2

Oil and Power in Ancient Israel

THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD preserves an interpretation—attributed to the fourth-century Babylonian amora R. Nahman b. R. Hisda—of the curious oracle of Second Isaiah in which the prophet speaks of the Persian king Cyrus II as YHWH's own רעה, "shepherd" (Isa 44:28), and משיח, "messiah" or "anointed one" (Isa 45:1). The passage in Bavli Megillah reads as follows:

> R. Nahman b. R. Hisda gave the following exposition: What is the meaning of the verse, *Thus says YHWH to his messiah, to Cyrus* [כה־אמר יהוה למשיחו לכורש], *whose right hand I have grasped* [Isa 45:1]? Now, was Cyrus the messiah? Rather, what it means is: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the messiah: I have a complaint for you against Cyrus [א"ל הקב"ה למשיח קובל אני לך על כורש]. I said, *He shall build my city and send forth my exiles* [Isa 45:13], but he said, *Whoever is among you of all his people, let him go up* [Ezra 1:3=2 Chr 36:23]. (*b. Meg.* 12a)[1]

Most modern Bible versions render משיח in Isa 45:1, quite reasonably, with "anointed" or "anointed one."[2] In the Isaiah citation in this passage from the Bavli, however, I have transliterated it "messiah" to highlight the puzzle that R. Nahman's interpretation is attempting to solve—namely, that the word used by the prophet for Cyrus is the same word used by the rabbis for an eschatological redeemer: "Thus says YHWH to his משיח, to Cyrus." Was Cyrus therefore the משיח? On the surface of it, the oracle might seem to suggest so, but R. Nahman knows this cannot be the case. He therefore reinterprets the two ל prepositional phrases, which are more naturally read in apposition to

1. Text from and trans. mod. from Soncino.

2. Thus, for example, KJV, RSV, NRSV, and JPS; and, similarly, Luther Bibel: *Gesalbten*.

one another ("YHWH says to his messiah, [that is,] to Cyrus"), as expressing two different relations to two different persons ("YHWH says *to* his messiah *about* Cyrus").[3] Thus, on R. Nahman's reading, God actually complains to the messiah about Cyrus's unsatisfactory performance in his role as deliverer of the exiles. This is obviously not the original sense of the oracle,[4] but it is a characteristically clever piece of rabbinic exegesis, wrangling a rogue text of scripture back in line with the orthodox assumptions of the ancient interpreter.[5]

If it is fanciful in certain respects, this talmudic interpretation nevertheless faces head-on the historical and philological problem that arises from the use of the same Hebrew word by the Achaemenid-period prophet on the one hand and the Sasanian-period rabbis on the other. Significantly, modern exegetes have not always faced this problem as forthrightly as the rabbis do. Thus, for instance, Sigmund Mowinckel, in his massively learned study of messiah texts in the Hebrew Bible, comments on our Isaiah text as follows:

> It is quite exceptional for a prophet like Deutero-Isaiah, in the exuberant enthusiasm of his faith, to call a heathen king like Cyrus "Yahweh's Anointed," because Yahweh has made him king in order to fulfill His plan for Israel. This use does not help us to define the meaning of the term.[6]

Mowinckel is, of course, right that the use of משיח in Isa 45:1 for a Persian rather than a Judahite ruler is anomalous within the corpus of the Hebrew Bible, where the word typically signifies indigenous kings and priests.[7] But he draws the arbitrary and in fact mistaken conclusion that Second Isaiah's usage

3. On this talmudic passage, see further Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in Its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 66–70, who notes the Bavli's use of Persian characters from the Bible to make sense of the redactors' own situation in Sasanian Persia.

4. On the original sense of the oracle, about which there is still debate, see in particular Lisbeth S. Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," *HTR* 95 (2002): 373–93; Jacob Stromberg, "Deutero-Isaiah's Restoration Reconfigured," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40–66* (ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Hans M. Barstad; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 195–218.

5. On this impulse in ancient biblical interpretation, both Jewish and Christian, see James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York, N.Y.: Free Press, 2007), 14–17.

6. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 6.

7. Isa 45:1 is the only biblical instance of the word משיח used of a gentile. We may compare Isa 10:5 ("Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury") and Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10 ("Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, my servant"), but in those texts the pagan king is

is therefore irrelevant to an account of the meaning of the word in antiquity. In stark contrast to Wittgenstein's axiom that the meaning of a word is its use in the language, Mowinckel begins by establishing a formal definition of "messiah" and then rules particular instances either relevant or not according as they agree with that definition. On this theory of meaning, however, R. Nahman b. R. Hisda's interpretation in *b. Meg.* 12a becomes not just fanciful, as it undoubtedly is, but completely unintelligible. If, per Mowinckel's claim, "messiah" in Second Isaiah does not mean "messiah" at all, then there simply is no puzzle here. But a puzzle there clearly is. The Bavli text begins from the unassailable observation that Isa 45 does in fact use the word "messiah" and then proceeds to explain how such a usage is possible. Its explanation may be strained, but its interpretive starting point is sound. Why this difference? How is it that Mowinckel can pass over without comment a messiah text that the rabbis found so very interesting? The answer lies in the modern history of research of which Mowinckel was part.

Messianic Prophecy in Hebrew Bible Scholarship

The question of the messiah in the Hebrew Bible is a classic set piece in modern biblical scholarship, the subject of many big, ambitious books from the eighteenth century to the present.[8] Its classic status is an inheritance from the premodern polemical and apologetic traditions,[9] represented, for instance, by the famous Barcelona Disputation of 1263, in which the great Sephardi rabbi Nahmanides was summoned to debate the converso Dominican friar Pablo Christiani on precisely this question.[10] In scholarship since the European Enlightenment, the interpretive methods with which scholars approach the question are more critical than before, but the sense of the uniquely high

the instrument of YHWH's wrath, whereas in Isa 45:1 the pagan king is the instrument of YHWH's salvation (thus rightly H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah, and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* [Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1998], 6; Roberts, "Old Testament's Contribution," 40).

8. On the history of this tradition of research, see R. E. Clements, "The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament," *JSOT* 43 (1989): 3–19.

9. See Reed, "Messianism between Judaism and Christianity."

10. See Cecil Roth, "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263)," *HTR* 43 (1950): 117–44; Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992); Günter Stemberger, "Die Messiasfrage in den christlich-jüdischen Disputationen des Mittelalters," *JBTh* 8 (1993): 239–50.

stakes of the question persists.[11] So the American Hebraist Charles Augustus Briggs, in his 1886 opus *Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfillment of Redemption through the Messiah: A Critical Study of the Messianic Passages of the Old Testament in the Order of Their Development*, writes, "Messianic prophecy is the most important of all themes; for it is the ideal of redemption given by the Creator to our race at the beginning of its history, and it ever abides as the goal of humanity until the divine plan has been accomplished."[12] Strikingly similar, despite his very different social location, are the comments of Jewish historian Joseph Klausner in his *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, addressing the same topic in the first decade of the twentieth century:

> Even in my youth, the greatness and loftiness of the Messianic idea, that *original* Hebrew idea which has influenced all humanity so much, thrilled my soul; and I vowed in my heart to dedicate to it the labor of years, in order to examine it from every side and to grasp its essence.[13]

In this venerable tradition of scholarship, messianic prophecy is the greatest and worthiest theme to which scholars of the Bible may apply their learning.

In his 2007 study on the topic, Andrew Chester organizes contributions to research on the messiah in the Hebrew Bible around the twin poles of minimalism and maximalism—that is, studies that find little or no evidence of a messiah in the Hebrew Bible on the one hand and studies that find a great deal of such evidence on the other.[14] One might think that this twofold rubric seems overly simplistic, but it actually maps onto the history of scholarship quite neatly. If there is oversimplification here, as I think there certainly is (as discussed later in this chapter), the fault lies not with Chester's summary but with the history of scholarship itself. That is to say, when scholars have addressed the question of the messiah in the Hebrew Bible, a few exceptions

11. Consequently, as John Barton notes, "The question of the Messiah [is] the topic *par excellence* where Christian scholars may be expected to distort the natural contours of the Hebrew Scriptures" (John Barton, "The Messiah in Old Testament Theology," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* [ed. John Day; London: T. & T. Clark, 2013 (1998)], 365). Nor, I would add, are Jewish scholars immune from this temptation.

12. Charles Augustus Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy: The Prediction of the Fulfillment of Redemption through the Messiah: A Critical Study of the Messianic Passages of the Old Testament in the Order of Their Development* (New York, N.Y.: Scribner, 1886), vii.

13. Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, 2; emphasis in original.

14. See Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation*, 205–30.

notwithstanding, they have tended to frame the question in binary terms, as a for-or-against proposition.

For most of the modern history of research, it was emphatically a "for" proposition. The maximalist interpretation was manifestly the dominant one from the eighteenth century to the mid twentieth century. It is represented by the studies of Briggs and Klausner, just cited, and many others beside. These include classic studies by Christoph Friedrich Ammon, Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann, Johann Jakob Stähelin, Jules Steeg, David Castelli, Franz Delitzsch, Frants Buhl, and Eduard König, among others.[15] The high-water mark of this school, as Chester notes, is the massive three-volume work of Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Christologie des Alten Testaments und Commentar über die messianischen Weissagungen der Propheten.*[16] Hengstenberg summarizes his own position as follows:

> When we observe that the Messianic announcements, which are peculiar to Israel alone, have their origin in the primeval age, that for many successive centuries they continue to reappear again and again, that they do not occur merely incidentally and in an isolated form, in the midst of other prophecies, but constitute the very centre and soul of all prophecy, that they stand out in great prominence even in the Psalms, in which utterance is given to the living faith of the people of God, under the quickening influence of the law and the prophets, we cannot for a moment doubt, that to the people of the ancient covenant the anticipation of a Messiah must have been one of all-absorbing importance.[17]

15. See Christoph Friedrich Ammon, *Entwurf einer Christologie des Alten Testaments* (Erlangen: Palm, 1794); Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung im alte und im neue Testamente* (2 vols.; Nördlingen: Becksche, 1841–1844); Johann Jakob Stähelin, *Die messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: Reimer, 1847); Jules Steeg, *Le Messie d'après les Prophètes* (Strasbourg: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1867); David Castelli, *Il messia secondo gli Ebrei* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1874); Franz Delitzsch, *Messianische Weissagungen in geschichtlicher Folge* (Leipzig: Faber, 1890); Frants Buhl, *De messianske Forjaettelser i det gamle Testamente* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1894); Eduard König, *Die messianische Weissagungen des Alten Testaments vergleichend, geschichtlich und exegetisch behandelt* (3d ed.; Stuttgart: Belser, 1925).

16. Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Christologie des Alten Testaments und Commentar über die messianischen Weissagungen der Propheten* (3 vols.; Berlin: Oehmigke, 1829–1835); ET *Christology of the Old Testament, and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (trans. Theodore Meyer and James Martin; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1854–1858); abridged ET *Christology of the Old Testament, and Commentary on the Messianic Predictions of the Prophets* (trans. R. Keith; ed. T. K. Arnold; London: Rivington, 1847; repr. Kregel, 1970).

17. Hengstenberg, *Christology*, 4:259.

For Hengstenberg and the like-minded interpreters who dominated the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discussion, the conviction that "to the people of the ancient covenant the anticipation of a Messiah must have been one of all-absorbing importance" justified the enormous scholarly energy devoted to explicating the theme of the messiah in the Hebrew Bible.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, arguably the most important authority on the topic was Hugo Gressmann, who published his *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* in 1905.[18] The material comprising the latter half of that book Gressmann thoroughly rewrote and supplemented for publication as *Der Messias*. Gressmann died prematurely in 1927, but Hans Schmidt finished editing the manuscript, and *Der Messias* appeared posthumously in 1929.[19] Although from Mowinckel's perspective Gressmann shares in the guilt of the old maximalists for speaking too loosely of biblical figures as "messianic,"[20] relative to his own predecessors and contemporaries, Gressmann's thoroughgoing *religionsgeschichtlich* approach was considered radical.[21] Gressmann argues that the messianic idea in ancient Israel derives from and belongs to a very ancient, pan-Near Eastern mythology of kingship, and he is content to call all the various local forms of this mythology "messianic hope."[22] On the reception of this argument, Brevard Childs rightly comments, "Gressmann ... derived messianism from ancient mythological patterns, but in spite of the early dating for the origins of the concept, it

18. Hugo Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (FRLANT 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905).

19. Hugo Gressmann, *Der Messias* (ed. Hans Schmidt; FRLANT 26; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929). William Creighton Graham said of it, "Without question, *Der Messias* is the most thorough and searching examination of the messianic problem in the Old Testament yet produced" (William Creighton Graham, review of Gressmann, *Der Messias*, in *JR* 10 [1930]: 412).

20. See Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 4n2: "In his *Der Messias* Gressmann does not seem to adhere so strictly to this manifestly correct terminology"; Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 15: "It is therefore bad scientific method to do as Gressmann, Sellin, and others have done, and to base our inquiry into the origin of the conception of the Messiah on an assumed oriental Messianic theology of which we know nothing."

21. See Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 15–21; Magne Saebo, "On the Relationship between 'Messianism' and 'Eschatology' in the Old Testament: An Attempt at a Terminological and Factual Clarification," in idem, *On the Way to Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 197–231 at 197–209.

22. For example, Gressmann, *Messias*, 415–45 on *die ägyptische Messiashoffnung*. Compare also the similar, roughly contemporary English-language account of Oesterley, *Evolution of the Messianic Idea*.

certainly offered little comfort to the traditional interpretation."[23] Indeed, this feature of Gressmann's work partly explains Mowinckel's choice of him as a worthy opponent.[24]

With this history of research in view, one can understand why, when Mowinckel wrote it in the 1940s, the following claim was both thinkable and also sharply controversial:

> In later Judaism the term "Messiah" denotes an eschatological figure. He belongs to "the last time"; his advent lies in the future. To use the word "Messiah" is to imply eschatology, the last things. It is, therefore, a misuse of the words "Messiah" and "Messianic" to apply them, for instance, to those ideas which were associated in Israel or in the ancient near east with kings who were actually reigning, even if, as we shall see, these ideas were expressed in exalted and mythical terms. The word "Messiah" by itself, as a title and a name, originated in later Judaism as the designation of an eschatological figure; and it is therefore only to such a figure that it may be applied.[25]

And again, more tersely still, "The expression 'the Anointed One' does not occur in the Old Testament as a technical term for the Messiah."[26] Mowinckel's *Han som kommer* (1951; ET *He That Cometh* [1956]) took to task not only the grand old maximalists such as Hengstenberg, Briggs, and Klausner, but even (and, in fact, more pointedly) scholars such as Ernst Sellin and Hugo Gressmann, who were their more critical counterparts. Even the latter, on Mowinckel's account, allow far too much talk of messianism in the Hebrew Bible. Mowinckel draws an absolute distinction between ancient Israel, where משיח signifies the sitting king, and later Judaism, where the same word signifies an eschatological redeemer. Between the two discursive contexts there is no passage to or fro. Although, as Mowinckel acknowledges, the lexeme is the same,[27] for him the putative *spätjüdisch* usage is determinative and, what is more, binding on modern scholars: "It is a misuse of the words to apply them

23. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992), 453.

24. Gressmann is the author cited most frequently by Mowinckel in *He That Cometh*, rivaled only by Willy Staerk and Wilhelm Bousset.

25. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 3.

26. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 7.

27. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 7: "The eschatological Messiah derived his name from the sacral title of the ancient kings of Israel."

to [kings in Israel]"; "It is only to such a[n eschatological] figure that it may be applied."[28] Those scholars who speak of a messiah in the Hebrew Bible are guilty of a semantic transgression.

This acute terminological anxiety is frankly rather strange, but it is intelligible relative to the history of research to that point, which we have just sketched. In addition to its enduring value as a contribution to biblical exegesis, *He That Cometh* is a sophisticated piece of counterapologetics—a 500-page scolding of the many modern scholars who find in the Hebrew Bible a *praeparatio evangelica*. Mowinckel briefly addresses the problem of the messiahship of Jesus in the last part of the book, but for him Jesus represents a marked departure from all antecedents. He writes, "Jesus understood and fulfilled the thought of the unknown Messiah on earth in a manner entirely different from its presentation in the Jewish legend."[29] And again:

> For Jesus, the Jewish Messianic idea was the temptation of Satan, which He had to reject. The new conception of a saviour, which Jesus created, unites in itself the loftiest elements in both the Jewish and the "Aryan" spirit, and fuses them into a true unity, which is realized in Jesus Himself.[30]

Mowinckel, for his part, has no need of a *praeparatio evangelica*.[31]

Mowinckel won the day decisively. *He That Cometh* was well received in its own day and in time earned classic status, effectively supplanting Gressmann.[32] Scholars writing on the issue since Mowinckel have overwhelmingly favored his conclusion that there are no messiahs in the Bible

28. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 3.

29. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 447.

30. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 450.

31. On this aspect of *He That Cometh*, see John J. Collins, "Mowinckel's *He That Cometh* in Retrospect," in Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, xv–xxviii at xxiv–xxv. On the social history of this strand of biblical research, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Jewish Myth and Ritual and the Beginnings of Comparative Religion: The Case of Richard Simon," in *Religions and Cultures* (ed. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce; Binghamton, N.Y.: Global Publications, 2001), 27–48.

32. On its early reception, see, for example, the enthusiastic reviews by A. J. B. Higgins in *SJT* 10 (1957): 304–9; H. Neil Richardson in *JBR* 26 (1958): 135–37; and James Muilenburg in *JBL* 76 (1957): 243–46, here 246: "It is one of the great books of OT scholarship in our generation." S. H. Hooke, reviewing it in *NTS* 4 (1958): 227–30, objects that the author "appears, like Saturn, to be devouring his own children"—that is, scholars such as Hooke who were influenced by the comparative ritual emphasis of Mowinckel's *Psalmenstudien* but now come under criticism in *He That Cometh*. On the book's subsequent legacy, see the retrospectives of D. R. Ap-Thomas, "An Appreciation of Sigmund Mowinckel's Contribution to Biblical Studies," *JBL* 85 (1966): 315–25; Collins, "*He That Cometh* in Retrospect"; and the articles

and, relatedly, no place in *Bibelwissenschaft* for the proof from messianic prophecy. To wit: H. L. Ginsberg writes in the 1972 edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, "[The messiah] is a strictly postbiblical concept. . . . One can, therefore, only speak of the biblical pre-history of messianism"; and his assessment is reprinted unchanged in the 2007 edition.[33] J. J. M. Roberts articulates a similar position: "In the original context not one of the thirty-nine occurrences of משיח in the Hebrew canon refers to an expected figure of the future whose coming will coincide with the inauguration of an era of salvation." And again, "Nowhere in the Old Testament has the term משיח acquired its later technical sense as an eschatological title."[34] Similarly Paul Hanson: "[משיח] in scriptural usage does not normally refer to an eschatological figure whose coming would inaugurate a new era of salvation, rather to contemporary kings and priests."[35] And Shemaryahu Talmon: "I distinguish between the epithet משיח, which is preponderantly used in the Hebrew Bible in reference to an actual ruling king or his immediate successor, and the concept messianism, which . . . transcends the original terrestrial signification of the term *masiah*."[36] Even more succinctly, James Charlesworth: "The term 'the Messiah' simply does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures."[37] Likewise John Barton: "No-one in ancient Israel believed in the Messiah, and the texts they wrote which would later come to be taken as messianic were not so intended."[38] And John Day: "The term *masiah*, 'Anointed' (whence the word 'Messiah') is applied in the Old Testament to the current Israelite king, not the future eschatological one."[39] And Susan Gillingham: "Although the psalms provided the soil for Messianic eisegesis, they were certainly not written as Messianic compositions."[40] And more recently, Joseph Fitzmyer: "[In] the original literal and religious sense of these Old Testament passages . . . a 'messianic' meaning is still out of place."[41] And more recently still, John Collins: "As is well known, the word משיח simply means 'anointed' and is not used in the Hebrew Bible in an eschatological sense."[42] And so on, but this is enough to make the point.

collected in *SJOT* 2, in particular Nils A. Dahl, "Sigmund Mowinckel, Historian of Religion and Theologian," *SJOT* 2 (1988): 8–22.

33. H. L. Ginsberg et al., "Messiah," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (2d ed.; Detroit, Mich.: Thomson Gale, 2006), 14:110.

34. Roberts, "Old Testament's Contribution," 39, 51, respectively.

35. Paul D. Hanson, "Messiahs and Messianic Figures in Proto-Apocalypticism," in *The Messiah*, 67–75 at 67.

36. Talmon, "Concept of *Masiah*," 80.

37. Charlesworth, "From Messianology to Christology," 11.

38. Barton, "Messiah in Old Testament Theology," 375.

39. John Day, "The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy," in *King and Messiah*, 72–90 at 80.

40. S. E. Gillingham, "The Messiah in the Psalms," in *King and Messiah*, 209–37 at 237.

Despite this substantial weight of opinion, maximalist accounts of the messiah in the Hebrew Bible did not disappear altogether. Several such accounts, representing quite different approaches, have challenged the *communis opinio* from the 1950s to the present. Immediately on the heels of Mowinckel, Helmer Ringgren used the Scandinavian school's comparative approach to ancient Near Eastern divine kingship to revive the theme of the messiah in Old Testament theology. Ringgren writes:

> From earliest days the Christian Church has seen in many Old Testament passages prophecies which have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Modern biblical research has not always been of the same opinion, and has often interpreted those messianic passages in quite a different way. Many good Christians have been offended by this, and the consequence has been the opening of a broad gulf between scholarly and practical interpretation of the Bible. . . . Consequently it must be hailed with satisfaction that there is a certain tendency in more recent research to defend the messianic import of those biblical passages in quite a new manner. Thus, the traditional Christian interpretation of those passages seems to have received some support from historical exegesis.[43]

It is doubtful, to my mind, whether *Religionsgeschichte* can in fact yield the kind of theological results that Ringgren wants, but one can see how the mythical language of ancient kingship texts appeals to him in this respect.

Joachim Becker's 1977 monograph, *Messiaserwartung im Alten Testament*, undertakes to salvage the Old Testament messiah as a matter of urgency for Catholic faith.[44] Becker acknowledges that "there was not even such a thing as

41. Fitzmyer, *One Who Is to Come*, 25.

42. Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 1.

43. Helmer Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (SBT 18; Chicago, Ill.: Allenson, 1956 [Swedish original, 1954]), 7.

44. Joachim Becker, *Messiaserwartung im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977); ET *Messianic Expectation in the Old Testament* (trans. David E. Green; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1980).

messianic expectation until the last two centuries B.C."[45] But for him, this conclusion induces theological anxiety: "Such a conclusion would contradict one of the most central concerns of the New Testament, which insists with unprecedented frequency, intensity, and unanimity that Christ was proclaimed in advance in the Old Testament."[46] Becker's solution is to propose a synthesis of the historical-critical and canonical approaches;[47] but, in practice, this means privileging the latter. He writes, "Above all, we must remember that the messianic interpretation of the Old Testament, arbitrary as it may appear, is nevertheless based on the highest authority [viz. the New Testament]."[48] Guided by this authority, the interpreter can see how "the Old Testament itself and even the history that lies behind it possess a unique messianic luminosity."[49] Becker's argument is not unsophisticated, but in the nature of the case it can only be fully persuasive among his own coreligionists.

Another Catholic exegete, the eminent Leuven Old Testament scholar Joseph Coppens,[50] marshals a less overtly theological argument in defense of messianism in the Hebrew Bible. In a number of studies, most significantly his 1968 monograph, *Le messianisme royal*, Coppens argues for a deep continuity between preexilic Judahite royal ideology and postexilic messianism, even happily adopting the latter word for the former phenomenon.[51] More recently, Finnish scholar Antti Laato has argued along similar lines.[52] Although he

45. Becker, *Messianic Expectation*, 93. And again, "It is on the threshold of the New Testament itself that we first encounter a real messianism. It is not the seamless continuation of the restorative monarchism of the exilic and early postexilic period; it is a new outgrowth of anti-Hasmonean, anti-Roman, and anti-Herodian tendencies" (Becker, *Messianic Expectation*, 87).

46. Becker, *Messianic Expectation*, 93.

47. Following a proposal by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961–1969), 3/2:371–82.

48. Becker, *Messianic Expectation*, 95.

49. Becker, *Messianic Expectation*, 96.

50. On whom see Johan Lust, "Msgr. J. Coppens: The Old Testament Scholar," *ETL* 57 (1981): 241–65.

51. Joseph Coppens, *Le messianisme royal: Ses origines, son développement, son accomplissement* (LD 54; Paris: Cerf, 1968). See further idem, *Le messianisme et sa relève prophétique: Les anticipations vétérotestamentaires: Leur accomplissement en Jésus* (BETL 38; Gembloux: Duculot, 1974); and idem, *La relève apocalyptique du messianisme royal* (3 vols.; BETL 50, 55, 61; Leuven: Peeters, 1979–1983).

52. Antti Laato, *A Star Is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations* (USFISFCJ 5; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1997). This book is Laato's programmatic statement. For his interpretation of some of the contested texts, see further idem, *Who Is Immanuel? The Rise and the Foundering of Isaiah's Messianic Expectations* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Academy Press, 1988); idem, *Josiah and*

formally concedes Mowinckel's terminological point—"The term משיח, the Messiah, with the absolute meaning 'the Anointed One' (=the coming, ideal, king), never appears in the Old Testament"[53]—Laato, like Coppens, nevertheless argues that Judahite kings like Hezekiah are indeed messiahs and that their enthronement psalms and succession oracles are messianic texts, once allowances are made for synchronic diversity and diachronic change. He writes, "When the term 'Messiah' is adopted to describe the (ideal) king in the Old Testament it should be noted that the Israelite royal and 'messianic' ideology developed and was transformed over a period of many hundred years."[54]

Perhaps the most sophisticated version of the neomaximalist position is that developed by William Horbury, especially in his *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (1998).[55] Horbury writes:

> Although the lengthy development of messianism *from* the Old Testament is obvious . . . , it has also become clear that messianism is important *within* the Old Testament. It flourished especially in the period of the collecting and editing of the books . . . , [but] from the inception of the Davidic monarchy and the Israelite capture of Jerusalem it was bound up with the traditions of kingship in Zion.[56]

Horbury's argument focuses especially on the collection and redaction of the biblical books during the Persian and Hellenistic periods, but he traces messianism back to the origins of the Judahite monarchy. He does this by flatly rejecting the strict Mowinckelian definition of "messianism" in favor of a more capacious one: "Messianism is taken in the broad sense of the expectation of a coming preeminent ruler—coming, whether at the end, as strictly implied by the word 'eschatology,' or simply at some time in the future."[57] Horbury is right to challenge the post-Mowinckel scholarly orthodoxy about "messianism in the strict sense," but it is not clear

David Redivivus: The Historical Josiah and the Messianic Expectations of Exilic and Postexilic Times (ConBOT 33; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992); idem, *The Servant of YHWH and Cyrus: A Reinterpretation of the Exilic Messianic Programme in Isaiah 40–55* (ConBOT 35; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992).

53. Laato, *A Star Is Rising*, 394.

54. Laato, *A Star Is Rising*, 3.

55. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*; also idem, *Messianism among Jews and Christians*.

56. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 35.

57. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ*, 7.

to me that his alternate definition actually advances the discussion. It lets more count as evidence, naturally, but it operates in roughly the same way that Mowinckel's does. As I argued in Chapter 1 and illustrated from Bavli Megillah at the beginning of this chapter, the really interesting thing is not any interpreter's definition of messianism, but rather the way the ancient sources use the words. If we want to understand the latter, then we must take into account not only *Psalms of Solomon* and *Parables of Enoch*, but Psalms and Leviticus as well.

Oil and Power in Ancient Israel

In the fraught history of research just discussed, "messiah" and "messianism" function as ciphers for political utopianism, pious optimism, a linear view of history, and other philosophical or psychological categories. In the biblical sources themselves, however, the discourse of "messiahs"—"anointed persons"—is predicated on a simple symbolic relation between oil and power. The basic but very important point is that the ritual smearing of oil on objects and persons was a widely recognized means of conferring sacredness in ancient Israel as well as in other, older ancient Near Eastern cultures: Egyptian, Hittite, Canaanite, and otherwise.[58] We often think of ritual anointing in connection with the installation of kings and priests, and rightly so, but there are of course biblical stories of the consecration of inanimate objects with oil. In one important example from the patriarch cycle in Genesis, the smearing of oil on a stone makes that stone a *massebah* or a *betyl*, a dwelling for or embodiment of a god (Gen 28:16–19; 31:13; 35:14).[59]

The ritual application of oil to persons is another instantiation of the same principle; anointing a person with oil according to certain protocols makes the person sacrosanct. Indeed, analogously to the case of the *massebah*, anointing a person with oil can effectively make him an embodiment of a god, as in the psalmist's address to the king: "Your throne, O god, endures forever and ever; your royal scepter is a scepter of equity. . . . Therefore God, your God, has

58. See especially Ernst Kutsch, *Salbung als Rechtsakt im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient* (BZAW; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963); and more recently and more specifically Stephanie Dalley, "Anointing in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in Christian Tradition* (ed. Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell; London: SPCK, 1993), 19–25; Stephen E. Thompson, "The Anointing of Officials in Ancient Egypt," *JNES* 53 (1994): 15–25.

59. On this practice, see Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 49–54.

anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions" (Ps 45:6–7).[60] In sum: oil, properly applied, confers divinely sanctioned power. Mowinckel himself makes this point well:

> In the ancient east both persons and things were anointed by having sweet-smelling oil poured or smeared over them. . . . The act had a sacral significance. The original idea was, no doubt, that the oil possessed an abnormal, "holy" power, or "mana," to use the familiar term from the phenomenology of religion. In the act of anointing, this power and holiness were transmitted to the person anointed, or the holiness and supernatural power with which he was already endowed were renewed and strengthened. Practical experience of the power and usefulness of oil, both as a food and as a medicine, readily explains this belief in its sacral, mana-like character.[61]

The appeal to the Polynesian concept of *mana* (a commonplace in mid-twentieth-century religion scholarship) is problematic,[62] and the concluding anthropological claim is speculative, but the core of Mowinckel's comment is to the point: Behind the whole discourse of messianism lies a very ancient Near Eastern complex of oil rituals.

In this connection, there has been considerable discussion of the question whence the Israelites got the custom of anointing their kings with oil. Martin Noth, for instance, argued that it came over to Israel from Hittite precedent.[63] The Hittite custom is attested, for example, in a magical text instructing how the king can avert an evil omen by installing a decoy for himself: "They anoint the prisoner with the fine oil of kingship and [he speaks] as follows: This man [is] the king. To him [have I given] a royal

60. Thus rightly Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 56: "The Hebrew text [of Psalm 45] . . . preserved a remnant of an early Israelite conception of divine kingship."

61. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 4–5.

62. See Jonathan Z. Smith, "Manna, Mana Everywhere and /_/_/_," in idem, *Relating Religion* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 117–44.

63. Martin Noth, "Office and Vocation in the Old Testament," in idem, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 229–49, here 239:

> If such a practice existed in Syria and Palestine during the late Bronze Age, but is found neither in Egypt nor in Mesopotamia, then we are inclined to search for its origins in Hurrian or Hittite civilizations, unless we accept that it arose spontaneously in Syria and Palestine. There is even some evidence that the anointing of kings was known to the Hittites.

name."[64] The parallel is reasonably close, but Hittite civilization lay in the distant past by the time the Israelites were pouring oil on their kings. Alternatively, Roland de Vaux argued that the Israelite anointing of kings was a modification of the Egyptian anointing of vassals and court officials.[65] An example of Egyptian practice is El-Amarna letter 51, in which Addu-nirari writes to the Pharaoh:

> Manahpiya [i.e., Thutmose III], the king of Egypt, your ancestor, made [T]a[ku], my ancestor, a king in Nuhasse, he put oil on his head and [s]poke as follows: "Whom the king of Egypt has made a king, [and on whose head] he has put [oil], [no] one [shall]."[66]

Unlike the Hittites, the Egyptians were still a force to be reckoned with at the time of the Israelite monarchy, although they had fewer dealings with Israel than the Mesopotamian empires had. The latter would be promising candidates, but there is no reliable evidence that either the Assyrians or the Babylonians anointed their kings with oil. Consequently, John Day, among others, has argued that the anointing of kings was an indigenous Canaanite custom, which naturally therefore became an Israelite custom.[67] Judges 9:7–15, the parable of the trees who "anoint a king over themselves" (representing the rivalry between the chieftains Jerubbaal and Abimelech), might point in this direction, but the passage could be a retrojection of Israelite custom into an earlier period. There is some evidence from Ugarit for royal anointing among non-Israelite Canaanites. Day cites *KTU*[2] 1.22.II.15–18, a Ugaritic Rephaim text[68] "Oil ... He vowed, If at (my?) command, he shall tak[e] the throne of

64. Text ed. M. Vieyra, "Rites de purification hittites," *RHR* 119 (1939). 121–53 at 129; trans. James B. Pritchard in *ANET*.

65. Roland de Vaux, "The King of Israel, Vassal of Yahweh," in idem, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (trans. Damian McHugh; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972 [French original, 1967]), 152–66, especially 165; idem, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980 [French original, 1961]), 104: "These facts suggest an Egyptian practice rather than a native [Levantine] custom: we know from other sources that the high officials in Egypt were anointed on appointment to office, but the Pharaohs were not."

66. Trans. William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 122.

67. Day, "Canaanite Inheritance," here 73: "The clearest evidence of Canaanite, indeed Jebusite Jerusalemite, influence on Israel's monarchy is indicated by the coronation Psalm 110. ... There is therefore here explicit evidence of the fusion of Israel's royal ideology with that of the Jebusites."

68. And also less certainly *KTU*[2] 1.6.I.50–52.

his kingship, the resting place of the seat of [his] domin[ion]."[69] Perhaps, then, the anointing of Israelite kings perpetuated a custom that had long been current among the tribes of the Levant,[70] although there is no evidence that any of these older cultures derived a title of office, "anointed one," from the custom.

Thus far Israelite kings. But what about Israelite priests? In a number of biblical texts, they, too, are said to be consecrated by anointing with oil (e.g., Exod 28:41; 30:30; 40:13, 15; Lev 16:32). Many historians, however, have thought this to be a retrojection from the Second-Temple period, when the high priesthood effectively supplanted the kingship.[71] Martin Noth gives classic expression to this view:

> It is clear that the act of anointing was transferred from the kingship to the high priesthood, because in the Old Testament tradition of the earlier period only the anointing of kings is mentioned—not of priests; this anointing only recurs afterward with respect to the post-exilic High Priest. Initially the anointing was intended for the High Priest alone, and not for the rest of the priests as well. Only later, in the course of making the office more "democratic," were they included in the circle of the anointed.[72]

The literary–critical evidence arguably does point in this direction. The anointing of priests is only mentioned in the Priestly Torah, not anywhere in the numerous biblical stories of priests.[73] Against this view, however, Daniel

69. Text in *KTU*[2]; trans. in *COS*.

70. *Pace* Talmon, "Concept of *Masiah*," 87. "The practice of anointing a secular-political leader with oil was an innovation which has no roots whatsoever in the socioreligious tradition or premonarchic Israel." See further Gerhard von Rad, "Royal Ritual in Judah," in idem, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. N. W. Porteous; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 222–31; Frank Moore Cross, "The Judaean Royal Theology," in idem, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1973]), 241–73; Nicholas Wyatt, "Royal Religion in Ancient Judah," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (ed. Francesca Stavrakapoulou and John Barton; London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 61–81.

71. In Dan 9:25–26 we find two uses of משיח for a high priest of the Second Temple: Joshua ben Jehozadak (the contemporary of Zerubbabel) in 9:25 (cf. Zech 4:14) and Onias III in 9:26 (cf. 2 Macc 4:30–38). The genre of Dan 9 is an apocalypse, but here the "messiahs" do not feature prominently as they do in later apocalypses such as *Parables of Enoch*, Revelation, *4 Ezra*, and *2 Baruch*. See further Fitzmyer, *One Who Is to Come*, 56–64; and, more accurately, Collins, *Scepter*, 17, 42.

72. Noth, "Office and Vocation," 237.

73. With the one late exception of Zadok in 1 Chr 29:22: "They made Solomon son of David king a second time, and they anointed him as prince for YHWH and Zadok as priest [וימשחו ליהוה לנגיד ולצדוק לכהן]."

Fleming has objected, first, that anointing of priests was a Near Eastern commonplace, so that nothing would be more natural than for Israelites to do it and, second, that the biblical protocol for anointing rank-and-file priests is, in fact, altogether different from that for anointing kings and high priests.[74] He writes:

> Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 merge the customs for anointing the high priest and all the sons of Aaron in one narrative for their installation, and these texts preserve two very dissimilar rites. The high priest is anointed by pouring oil on the head, while the priest family as a whole is anointed by splashing oil and blood on men and garments together.[75]

And again, "Where the anointing of Aaron suggests a natural origin in the Jerusalem Temple heritage of the Priestly Torah, the anointing of his sons may have roots in a more widespread practice from the old towns, villages, and shrines of the countryside."[76] Perhaps, then, there was a protocol for anointing priests in preexilic Israel, even if the form of the ritual as we have it in Leviticus reflects the postexilic attraction of royal paraphernalia to the office of high priest.

It is because of these archaic oils rituals that other biblical texts can take for granted the use of משׁח for their respective kings and priests.[77] The prayer of Habakkuk (Hab 3), a divine warrior psalm in the midst of a collection of prophetic oracles,[78] uses משׁח after the pattern of the Psalms for the unnamed Judahite king, whom YHWH delivers from his enemies:[79]

> You [YHWH] strode across the earth in fury, you trampled the nations in anger. You went forth for the salvation of your people, for the salvation

74. Daniel E. Fleming, "The Biblical Tradition of Anointing Priests," *JBL* 117 (1998): 401–14.

75. Fleming, "Anointing Priests," 401.

76. Fleming, "Anointing Priests," 414.

77. And in a few, exceptional instances, prophets: Ps 105:15=1 Chr 16:22; cf. 1 Kgs 19:16; Isa 61:1. On this anomaly, see Jean Giblet, "Prophétisme et attente d'un messie prophète dans l'Ancien Testament," in *L'Attente du Messie* (ed. Lucien Cerfaux; Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958), 85–129.

78. On the literary-critical problem, see J. H. Eaton, "The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 144–71; J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: WJK, 1991), 148–49; Francis I. Andersen, *Habakkuk* (AB; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2001), 259–64.

79. Thus Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 156; but compare the different explanation of Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 335.

> of your anointed one [לישע אדמשיחך; OG τοῦ σῶσαι τοὺς χριστούς σου]. You crushed the head of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. (Hab 3:12–13)

There is a poetic parallelism between the lines "for the salvation of your people" and "for the salvation of your anointed" in the sense that the fate of the king is, in effect, the fate of the people. Interestingly, though, the Greek translator takes the parallel as strictly synonymous, so that משׁיח (singular) becomes χριστούς (plural): the people of the Lord are his anointed ones.[80]

Lamentations 4, an alphabetic acrostic poem mourning the atrocities committed during the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE,[81] includes a description from the perspective of the people of the capture and humiliation of the Judahite king (Zedekiah, although he is not named in the poem) (cf. 2 Kgs 25:1–17; Jer 32:1–5; 34:2–3; 39:1–7; 52:1–11; Ezek 12:12–13):[82]

> Our pursuers were swifter than the vultures in the heavens; they chased us on the mountains, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of YHWH [רוח אפינו משׁיח יהוה; OG πνεῦμα προσώπου ἡμῶν χριστὸς κυρίου], was taken in their pits, he of whom we said, "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations." (Lam 4:19–20)

"The anointed of YHWH" is the familiar Deuteronomistic title for the king, and the poet here uses it in apposition with "the breath of our nostrils," illustrating the praise of the king typical of Judahite royal ideology (also "we shall live under his shadow"), which has, however, been sorely chastened by recent events.[83]

A generation after Lamentations, another Judahite poet used the same figure of speech for another king, but, strikingly, a foreign rather than an

80. On the text-critical puzzle posed by Hab 3, see Joshua L. Harper, *Responding to a Puzzled Scribe: The Barberini Text of Habakkuk 3 Analyzed in the Light of the Other Greek Versions* (LHBOTS 608; London: T. & T. Clark, 2015), and on our verse pp. 119–25.

81. On the acrostic form, see R. B. Salters, *Lamentations* (ICC; London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 17–21. On the poem as a whole, see Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (AB; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 86–93.

82. See Hillers, *Lamentations*, 92; Salters, *Lamentations*, 330–33.

83. Thus rightly Hillers, *Lamentations*, 92:

> He deliberately uses somewhat exaggerated language in speaking of the king, in order to sharpen the contrast between their hopes in the king and the bitter actuality. . . . [This event] is given prominent place as the climax of the tragic fall of the nation.

indigenous one. In the passage with which we began this chapter, Deutero-Isaiah writes about Cyrus II of Persia:

> Thus says YHWH to his anointed, to Cyrus [כהאמר יהוה למשיחו לכורש; OG Οὕτως λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῷ χριστῷ μου Κύρῳ], whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, YHWH, the god of Israel, who call you by your name. 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." (Isa 45:1–4)

Deutero-Isaiah's use of "anointed" here is purely figurative, because Cyrus of Persia will not have undergone any Judahite oil ritual. Cyrus is, by the prophet's lights, the anointed of YHWH because he effects what the prophet considers the will of YHWH—namely, the toppling of the neo-Babylonian power and the return of the deported Judahites to the homeland.[84] *Mirabile dictu*, the messiah is a gentile.

Messiahs within and without the Hebrew Bible

Thus far ritual anointing in the Hebrew Bible. As noted earlier, a great deal of post-World War II scholarship has insisted loudly that none of this is "messianic" in a certain maximalist sense stipulated by the scholars who make this point. But this seems to me obviously true, and therefore not worth repeating as if it were a significant conclusion. An equally true and much more interesting observation is that oftentimes Hellenistic- and Roman-period messiah texts, too, fall short of the maximalist sense of "messiah" invented by scholars, effectively just reproducing the idiom of the Hebrew Bible unchanged. Such cases undermine the bright line drawn by scholars between biblical

84. See Williamson, *Variations on a Theme*, 6: "The single most important conclusion to be drawn is the negative point that the agent of the anticipated restoration will not be an Israelite or Davidic king. But then, in Deutero-Isaiah we should not expect it to be": Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55* (AB; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 248–49:

> Cyrus is introduced at once and surprisingly, even shockingly, as Yahweh's anointed one. . . . What this implies in concrete historical terms is that Cyrus has taken the place of the Davidic royal house, at least for the time being, an affirmation that we suspect not all of the prophet's audience would have agreed with.

and postbiblical usage.[85] We may cite several cases to illustrate the point. One instructive example, which features prominently in the narrative of 1–2 Samuel, is the scene of messianic recognition or identification. The crucial assumption of the narrative is that there is such a person as a משיח יהוה, an anointed of YHWH, a king sanctioned by the deity, on which assumption, in several scenes, one character in the story recognizes another character as that figure.[86] Thus, for instance, when the prophet Samuel meets the sons of Jesse, we read, "When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely YHWH's messiah is before him [אך נגד יהוה משיחו; OG ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐνώπιον κυρίου χριστὸς αὐτοῦ]' " (1 Sam 16:6). Or later, when David, hiding from Saul in the wilderness of En-gedi, passes up the opportunity to kill his pursuer, he says, "Some bade me kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is the YHWH's messiah [כי־משיח יהוה הוא; OG ὅτι χριστὸς κυρίου οὗτός ἐστιν]' " (1 Sam 24:10).

Modern interpreters have pointed out that the "messiah" or "anointed" in these stories is simply the divinely approved king, not any kind of mythical archetype. And this is clearly the case. But if we look ahead to messiah texts from the Roman period, ostensibly the heyday of the messiah-as-mythical-archetype, we find scenes of recognition or identification very much like those in 1–2 Samuel. One such is the scene in the Gospel of Mark in which the disciple Peter identifies Jesus: "He asked them, 'Who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the messiah [σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός]' " (Mark 8:29; and cf. Matt 16:16; Luke 9:20). Another is the scene in Yerushalmi Ta'anit in which R. Akiba recognizes Shimon bar Kosiba: "R. Shimon b. Yohai taught: My teacher Akiba used to expound, *A star* [כוכב] *goes out from Jacob* [Num 24:17], 'Koziba [כוזבא] goes out from Jacob.' When R. Akiba saw Bar Koziba, he said, 'This is the king messiah [דין הוא מלכא משיחא]' " (y. *Ta'an.* 4:8 [68d]; and cf. *Lam. Rab.* 2:2 §4).[87]

85. A point well made by Clements, "Messianic Hope in the Old Testament." See also, in this connection, Hindy Najman, "The Vitality of Scripture within and beyond the 'Canon,'" *JSJ* 43 (2012) 497–518; Mroczek, "Hegemony of the Biblical."

86. On these scenes, see Noth, "Office and Vocation," 240–42.

87. This and other formal parallels between Jesus stories and Bar Kosiba stories are a consequence not of the dependence of one upon the other (contra J. C. O'Neill, "The Mocking of Bar Kokhba and of Jesus," *JSJ* 31 [2000]: 39–41), but of the dependence of both upon scriptural precedents.

About these Roman-period texts, one might say, and many have said, that the title משיח or χριστός here no longer means what it did in the Deuteronomistic History, that whereas Samuel is merely identifying Eliab as the king-in-waiting, R. Akiba is identifying Bar Kosiba as the eschatological redeemer. But this is by no means obvious,[88] and in any case it begs the question. If we want to say that the Gospels and the Talmud use "messiah" in a technical, eschatological sense, then we owe an account of how they can predicate messiahship of flesh-and-blood, historical persons just as easily as the Deuteronomistic History can. Or perhaps we are better off doing away with the hypothesis of a late, eschatological technical term altogether. Of course, words are not semantically static; they accumulate various shades of meaning with the passage of time and use.[89] But in the case of משיח or χριστός, there is no *geistesgeschichtlich* flip of a switch from an earlier, Israelite, mundane sense ("anointed one") to a later, *spätjüdisch*, eschatological sense ("messiah").[90] Aharon Oppenheimer makes just this point in relation to Bar Kosiba and, *mutatis mutandis*, to R. Judah the Patriarch.[91] Oppenheimer writes, "Just as the *nasi* or the exilarch was not expected to bring the Final Redemption, so it is likely that when Rabbi Aqiva called Bar Kokhva 'the King Messiah,' he really intended to stress Bar Kokhva's status as king, and the term 'Messiah' should be understood simply in its original Hebrew meaning of 'Anointed.' Calling Bar Kokhva by this term is then not very different from the coronations of biblical times when the kings were

88. Thus, for example, Leo Mildenberg, *The Coinage of the Bar Kokhba War* (Zurich: Schweizerische Numismatische Gesellschaft, 1984) understandably but mistakenly refuses to classify Shimon bar Kosiba as a messiah, on the (true) premise A that Bar Kosiba was a political and military authority, and the (false) premise B that such persons may not be called "messiahs."

89. See Regine Eckardt et al., eds., *Words in Time: Diachronic Semantics from Different Points of View* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

90. Thus rightly Clements, "Messianic Hope in the Old Testament," 16: "We are no longer faced with a simple and clear-cut contrast between one original literal meaning and a later expanded, or spiritual, one"; and Peter Schäfer, "Bar Kokhba and the Rabbis," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered* (ed. Peter Schäfer; TSAJ 100; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). 1–22 at 17:

> I do not have any problem with attaching the label "Messianic" to Bar Kokhba and his rebellion, and I do not quite understand the trend in much of the relevant scholarship to distinguish neatly between merely a "down-to-earth" military leader/warrior on the one hand and a utopian figure with "divine and supernatural qualities" on the other.

91. On both Bar Kosiba and R. Judah the Patriarch, see my discussion in Chapter 3 in this volume.

anointed with oil."[92] Not very different, indeed. Of course 1 Samuel does not attest the putative late, technical sense of "messiah," but then, neither do the Gospel or the Talmud passages. If our goal is to understand any of these texts on their own terms, then the putative late, technical sense of "messiah" is simply a red herring.

Or consider the case of Jewish psalm literature from the Second-Temple period. The biblical Psalter (both MT and OG) is, together with 1–2 Samuel, the foremost source of "messiah" references in the Tanakh (see Pss 2; 18; 20; 28; 84; 89; 105; 132). With the lone exception of Ps 105:15 (OG Ps 104:15) (=1 Chr 16:22), which figures the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as prophets (נביאים, προφῆται) (cf. Gen 20:7) and anointed ones (משיחים, χριστοί), all of the numerous biblical "messiah" psalms are royal psalms, where משיח is a title of the Judahite or Israelite king.[93] Thus, for instance, Ps 2, which has as strong a claim as any to be a coronation hymn, a poem for the occasion of the installation of a new monarch:[94] "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against YHWH and against his messiah [על־יהוה ועל־משיחו; OG κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ]. . . . [YHWH] will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.' I will tell of the decree of YHWH: He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you' " (Ps 2:2, 5–7). Here, then, the "messiah" or "anointed" (2:2) is the sitting king, or rather, the king who is being installed on the occasion of the psalm's performance.

Other royal "messiah" psalms have different genres and *Sitzen im Leben*, but they serve equally well to illustrate our point. Psalm 132, for instance, is an encomium on the house of David and on the state-sponsored shrine to YHWH on Mount Zion.[95] The psalmist wishes that both institutions should exist in perpetuity, invoking certain oracles of YHWH to this effect

92. Aharon Oppenheimer, "Leadership and Messianism in the Time of the Mishnah," in *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (ed. Henning Graf Reventlow; JSOTSup 243; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 157.

93. See Gillingham, "Messiah in the Psalms."

94. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004 [1962]), 1:62–63; Gillingham, "Messiah in the Psalms," 212–13; William M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69–70.

95. See Gillingham, "Messiah in the Psalms," 216–17; Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 32–33.

(see 2 Sam 7; and cf. Ps 89).[96] He writes, "YHWH has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation: 'This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. . . . There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed [שם אצמיח קרן לדוד ערכתי נר למשיחי; OG ἐκεῖ ἐξανατελῶ κέρας τῷ Δαυιδ, ἡτοίμασα λύχνον τῷ χριστῷ μου]'" (Ps 132:13–17). Here, again, the משיח of the psalm is the king from the house of David, although not, in this case, a particular office-holder but rather the office itself. The phrase "prepare a lamp for the messiah" means that the deity endorses the current dynasty against would-be usurpers, whether foreign or domestic. Thus, "messiah" in the Psalms, like "Caesar" in the early Roman Empire, can signify not just the current incumbent but the institution, including successors yet to come.

Now compare the first-century BCE *Psalms of Solomon*, a *locus classicus* for modern theories of early Jewish messianism.[97] This corpus of 18 psalms, attested in Greek and Syriac but possibly going back to a Hebrew *Vorlage*,[98] gives a pious interpretation of the turbulent events in Judea in the mid first century BCE: the siege of Jerusalem by Pompey and the end of a century of Hasmonean rule (cf. Josephus, *War* 1.131–58).[99] All eighteen psalms include pleas that God will intervene to resolve matters to the psalmist's satisfaction. Two psalms, in particular, ask God to do so by appointing a legitimate χριστός (rendering משיח, if there was indeed a Hebrew *Vorlage*), an indigenous king from the house of David. Thus *Ps. Sol.* 17 prays: "See, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, at the time which you choose, O God, to rule over Israel your servant. . . . He shall be a righteous king, taught by God, over them, and there shall be no injustice in his days in their midst, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord's messiah [βασιλεὺς αὐτῶν χριστὸς

96. See J. J. M. Roberts, "The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition," in idem, *The Bible and Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 313–30; idem, "Zion in the Theology of the Davidic-Solomonic Empire," in *The Bible and Ancient Near East*, 331–47; Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David*, 44–46.

97. See, for example, Schurer-Vermes, *History*, 2:503: "The figure of the messianic King is encountered in fuller colour and sharper outline in the Psalms of Solomon"; also Klausner, *Messianic Idea*, 317–24; Collins, *Scepter*, 52–60; Fitzmyer, *One Who Is to Come*, 115–17; and many others.

98. Thus the majority view, but it may be that the Greek text is the original, as recently argued by Jan Joosten, "Reflections on the Original Language of the Psalms of Solomon," in *The Psalms of Solomon: Language, History, Theology* (ed. Eberhard Bons and Patrick Pouchelle; EJL 40; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 2015), 31–47.

99. On the historical background, see Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*; and the essays in Bons and Pouchelle, eds., *Psalms of Solomon*.

κυρίου]" (*Ps. Sol.* 17:21, 32).[100] And similarly *Ps. Sol.* 18: "May God cleanse Israel for the day of pity with blessing, for the day of election when he brings up his messiah [ἐν ἀνάξει χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ]. Happy are those who shall live in those days, to see the good things of the Lord, which he will perform for the coming generation. Under the rod of discipline of the Lord's messiah in fear of his God [ὑπὸ ῥάβδον παιδείας χριστοῦ κυρίου ἐν φόβῳ θεοῦ αὐτοῦ], in wisdom of spirit and of righteousness and strength" (*Ps. Sol.* 18:5–7).[101] *Psalms of Solomon* is writing centuries after the fall of the house of David, so of course by χριστός the psalmist does not mean a particular, incumbent Judahite king—there being no such person. By χριστός, the psalmist means, roughly, the office of the Judahite king, which he eagerly hopes will soon be occupied once again. Yes, this usage points to the future rather than present, but so does the prayer of Ps 132 that YHWH will ensure the franchise of the house of David in perpetuity. We could create a difference by calling *Pss. Sol.* 17–18 eschatological, but what is eschatology if not just another word for the future?[102]

One more example. There is a less familiar but no less important cluster of biblical משיח texts in the Priestly Torah, in the protocols for sacrifices in Lev 1–7 (Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:15). In these texts, משיח is used not as a substantive ("anointed one") but as an adjective with כהן, "priest," thus "the anointed priest."[103] For example, the instructions for the sin offering for the priest are as follows:

> If it is the anointed priest [הכהן המשיח; LXX ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς ὁ κεχρισμένος] who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer for the sin which

100. Trans. mod. from NETS.

101. Trans. mod. from NETS.

102. It is standard, of course, to stipulate that eschatology signifies only the very last things, which is etymologically precise, but artificial and ill-suited for many of our primary texts. On this issue, see John Barton, *Oracles of God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986), 214–23; Saebo, "Messianism and Eschatology." Gillingham, "Messiah in the Psalms," 210, writes, "The future the psalmists point to, even in postexilic times, appears to be that of the present or the next generation, rather than any great and golden age breaking in from beyond." Yes, but, first, the same is true of *Psalms of Solomon* and many other Roman-period messiah texts, and, second, the notional distinction between the next generation and the golden age is frequently collapsed in the primary sources. Thus rightly Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (London: Lutterworth, 1955 [German original, 1948]), 37: "The difference between the 'cultic' and the 'eschatological' interpretations of the Enthronement Psalms is not very great."

103. On this P material, see Deborah W. Rooke, "Kingship as Priesthood: The Relationship between the High Priesthood and the Monarchy," in *King and Messiah*, 198–206, here 199:

> Of P's seven references to the high priest as "anointed," four of them come in the context of his officiation on behalf of the community as a whole . . . thereby apparently underlining the correspondence of the high priesthood with the monarchy as a vocational position that is vital for the well-being of the whole sacral community.

> he has committed a young bull without blemish to YHWH for a sin offering. He shall bring the bull to the door of the tent of meeting before YHWH, and lay his hand on the head of the bull, and kill the bull before YHWH. And the anointed priest [הכהן המשיח; LXX ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ χριστός] shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting; and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before YHWH in front of the veil of the sanctuary. (Lev 4:3–6)[104]

In this context, the כהן המשיח is the high priest, in particular (thus the Greek translator's choice of ἀρχιερεύς for כהן in v. 3). The basic participial sense of משיח remains live, so that the LXX can use either the standard equivalency χριστός (v. 5) or the perfect-tense form κεχρισμένος (v. 3). These instructions for "the anointed priest" either presuppose or are presupposed by the narrative of the consecration by anointing of Aaron and his sons in Lev 8–9.[105] This P material purports to legislate for the cult of YHWH in the wilderness tent-shrine and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Solomon's temple. If P was working in the Persian period,[106] then its purpose may have been to legislate for the cult of YHWH in the Second Temple. In any case, the כהן המשיח or ἱερεὺς ὁ χριστός of Lev 1–7 is an officiant in the liturgy, not an eschatological savior figure of any sort. And yet, he is a template for some Roman-period messiahs.

1QSa (=1Q28a), the much-discussed Rule of the Congregation (*Serekh Ha-'Edah*) from Qumran, gives instructions for a ritual meal to be attended by the anointed high priest, the other sons of Aaron, the messiah of Israel, and the chiefs of the clans of Israel. The text has sometimes been called "the Messianic Rule" on account of its *dramatis personae* and its stated time frame ("This the Rule for all the congregation of Israel in the last days" [1QSa 1:1]),[107] but in terms of content the text is actually very quotidian. The relevant part of column 2 reads as follows:

> When God engenders (the Priest-) Messiah [יוליד אל את המשיח], he shall come with them [at] the head of the whole congregation of Israel with all [his brethren, the sons] of Aaron the Priests [בני אהרון הכוהנים], [those called] to the assembly, the men of renown; and they shall sit [before him, each man] in the order of his dignity. And then [the Mess]iah of Israel [משיח ישראל] shall [come], and the chiefs of the [clans of Israel] shall sit before him, [each] in the order of his dignity. . . . And [when] they shall gather for the common [tab]le, to eat and [to drink] new wine, when the common table shall be set for eating and the new wine [poured] for drinking, let no man extend his hand over the firstfruits of bread and wine before the Priest [הכוהן]; for [it is he] who shall bless the firstfruits of bread and wine, and shall be the first [to extend] his hand over the bread. Thereafter, the Messiah of Israel [משיח ישראל] shall extend his hand over the bread, [and] all the congregation of the Community [shall utter a] blessing. (1QSa 2:11–21)[108]

Much of the discussion of this text has centered on the verb in the subordinate clause of the first sentence, which Vermes translates "engenders," reading יוליד, from the root ילד, "to beget." This reading is contestable on paleographic grounds, but both early and recent interpreters have tended to support it.[109] For our purposes, it does not matter. The important thing is the cast of characters and the scene. We have, first, the messiah of Israel, who is not a priest but a lay ruler; he is coordinated with the chiefs of the clans of Israel. And we have, second, the (high) priest, who is coordinated with his brothers, the sons of Aaron, the priests. He is not here called the messiah of Aaron (see 1QS 9:9–11; and cf. CD 12:22–13:1; 14:18–19; 19:10–11; 19:33–20:1); but he is apparently identical with the messiah begotten (or sent) by God in line 1. Hence Vermes's gloss "(Priest-) Messiah" is on the right track. Because we have here both a (priest) messiah and the messiah of Israel, it seems to me that 1QSa presupposes the Qumranite motif of the two messiahs of Aaron and Israel.[110]

104. Trans. mod. from RSV.

105. For example, Lev 8.12: "[Moses] poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head, and anointed him, to consecrate him [וימשח אתו לקדשו; LXX ἔχρισεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτόν]."

106. Which question remains much disputed. See, for example, Joseph Blenkinsopp, "An Assessment of the Alleged Pre-exilic Date of the Priestly Material in the Pentateuch," *ZAW* 108 (1996): 495–518; and compare Jacob Milgrom, "The Antiquity of the Priestly Source: A Reply to Joseph Blenkinsopp," *ZAW* 111 (1999): 10–22.

107. Thus, for example, Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (7th ed.; London: Penguin, 2011). Likewise Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Eschatological Community of the *Serekh Ha-'Edah*," *PAAJR* 51 (1984): 105–29, here 105:

> The text describes the nature of the eschatological community which is structured to reflect the ultimate purity and perfection following the dawning of the eschaton. In the present age, the sect's way of life was structured to accord as much as possible with their aspirations for the future. *Serekh Ha-'Edah* is a Messianic document picturing the ideal constitution of the sect in the end of days.

108. Text ed. D. Barthélemy in D. Barthélemy and J. T. Milik, eds., *Qumran Cave I* (DJD 1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 107–18; trans. Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*.

109. On this issue, see Collins, *Scepter*, 81–82.

110. Thus rightly Collins, *Scepter*, 81–82; see also Johannes Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte aus Qumran* (WUNT 2.104; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 33–34.

In this Rule text, their job is to preside (the priest messiah at the head, the messiah of Israel his attaché) at the ritual meal in the last days.[111]

Morton Smith comments on this and several other related Qumran messiah texts: "There are a number of passages [in the Scrolls] where the word 'messiah' does appear, but refers to some anointed functionary who may have nothing whatever to do with the End, and in any case owes his title to a position quite other than that normally, in modern usage, called messianic."[112] This is to the point. In my view, 1QSa does envision an ideal future state of affairs (which is to say, eschatology)—a state of affairs that includes at least one and probably two persons called messiah. But the particular role that 1QSa assigns to these messiahs is not, say, descending on the clouds to Mount Zion or slaying the wicked with swords from their mouths, but rather presiding at a properly ordered temple meal. In fact, the *mise en scène* has a great deal in common with Lev 1–7. As Smith notes, it is not the kind of thing that we moderns usually call messianic, but it is messianic by Qumran standards and, for that matter, by the standards of the Priestly writer in the Pentateuch.

We might adduce still more examples, but this is enough to make the point. The post-World War II scholarly axiom that in the Hebrew Bible we find mundane "anointed ones" but after the Hebrew Bible eschatological "messiahs" is, well, partly true. To the extent that it rebutted the grand old triumphalist accounts of messianic prophecy (Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Briggs, and the like), it did a valuable service. But as an analytical tool, it is virtually useless. If we set aside, as we must do, the apologetic and counterapologetic projects handed down to us by our disciplinary forebears, we can see myriad fine points of continuity and change among messiah texts from the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.[113] As Peter Schäfer has commented, "We are not dealing here with evolutionary stages which can be derived 'genetically' from one another, but with themes or motifs which are

111. See Émile Puech, "Préséance sacerdotale et Messie-Roi dans la Règle de la Congrégation (1QSa ii 11–22)," *RevQ* 16 (1995): 351–65; Zimmermann, *Messianische Texte*, 26–34.

112. Smith, "What Is Implied," 67.

113. As rightly highlighted by the mid-twentieth-century Scandinavian Myth and Ritual School (especially Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah*), about whom John Barton writes:

> In the Scandinavian tradition, as I see it, there is a concern not to lose sight of the wood by concentrating too much on the trees, to avoid the minimalism which might lead an English-speaking or German-speaking critic to note that the developed Messiah concept is not yet present in pre- and most post-exilic literature, and so to declare the idea simply post-biblical. (Barton, "Messiah in Old Testament Theology," 372)

in many ways intertwined and emphasized differently in different periods."[114] And again, "They are to be described adequately only as the dynamic interaction of various and changing configurations within different historical constellations."[115] This is every bit as true of those messiah texts that are now part of the Bible as it is of those that are not.[116]

Conclusion

When is a messiah not a messiah? The answer, according to much of the past half century of research, is when it appears in the Hebrew Bible. Relative to the theologically loaded history of interpretation up to that point, this judgment was a welcome and perhaps necessary corrective. Against the dominant narrative of the smooth evolution of a single messianic idea from premonarchic Israel to a magnificent acme (whether at the time of Jesus, of R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, of Bar Kokhba, of Theodor Herzl, or otherwise), post-World War II scholars rightly pointed out that משיח in the Hebrew Bible does not mean all that it means in many Roman-period and later texts. But if this was a welcome corrective, it also introduced seven other spirits more wicked than the first, or, if not more wicked, at least wicked in a different way. Where before there was precisely one very capacious concept "messiah," now there were precisely two: the mundane, political, ancient Israelite "anointed one" and the *spätjüdisch*, mythical, eschatological "messiah." Hebrew Bible scholars secured their disciplinary jurisdiction over the former at the cost of accepting uncritically the status of the latter.

Perhaps it was a cost worth paying, but it was not necessary to pay it. The conspicuous flaw at the heart of the dominant, Mowinckelian approach is the ubiquitous appeal to a supposed late, technical sense of the word "messiah." In Mowinckel's formulation: "As a title and name for the eschatological king, Messiah does not occur in the Old Testament, but appears first in the literature of later Judaism."[117] Likewise Roberts: "Nowhere in the Old Testament has the term משיח acquired its later technical sense as an eschatological

114. Schäfer, "Diversity and Interaction," 20.

115. Schäfer, "Diversity and Interaction," 35.

116. Thus rightly Clements, "Messianic Hope in the Old Testament," 15–16:

> The type of interpretation of these royal prophecies which is found in later Judaism and in the New Testament does not stand isolated and distinct from what has preceded it. Rather it marks the end of a long process of what we have come to describe as "inner-biblical exegesis."

Except that these late Second Temple-period texts do not, in fact, mark the end of the process.

117. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 7.

title."[118] And Fitzmyer: "It is significant that the title משיח does not appear, for it is still too early (520–518 B.C.) for 'Messiah' in the narrow sense."[119] All point to an ostensibly late technical term "messiah," the status of which they take for granted, and the burden of the argument is simply to show that none of the biblical instances of the word משיח means that. Already in 1959, Morton Smith identified and deconstructed this methodological strategem: "Faced with this embarrassment of messianic riches, the Christian exegete will probably try to define the object of his interest as '*the* Messiah'—the one whose coming is to be the major event in the End. But this brings us to the fact that just as there are messiahs without Ends, so there are Ends without messiahs."[120]

In other words, the supposed late, technical sense of messiah is an entirely artificial construct. This might perhaps be excusable, but it is not even a well-formed artificial construct. David Reimer, in a passing comment in an essay on the subject, puts his finger on this issue. Reimer writes, "We agree that 'full blown messianism' (we all know intuitively what we mean by that) is not to be found until very late in the day."[121] Just so. In practice, ostensibly, we all know intuitively what we mean by full-blown messianism, and we all agree that it is not in the Bible. But what exactly do we mean? Intuition can of course be deceptive, and in this case, our intuition that we know what we mean is, in fact, deceptive. Not that we do not articulate definitions; indeed, there are scores of formal definitions of "messiah" on offer, some of which overlap with some others at various points.[122] But such definitions, almost without exception, are entirely arbitrary. They take the form: Let "messiah" mean *x*. They are stipulated rather than defended. We are of course free to stipulate such definitions, but we should recognize that to do so is to beg the question.

Interestingly, at one key moment in his own argument, Mowinckel comes very close to conceding this criticism. He writes, "All the genuinely Messianic passages in the Old Testament date from the time after the fall of the monarchy and the destruction of the Israelite states. Of those passages which are commonly held to be Messianic, only Isa. vii and ix, 1ff. can with certainty be

118. Roberts, "Old Testament's Contribution," 51.

119. Fitzmyer, *One Who Is to Come*, 52.

120. Smith, "What Is Implied," 68. Compare the exact opposite statement of Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 8: "An eschatology without a Messiah is conceivable, but not a Messiah apart from a future hope." Smith, who has the better side of this argument, does not indicate whether he is responding to Mowinckel, who had written just a few years prior.

121. David J. Reimer, "Old Testament Christology," in *King and Messiah*, 380–400 at 384.

122. See the discussion in Chapter 1 in this volume.

referred to the pre-exilic age, but they are not Messianic in the strict sense. This may seem to the reader to be a *petitio principii*, but it is not."[123] But no explanation follows. Mowinckel denies the charge of question-begging, but he does not defend himself from it. In fact, his argument at this point is a textbook example of *petitio principii*. The whole thing hangs on how one defines "genuinely messianic" or "messianic in the strict sense," which Mowinckel does literally on page 1. The balance of the book, although it is a gold mine of incisive exegetical observations, is preoccupied with showing systematically that no preexilic text fits the definition stipulated on the first page. Mowinckel succeeds in proving his thesis, but the thesis itself is, strictly speaking, trivial.

James Muilenburg, giving due praise to *He That Cometh* in a review in *JBL* in 1957, wrote, "Once the definitions of Mowinckel are accepted, it is difficult to resist the force and persuasiveness of his arguments."[124] Indeed. "Once the definitions of Mowinckel are accepted." Muilenburg, for his part, is happy to accept Mowinckel's definitions and thus all that follows, but as I have argued in this chapter, there are good reasons for challenging Mowinckel's definitions. And if we do so, then the resultant picture turns out to be quite different. We can see, with Mowinckel, how Hellenistic- and Roman-period Jewish writers added creative new layers of mythology to their source texts. But we can also see how they often reused or imitated those source texts, adding little or nothing in the way of innovation.[125] In these latter cases, the difference between an ancient Israelite "anointed one" and an early Jewish "messiah" is effectively nil. This may be a disappointment for the historian of ideas, but it is an essential piece of evidence for the exegete.

For the exegete, it is entirely possible and methodologically far preferable to describe the various ancient uses of the word "messiah" and the pertinent differences among them without artificially privileging one as the ostensibly real, proper, strict, fully evolved definition.[126] We can appreciate how, in their historical context, interpreters like Mowinckel made a genuine advance over

123. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 20.

124. Muilenburg, review of Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, in *JBL* 76 (1957): 244.

125. Thus rightly Smith, "What Is Implied," 68: "The state of affairs in the [Qumran] scrolls is a heritage from the OT and a parallel to the pseudepigrapha and the rabbinic literature."

126. Thus rightly Bentzen, *King and Messiah*, 37:

> When we know what we mean, and are sure that we shall not be misunderstood by readers and listeners, it will be much more in tune with the material which we have to investigate and describe to use the expressions "Messiah" and "Messianic" of a figure which changes through the ages, but still retains certain essential characteristic features even through changed circumstances.

the powerful legacy of interpreters like Hengstenberg.[127] But it is no credit to us twenty-first-century interpreters if we carry on repeating Mowinckel's point for emphasis, as many of us continue to do. We ought to have found more interesting things to say by now. To be fair, some have found more interesting things to say. (May their tribe increase.) The messiah texts in the Hebrew Bible are fascinating in their own right and historically generative out of all proportion to their small number. Sixty years after *He That Cometh*, there is no longer any point in showing what these texts do not mean. Whatever worthwhile research remains lies in showing what they do mean.

127. Again, rightly, Bentzen, *King and Messiah*, 37: " That some people want to restrict the word 'Messiah' to the Saviour of Eschatology is based only on a praiseworthy desire for clarity of expression."

3

Messiahs Born and Made

WRITING NEAR THE end of the first century CE, the author of the Gospel of Matthew takes from his source and revises a curious dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees in which he asks them, "What do you think about the messiah? Whose son is he [τίνος υἱός ἐστιν]?" to which the Pharisees respond, quite sensibly, "David's" (Matt 22:42). Jesus objects to this answer, however, with a dexterous interpretation of Psalm 110, suggesting that the messiah is not the son of David at all but, perhaps, the son of God (Matt 22:43–45; cf. Mark 12:35–37).[1] Some three centuries later, working perhaps not far from where Matthew wrote his Gospel, the editors of the Talmud Yerushalmi relate a story about a Jew living in Israel during the late first century CE who one day receives news both that the temple has been destroyed and that the king messiah has been born. The Jew responds by questioning the Arab who brought the news: "The Jew asked, 'What is his name?' 'Menahem,' he said. 'And what is his father's name [ומה שמיה דאבוי]?' he asked. 'Hezekiah,' he said. 'Where is he from?' he asked. 'From the royal city, Bethlehem in Judah,' he said" (*y. Ber.* 2:4 [5a]).[2] Just as Jesus in Matthew asks the Pharisees, "Whose son is the messiah?" so the Jew in *y. Ber.* 2:4 asks the Arab, "What is the name of the messiah's father?" In these texts, the issue of the ancestry of the messiah—Whose son is he?—is at the forefront. For them, at least part of what makes the

1. This passage is discussed later in this chapter.

2. Trans. Himmelfarb, "Mother of the Messiah"; text per Peter Schäfer and Hans-Jürgen Becker, eds., *Synopse zum Talmud Yerushalmi* (7 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991–2001).