaiah 1-33* (Word Biblical Commentary 24; Waco: Word Books, 1985) 97.

²⁰ Cf. WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 350.

²¹ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1311.

²² MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1311.

²³ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1311.

Thus the expectation began to move toward the indefinite future; and rather than centering on one monarch in a continuing line of rulers these expectations came to center on one supreme king who would represent Yahweh's definitive intervention to save his people. It is in this period that we may begin to speak of *the Messiah* in the strict sense. Earlier Scripture (Royal Pss; Isa) was now reread with this new messianic understanding in mind.²⁴

Messiah as symbolized by historical figures

To be treated under this topic, rather briefly, are some OT historical figures who are seen as "types" of the Messiah as well as other OT Messianic figures. Despite the late historical development of the hope for a specific Messiah in the OT, as already said, it is possible to still trace throughout OT history a hope or expectation of 'a figure of salvation' as part of the whole plan and purpose of God. Three of these historical figures are considered historical "types" of the way God acts through his Messiah. They are Adam, Moses and David²⁵ – but David has been treated at some length above.

Adam

The Messianic future is in some respects reminiscent of the Garden of Eden as a time of peace and prosperity (e.g. Isa 4:2; 11:6-9; 32:15-20; Am. 9:13). Isaiah, for example, describes this new creation thus: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isa 11:6).

In other words, this salvation figure reverses the curse on the world (cf. Gen 3:15)²⁶ as a logical outworking of the doctrine of creation by a holy God. The first Adam had dominion over the rest of creation but fell when he allowed his dominion to be usurped (Gen 1:28; 2:19-25; 3:13). The NT doctrine of Christ as the "second Adam" has its roots in these passages which all concern the Messianic King.²⁷

Moses

The first Exodus was not simply a historical event (Exod 3:15) but an eternal revelation of God. Therefore, there grew a belief that there would be a second Exodus (cf. Jer 31:31-32; Ho. 2:14-15; Ezek 20:33-38); also expressed in Isa 51:9-11;²⁸ 52:12. Furthermore, the prophecy of a Moses-like prophet is explicit in Deut 18:15-22. Although the passage is considered by some scholars as only a promise to a continued line of prophets, some see it also as promising the advent of a Messiah. This dual implication of the passage means that each of the ensuing prophets after Moses,

²⁴ MCKENZIE, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1311.

²⁵ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 350.

²⁶ Gen 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

²⁷ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 348-349.

²⁸ Isa 51:11: So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

who is really unique (Deut 34:10), must be as much like him as possible until the (unspecified) time in the future when the Messiah would come as prophet, lawgiver and mediator of a new covenant.²⁹

The Suffering Servant

The Suffering Servant in the book of Isaiah is the next Messianic figure in the OT. The texts of this servant are variously delineated as Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12.³⁰ The servant is YHWH's anointed judge (42:1), prophetic (49:1-26), the agent of world-wide revelation (42:1-9) and salvation (49:6), not as a priest but as a victim (53).³¹

Expressed in greater detail, the servant, in the first song, "will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching" (42:4). In the second, YHWH assures this servant: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the end of the earth" (49:6). In the third song, the servant is sure of YHWH's sustaining assistance in his sufferings: "For the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame" (50:7). In the fourth song, YHWH's "servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (52:13).

Even though the identity of this servant in the OT is highly debated, yet a good number of scholars favour "Israel" as a nation.³² Yet, in the light of the details provided above, most Christian scholars see the Suffering Servant as ultimately referring to Jesus, the Christ, in the NT.

Other messianic figures

Apart from these figures mentioned, other Messianic figures include the seed of the woman in Gen 3:15, reflected in Isa 7:14 and 49:1, where the Messiah's humanity is traced through his mother – the passage has messianic overtones because biblically the serpent of the story ultimately is Satan (Rev. 20:2) whom the woman's seed will destroy, being bruised in the process, in order to reverse the calamity of the fall. The Son of Man in Dan 7 disposes of his enemies and those of the saints. Hence, the one "like a son of man" receives a universal dominion and, even though he is a man, comes as God in the clouds of heaven (cf. Ps 104:3). Finally, the anointed Prince (Dan 9:24-27): the messianic age will be marked by the abolition and forgiveness of sin, and by perpetual righteousness. This would be most satisfactorily fulfilled by the Messianic figure of Jesus Christ.³³

In resumé, what has been said above on the third stage of royal messianism is here recapitulated, namely, that during the post-exilic period – and shortly before the coming of Christ – all these

²⁹ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 349.

³⁰ For further details on this, cf. E. U. DIM, *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66 as the Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah* (Bible in History; Bern: Peter Lang, 2005) 349.

³¹ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 350.

³² DIM, *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66 as the Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah*, 349-352.

³³ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 350-351.

divergent opinions and expectations on the messiah, which have arisen right from the early days of Israel as a nation, narrowed down to the expectation of the Messiah as an individual figure sent by YHWH to liberate his people. Precisely stated, it was “in the last pre-Christian centuries of Palestinian Judaism” when this expectation finally emerged, “a belief in a future David or in anointed figures to be sent by God”³⁴ – hence the prevalent mentality of the Israelites during the time of Jesus, leading many of them to ask whether Jesus was actually the expected Messiah – as already pointed out.

This Messiah would be a king-saviour, a political savior. But he would be a savior by virtue of “the charisma and power of Yahweh, and so his saving acts would never be merely political. In his reign, the Messiah would bring to Israel the ideal rule of Yahweh himself.”³⁵ The salvation mediated by this messiah and his power would have a scope outside Israel too. They would be universal, with the Gentiles coming to Israel to worship, and the Messiah bringing “victory, peace, and prosperity to Israel on earth.”³⁶

The Messiah in the NT

“Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Messiah’, as already said. In the Gospels, particularly in John, it denotes the expected deliverer in a general sense (cf. John 1:20, 41; 4:25, 29). This is because the dominant popular hope of the time, as has already been indicated, was for a king like David who would be a political conqueror and liberator, and a nationalistic element is also present in some passages (cf. Mat 2:2-12; Mark 15:32). Jesus was, however, reluctant to apply the term to himself, the only clearly explicit reference being in John 4:25-26, in Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman: “The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”³⁷

But Jesus did not deny the title either, and constantly stressed his fulfilment of OT hopes. In response to John the Baptist’s request whether he was the Messiah, he pointed to an unambiguously Messianic passage: “Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them’” (Matt 11:4-5; cf. Isa 61:1-4). Yet when Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ, he swore him to secrecy, teaching that, contrary to popular ideas, the Messiah must suffer and die (Mark 8:29-33). Here, and when challenged by the high priest (Mark 14:61),³⁸ he did not deny the title but went on to speak of his role as ‘Son of man’. He also played

³⁴ J. A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (The Anchor Bible 28; New York: Doubleday, 1970) 198.

³⁵ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1312.

³⁶ R. E. BROWN – *al*, “Aspects of New Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1994) 1357.

³⁷ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 351.

³⁸ Mark 14:61: Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One? Jesus answered, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

down the titles ‘son of David’ and king of Israel’ which others used on him (Mark 10:47; 15:2). In fact, he deliberately ran from the crowd which wanted to make him a nationalistic king (John 6:15).³⁹

Consequently, the NT acclaims Jesus as the Messiah who has been expected right from the OT times. But, quite contrary to popular Jewish and OT expectations, Jesus’ Messiahship comes through his incarnation, life, death and, especially, the resurrection from the dead. It is on account of this that he immediately emphasizes the fact of his suffering and death, even when Peter has correctly described him as the Messiah (Mark 8:29), as already highlighted above. “Jesus is Messiah, Lord, and Son of God in the Father’s presence in heaven, and he has achieved this status by being raised up.”⁴⁰

Thus, the declaration that Jesus was the Messiah lay at the heart of the earliest Christian preaching, using the resurrection to validate the claim. Some examples: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). “Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee’ (Acts 13:32-33). “The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 1:3-4). “And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name” (Phil 2:8-9).

The term “Christ” was then used openly because, since Jesus had died and resurrected, it was no longer likely to be interpreted politically. The central message, as already shown, was that Jesus, now exalted to God’s ‘right hand’ was enthroned as Messianic King (Ps 110:1; cf. Mark 14:62; Acts 2:34-36). ‘Christ’ therefore quickly came to be used as a second name for Jesus, and the disciples became known as Christians (Acts 11:26). Hence, Paul used “Christ” as a name in his earliest letters, and of the almost 400 occurrences of the term in his writings only one (Rom 9:5) is clearly meant in the technical sense.⁴¹

Fitzmyer also thinks that the regal status attributed to Jesus by Pilate on the cross (“The king of the Jews” [Mark 15:26]) also led to the clear association of him with the messianic expectation of the time. He comments at length on this:

Crucified as king, he quickly became for his followers “the Messiah,” and the title coloured by resurrection-faith, ceased to be a mere appellation for an expected messianic figure and became instead a honorific designation that suited one person

³⁹ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 351.

⁴⁰ BROWN – *al*, “Aspects of New Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1357.

⁴¹ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 351-352.

alone. Within a few years of the crucifixion “Christ Jesus,” “Jesus Christ,” or “Jesus the Messiah” emerged. It soon became part of the kerygma, as I Cor 15:3 reveals: “*Christ* died for our sins in accord with the Scriptures.”⁴²

How the Incarnation fulfills OT messianic Expectations

The word “incarnation”, apart from being a central Christian doctrine, has many sides to it⁴³ – and most of those aspects have little or no bearing with the thrust of this article. To that end, this writer feels attracted to the two senses of this word expressed by Lang, especially the second definition, as the distinction he makes is believably helpful to the main emphasis of this work. They are: 1) Incarnation is the action by which the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity took human nature. But although he was born of a human being with a human body and soul, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he did not cease to be God. As true God and true man, he is like us in all things except sin. 2) Incarnation is the supernatural mystery which covers the entire life, death and resurrection of Christ and his risen life in glory interceding for us.⁴⁴

John’s Gospel brings out this mystery properly: Jesus was the Word of God, who was with God in the beginning, and who was also God (John 1:1-2). He had glory with the Father “before the world was made” (John 17:5). Jesus, the Word, then became flesh (*sarx*), and dwelt among us (John 1:14). “Flesh” (*sarx*) here “stands for the whole man.”⁴⁵ It means “a man of flesh and blood.”⁴⁶ Thus, in Johannine context, it “expresses that which is earth-bound (3:6), transient and perishable (6:63), the typically human mode of being, as it were, in contrast to all that is divine and spiritual.”⁴⁷ In the Bible generally, also, it is a symbol of the created life which derives and is dependent upon God, and, hence, a generic term for creatures whose life on earth lasts for only a relatively short time (cf. Isa 40:6). Therefore, it was by his coming in the flesh (incarnation) and his dying in the flesh (making atonement) that Jesus Christ secured our salvation (Rom 8:3; Col 1:22; 1 John 4:2).⁴⁸ There is therefore little wonder that this doctrine of the incarnation, which calls up the entire mystery of Christ’s redemptive work, is central to Christianity, as already said, as it was in some sense “a consequence of the Easter faith.”⁴⁹

⁴² FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (The Anchor Bible 28; New York: Doubleday, 1970) 198-199.

⁴³ Cf. J. D. G. DUNN, “Incarnation”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 397-404.

⁴⁴ J. P. LANG, *Dictionary of the Liturgy* (New York: Catholic Book, 1989) 263.

⁴⁵ R. E. BRWON, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (The Anchor Bible 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966) 13.

⁴⁶ F. W. GINGRICH – F. W. DANKER, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 743.

⁴⁷ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 1 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968) 267.

⁴⁸ WILLIAMS, *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, 237.

⁴⁹ DUNN, “Incarnation”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, 401.

Therefore, the NT presents the incarnation as one of a sequence of mighty works through which God has saved sinners, as in the incarnation of Jesus it is God himself who is at work. Matthew and Luke, who record the account of Jesus' birth, also underline this: they stress that by this miracle God was fulfilling his promises (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 2:8-20, 22-38). Matthew, for instance, writes: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' which means God with us" (Matt 1:22-23).

This is the direct quotation of Isa 7:14 which has been referred to earlier in this article, but which would now be further explained especially in this context of Matthew's Gospel. In that passage in the book of Isaiah, the prophet was assuring king Ahaz, who was afraid of the impending forces of Syria and Israel, that the coalition of those two kings against Judah would not last. The prophet, in the assurance of the renewal of the Davidic dynasty – as already shown – assured him of the birth of a royal son, perhaps Hezekiah, during whose infancy the two kings would be ruined. The word used in Hebrew, as already indicated, is *'almâ* (hm'l.; – a virgin or young woman). The Jewish translators of the LXX in about the 3rd century BC, in the light of the apparently deeper meaning of the Isaianic text, translated this Hebrew word with *parqenoj*, specifically meaning "virgin", instead of *neanij*, meaning "young woman," which was used by the later Jewish translations of Theodotion, Aquila and Symmachus. By so doing, the LXX stressed the supernatural associations brought to mind by the identity and work of this son who would be born.⁵⁰ Hence, what has been said about this passage in the context of Isaiah, in the previous section of this article, has helped to throw more light on this translation by the LXX in this present context. In other words, "the idea of a virginal conception of the Messiah was completely unknown to Judaism; nevertheless, reflection on Jesus' conception threw light on the potentialities of the LXX of Isa 7:14."⁵¹

On his own part, Luke records the encounter of the angel Gabriel and Mary. The angel said to her: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). The Angel continues: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33). In these last two verses, Jesus' "extraordinary character is set forth in terms of his Davidic and messianic role with clear allusions to the dynastic oracle of Nathan in 2 Samuel 7."⁵² In both verses, in fact, "there is a strong affirmation of Davidic messianism, an affirmation which Luke sustains consistently (cf. Acts 1:6)."⁵³ Fitzmyer goes ahead to further outline the clear parallels between the two texts as follows:

⁵⁰ D. A. HAGNER, *Matthew 1-13* (Word Biblical Commentary 33A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 20.

⁵¹ BROWN – *al*, "Aspects of New Testament Thought", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1358.

⁵² FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 338.

⁵³ J. NOLLAND, *Luke 1-9:20* (Word Biblical Commentary 35A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989) 52.

| | | | |
|-----------|----------------------------------|-----------|---|
| 2 Sam 7:9 | “a great name” | Luke 1:32 | “he will be great” |
| 13 | “the throne of his Kingdom” | 32 | “throne of his father David” |
| 14 | “he will be my son” | 32 | “Son of the Most High” |
| 16 | “your house and Your kingdom” | 33 | “king over the house of Jacob forever” ⁵⁴ |

The two instances above are clearly the fulfillment of OT Messianic expectations in Jesus. The same is also true of the message of the angel to the shepherds in the field: “For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). Nolland indicates that the expression “Christ the Lord” (*Christos Kurios*) is not paralleled elsewhere in the NT. *Christos* here is clearly a title for the royal figure who would fulfill the eschatological hopes which are attached to the Davidic covenant (cf. Luke 1:32-33, 69), an opinion that is also reinforced by the phrase “in the city of David.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, Simeon blessed God, while holding the child Jesus, in the temple thus: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel” (2:29-32). Simeon is thanking God here, as he had been “specifically told that he would not die until he set his eyes on the Messiah of Israel”⁵⁶ (Luke 2:26). In that very hour, also, the prophetess, Anna, “gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). In this text, Anna actually “gave thanks to God for the coming of the Messiah and prophesied the redemption that God would bring to His people through Him.”⁵⁷

Consequently, the OT expectations of the Messiah are fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus – involving his life, death and resurrection, as already said. This is really so because the affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah in the NT indicates the unity of the history of salvation under one single divine plan. It is YHWH whose encounter with Israel is recorded in the OT who has also sent Jesus in the NT to continue that encounter with all humans (cf. Heb 1:1-2).

Points for Reflection for Christians

⁵⁴ FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 338.

⁵⁵ NOLLAND, *Luke 1-9:20*, 107.

⁵⁶ S. O. ABOGUNRIN, “Luke”, in *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 1375.

⁵⁷ I. H. MARSHALL, “Luke”, in D. GUTHRIE – *al*, ed., *New Bible Commentary*, 3rd Edition (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1970) 893.

A Christian is, simply put, a follower of Christ.⁵⁸ As has already been stated in the introduction, it is on the lips of Christians, generally, that Jesus is the Messiah and he has been expected right from the OT times. But, as already stated, the ability to provide a deeper and more informed explanation of this assertion, on the part of many of these Christians, is often not there – hence the writing of this article.

Thus, Jesus presents himself in the Gospels as the fulfillment of the hope and destiny of Israel and the early Church follows him on this emphasis. Consequently, the conclusion that the OT messianic expectations have been ultimately fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus in the NT – which is the topic of this paper – presumes a good understanding of the proper relationship between the OT and NT on the part of Christians. To that end, that there is a unity and continuity of the plan and history of salvation from the OT to the NT does not imply that the OT has no intrinsic value of its own or that the OT is meaningless without Jesus Christ. Rather the OT writings have value because they were the means through which YHWH revealed himself to the people of Israel. These OT writings were, therefore, meaningful to those who produced them and to those for whom they were produced – and it is from this meaning that their relevance in the NT are better understood and appreciated.⁵⁹ For example, when Jesus spoke of his Father, he had in mind the God who the Jews knew and whose encounter with them is narrated in the OT. As this YHWH was revealed to them in their history, Jesus' effort and ministry to expound for them the fullness of YHWH's revelation becomes significant and meaningful. Hence YHWH's character, attributes, providence and government of history could be recognized in the proclamation of Jesus.⁶⁰ This fact was strongly emphasized by Paul in his letter to the Romans and it was further expatiated by Vatican II in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, thus:

Now the economy of salvation, foretold, recounted and explained by the sacred authors, appears as the true Word of God in the books of the Old Testament, that is why these books, divinely inspired, preserve a lasting value: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might hope (Rom. 15:4).⁶¹

The emphasis, therefore, is that the authors of the NT accorded to the OT the value of divine revelation, proclaiming that "this revelation found its fulfillment in the life, in the teaching and above all in the death and resurrection of Jesus, source of pardon and everlasting life."⁶² Thus,

⁵⁸ For more on this, cf. E. U. DIM, "Abraham the Father of Faith (Gen12-17) – Challenge to Christians in Nigeria", *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2022) 56.

⁵⁹ R. E. BROWN – S. M. SCHNEIDERS, "Hermeneutics", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1994) 1151.

⁶⁰ MCKENZIE, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought", in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1314-1315.

⁶¹ VATICAN II, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: *Dei Verbum*," no. 14.

⁶² J. A. FITZMYER: *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church:" Text and Commentary* (Subsidia Biblica 18: Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995) 136.

any key theme which is common to both testaments, like messianism – currently under discussion – becomes profoundly enriched in the NT, thus exposing the novelty of the Christian fact. “The Christian fact rises in Judaism, but it is not derived from Judaism. The Christian fact is the newest and the most radical of the saving acts of God; it initiates a permanent revolution that affects Judaism as much as it affects the world at large.”⁶³

Hence, most scholars today feel that the most proper relationship pattern between the OT and NT is promise and fulfilment – and this relationship is clearly brought out in the topic of our discussion, the Messiahship of Jesus.⁶⁴ Mckenzie explains:

The early Church proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, well aware that no figure like him can be found in the OT. He is the Messiah and is recognized as such not because he can be identified with any particular prediction or with a number of predictions taken together, but because he unifies in his person all the ideas that are called messianic. The unification transforms some of these ideas profoundly.⁶⁵

In Jesus, therefore, the Acts of God which are related in the OT converge and reach their fullness. In him, the OT idea of history and its hope of the future are brought to a term.⁶⁶ The OT messianic expectations have really been fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus in the NT. Jesus is, therefore, the Messiah who has been expected right from the OT times.

CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to establish the fact that the OT Messianic expectations have been fulfilled in the Incarnation of Jesus in the NT. These OT expectations which revolved around the Davidic dynasty on the one hand, also involved other historical and messianic figures, on the other. YHWH’s promise of establishing the throne of David in perpetuity remained vivid in the minds of the Israelites even after the Babylonian exile when that dynasty had ceased to exist. That promise saw fulfillment in the incarnation of Jesus in the NT, encompassing his life, death and resurrection from the dead.

As it is YHWH whose encounter with Israel is recorded in the OT, who has also sent Jesus in the NT, the unity of salvation history in Jesus is proved. Jesus is, therefore, the Messiah, as he uniquely fulfilled all the messianic expectations in the OT, transforming some of those expectations in the process. In him, the relationship of promise and fulfillment which exists between the OT and the NT is realized.

⁶³ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1315.

⁶⁴ BROWN – SCHNEIDERS, “Hermeneutics”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1157.

⁶⁵ MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1315.

⁶⁶ Cf. MCKENZIE, “Aspects of Old Testament Thought”, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1314.

The emphasis, therefore, is that the OT has its own relevance in the economy of salvation just as it also has its relationship with the NT. Hence, all Christians, as well as all believers in God, are to value the OT as well – and not just the NT. This would engender a more holistic appraisal of YHWH's single plan of salvation for all humankind right from the OT. This appraisal would help to strengthen the relationship between Jews who use the OT canon in Judaism and Christians who use both canons. YHWH has revealed himself in both – even if the OT remains fulfilled in the NT in Jesus the Messiah.