

5: The Anointed of the Lord

Jon Garvey explains why, when it comes to political leaders, it's best to let God choose!

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The kings of Israel create a paradox. When the nation first asks for a king, under Samuel, the prophet is told it is because they have rejected the Lord himself as king¹. Yet, as we shall see, the anointed king becomes the central focus of God's salvation plan. How is this explained?

When Israel entered Canaan under Joshua, their enemies melted away before them and they had a land, complete with cities and crops, to occupy. They had God's presence and blessing to protect them from their neighbours and prosper them, and God's Torah to teach them how to live. So why would they need politicians?

The book of Judges gives the answer – sin. A vicious cycle is described in ch2. After Joshua's generation dies, the people soon turn from Yahweh to the local deities. He punishes them by handing them over to enemies. When they cry out to him he sends charismatic leaders called "judges" who rescue them and order their affairs. But after the judge dies, the whole cycle begins again. The Lord is "very angry" with Israel for violating their Covenant².

Immediately we see the problem with Moses' Covenant – the people. They are still sinners. Israel is rebellious, but only because all men are. They prove that God can give us everything, including sacrifices to forgive sin, but our sinful hearts will still turn against him.

We see the cycle played out through Judges. The moral ambiguity of the stories is deliberate: the land of promise has become a mess. At several points towards the end the author suggests why: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit³." These words end the book.

So when the people ask the last Judge, Samuel, for a king the Lord's reply is not so much that their request is rebellious, but that the necessity proves their rebellious hearts. They can't keep the Covenant unless a godly leader fights their battles for them, including the battle against sin.

They don't see it that way, of course.



PHOTO: PA

Every monarch has a Monarch – the purpose of (godly) rule is to the end that 'His name alone is exalted'

Sinners are too blind even to see their need. They just want to have a king like the other nations. So God gives them Saul, who fits their job description – tall, handsome and impressive⁴. He fails dismally just because he is like the kings of the other nations: faithless like his people. What is needed is not a man of the people, but a man of God. This explains the anointing of David, not the obvious choice⁵, but chosen by God in advance and "a man after the Lord's own heart"⁶.

David's leadership is characterised by dependence on God rather than himself. His first victory over Goliath shows this⁷. It is not an exemplary tale of the victory of faith, but an example of a faithful leader turning Israel's failure into victory⁸. Trust in the king who trusts in God.

David's early reign is like a microcosm of God's Covenant blessings. He gains a secure capital in the land⁹, personal fruitfulness¹⁰, rest from his enemies¹¹ and the blessing of God's presence¹². At this point, he develops the godly idea of building a temple. But God has better ideas.

The fifth Covenant – with David

The Covenant is found in 2 Samuel 7.1-17. When Nathan reports God's words to David, a wonderful word-play gently



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the covenants of God

reminds him of their true relationship. David wanted to build a house (temple) for Yahweh – but it is Yahweh who will build a house (dynasty) for him¹³. This, once more, is a Covenant of grace. It is not given because of David's righteousness, but because God has chosen him¹⁴. He will make his name great (echoes of Abraham's promise).

But though David is the mediator, the promise is given on behalf of others, following his death. Firstly it is for the sake of Israel, so that they may at last inherit the blessing¹⁵. But it is also on behalf of one of his offspring, who will be the one to build God's house, and whose throne will be established for ever. He will be God's son who, even if disciplined, will never be rejected like Saul. David's dynasty and kingdom will last forever¹⁶.

Effectively, this unconditional Covenant is underpinning the conditional Covenant of Sinai, for how can Israel perish utterly if David's kingdom is to be everlasting? David has a better promise than his nation – though no better, notice, than his ancestor Abraham¹⁷.

Israel (and careless readers!) no doubt expected this to be fulfilled in Solomon, who did indeed reign in peace and build the Jerusalem temple. But Bible history refutes that idea. 2 Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are largely written to show how Israel's kings failed to fulfil the Covenant. And yet God maintained it, developing the hope of the Branch, who would deliver what David and his successors could not. As Isaac only foreshadowed the true seed, so Solomon prefigured the true anointed Son of David – Messiah!

A brief history of the kings

David is the archetypal man of war who wins peace for Israel, a warrior but a writer of psalms. Yet his personal failure with Bathsheba, though forgiven, brings God's judgement that conflict will never depart from his house¹⁸. Solomon's reign is the other side of the coin – a golden age of peace, prosperity, wisdom and glory. Yet he falls into idolatry, and because of it the Lord tears away all but one tribe.

The northern kingdom defects to a

usurper, who immediately and permanently corrupts their worship. Dynasties come and go, and before long Ahab has even tried to replace the God of Israel with Baal. Only the Lord's prophets postpone disaster, but with no Davidic king there is never any true reformation. After only two hundred years God summons Assyria and Israel is scattered, fulfilling the penalties in the Sinai Covenant.

In Judah David's line continues against all odds. Some kings are evil, and some bring true reforms. But all have feet of clay, especially in failing to turn Israel from idolatry, which becomes endemic and leads to social injustice too. One hundred and thirty five years after Israel's destruction, Judah goes into Babylonian exile.

But David's line continues! Zerubbabel, the governor after the return from exile, is of David's house and the ancestor of Jesus, as Zechariah prophesies¹⁹.

Messiah foretold...and sent

Each King of Judah had the title "Son of God" in remembrance of the Covenant. The royal psalms, probably sung on royal occasions, described the king as he ought to be. But faithful people could see that none of the kings matched up to the description. The prophets saw this, and repeatedly spoke of the Shepherd king who would finally come to save Israel. After the exile, under a succession of foreign rulers, the hope of Messiah grew to fever pitch in every section of Jewish society.

This is the world Jesus entered, Davidic Son of the Most High, given the throne of his father David, reigning over the house of Jacob forever, his kingdom never ending²⁰. Even now, he is building God's house of living stones²¹, with himself as the chief cornerstone²². He comes as the mediator of a New Covenant, which we will look at next time.

1 1 Samuel 8.7
2 Judges 2.10-23
3 Judges 17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25
4 1 Samuel 9.2
5 1 Samuel 16.7-12
6 1 Samuel 13.14
7 1 Samuel 17.1-58
8 1 Samuel 17.52-53
9 2 Samuel 5.6-12
10 2 Samuel 5.13-16
11 2 Samuel 6.17-25; 7.1

12 2 Samuel 6.12-23
13 2 Samuel 7.11
14 2 Samuel 7.8-9
15 2 Samuel 7.10-11
16 2 Samuel 7.12-16
17 Genesis 17.7-8
18 2 Samuel 12.10
19 Zechariah 4.6-10
20 Luke 32-33
21 1 Peter 2.4
22 Isaiah 28.16

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