

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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THE DAVIDIC COVENANT II: CYRUS

Of all the covenants, the Cyrus Covenant is perhaps the most unusual. It occurs during an unstable time of Israel's history, when the nation is outside of the land. It centers around a unique redemptive deliverer, a gentile emperor. It comes just before the New Covenant, which sets the stage for every feature of Christ's covenant and explains many of the changes. It covers the time of the exile of Israel through the Gospels. No other covenant shows the fragmentation of the Old Covenant like this one, yet it is part of the Old Covenant system. Moreover, it is part of the Davidic Covenant.

The Anointed

There is no doubt that the Cyrus Covenant is a specific application of the Davidic Covenant. The most obvious proof is that God calls the gentile king, "His anointed" (Isaiah 45:1). That this is a Davidic title is unmistakable. The word "anointed" is originally used to set apart the priesthood (Exodus 28:41). It is an act that involves the pouring of oil upon the head and garments of the priests to symbolize the filling of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of consecration. Before the priest can enter God's presence, he must be set apart by the Spirit. Eventually, the act of anointing was applied to the prophet and the king. But it is important to note that anointing has to do with a priestly act.

The fact that anointing is finally applied to the king indicates a redemptive historical development. Due to the fall of man, priesthood and kingship were totally separated. Melchizedek was priest-king but these two offices were separated. The anointing of the king moves the offices of priest and king back toward each other without actually fusing them together. Only Christ can accomplish this. Nevertheless, the anointing of the king implies a priestly character to his office. Indeed, the Davidic king is the builder, protector, and rebuilder of the dwelling of God, the temple.

"Anointed" in its noun form, however, virtually never occurs until the time of the kings and especially David. With the great shepherd king, anointed becomes synonymous with Davidic kingship. When Samuel was sent to select David from his brothers, the prophet said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him" (1 Samuel 16:6). The reference is obviously to David, who became the anointed. After this introduction to the new anointed one, many other passages mention David with the same title (II Samuel 2:4,7; 5:3,17; 12:7; II Kings 9:3,6,12; 1 Chronicles 11:3; 14:8). It can be said of David and his successors that the phrase, "The anointed," is a Davidic title.

Perhaps the most focused citation to David as the Lord's anointed is in the Psalms. He is called the anointed but with an emphasis on another who is the real anointed, Christ Himself. Many Psalms use the designation, "the

anointed" (Psalms 20:6, 28:8, 132:17). One Psalm, however, stands out among all of the rest. It is given in full so that the relationship between the title, "anointed," and Davidic kingship will be in full view.

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (Psalm 2).

This Davidic Psalm is quite revealing. The king is called the "anointed." He is clearly a now and not yet kind of king. In one sense, the references point to David. As we saw in our last study, David is called God's "son" (II Samuel 7). He received this declaration from God in a way that no other had up to that point. Furthermore, consistent with Psalm 2 David was in conflict with the kings of the earth; he was a man of war and the kings of Canaan were in conflict with him (Psalm 2:2). The enemy rulers conspired against David. Even Saul identified with the antagonists against David. Yet, God definitely established David and his dynasty in the midst of the rulers of the world. Through this dynasty in the person of Solomon, the other ruler of the world had to sue for peace. In the words of Psalm 2, they had to, "Kiss the Son [of David] lest he be angry and they perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Psalm 2:12). David was the messianic king who fulfilled much of Psalm 2.

But, David did not fulfill all of Psalm 2. There is the not yet side to this Psalm. David was all of these things in the Psalm in modified or undeveloped form. Another is expected to come in history who will completely fulfill all of the designations, none other than Jesus Christ. The Lord Christ is the one who meets the ultimate resistance of the kings of the earth when Jew and Gentile conspire to have Him crucified. He was declared the only "begotten Son" (Hebrews 1). As such, he is given the "heathen for His inheritance" (Psalm 2:8), which means the kingdoms of this world are brought low in their attempt to oppose Christ.

They have no other choice but to "put their trust in Him" (Psalm 2:12).

Thus, the title, "The Anointed" is a messianic reference to Davidic kingship that points to Christ's eventual rule of the earth. Even when Saul, David's predecessor, was called the anointed, it is still a title of messianic kingship. In Saul's case, he failed to fulfill this designation and he showed himself to be like Adam. In terms of redemptive history, we see the familiar pattern of the failure of one prior to the success of the other. First Adam always appears before the Second Adam comes to deliver. Saul became the first Adam and David fulfilled the Second Adam. So, the "anointed" is never used of any other except a Davidic king, especially because of the unique sonship declarations attached to it that we have noted.

Cyrus

Now we come to the curious designation of Cyrus as, "The Lord's anointed," a title that makes him simultaneously a Davidic and a Messianic king. In both cases, there is a now and a not yet sense that point us to Christ as the true fulfillment.

Cyrus was like and unlike David. He was like David in that he was a political leader of a world power. He was a king. In one night he conquered Belshazzar just as David had defeated Goliath. The Gentile leader's rule led to the rebuilding of the temple in a similar way that David's kingship allowed for the building of the first temple. But, both men did not live to see that actual dedication of the temple. They started something that only their dynasties, successors, could finish.

Cyrus was unlike David. He was not of the tribe of Judah nor was he Jewish at all. David led a national power whereas Cyrus became a multi-national leader. In this regard, Cyrus was more of a fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in that it was said of Abraham, "He will become a father of many nations" (Genesis 15). In this final sense, we can begin to see how Cyrus pointed to Christ in spite of the discontinuities.

Cyrus was not the incarnation of God, nor did he have the Jewish lineage. But he was strikingly like Christ. He delivered the entire nation. He endorsed the establishment of a new temple in Jerusalem. He created a world kingdom of God, something that had never happened in the Old Covenant and could never occur until the New Covenant. In this regard, the Gentile ruler was more like the Davidic king than David; he more closely fulfilled the true messianic kingdom than David. Because he was more like Christ, he was a purer form of Davidic kingship. Thus, Cyrus was a Davidic king who anticipated Christ because of his similarity to David and Christ.

The Cyrus Covenant, therefore, is absolutely critical for an accurate understanding of the New Covenant. Perhaps the biggest mistakes of interpretation, especially in the prophetic sections, are made in this part of Scripture.

As we have seen in each of the covenants, a basic covenantal pattern repeats itself. This pattern, however, is a transformation of what has gone before. It is a covenant renewal and not strictly speaking a New Covenant because the transformation cannot come to completion under the emperor, whether Cyrus, Ahasuerus (Esther's husband), Artaxerxes, or Caesar. In each case, we learn of the failure of these great emperors to deliver the world from sin and judgment. This is the last great lesson before the coming of Christ, a lesson that will repeat itself in the destruction of the Roman Empire.

For our study, I turn to the specific covenant made with Cyrus, using it as a basis for our comprehension of God's covenant in this part of Scripture. The prophet Isaiah records the covenant for us. A quick summary of the ele-

ments of a covenant of grant as they have been demonstrated in II Samuel 7 will be helpful to see their relationship to the Cyrus Covenant as it is specified in Isaiah 45.1

Covenant of Grant

1. In the Covenant of Grant, the suzerain or "great king," on demonstration of the exceeding loyalty of the vassal king, may bestow on him the unconditional right of an enduring dynasty to rule over a particular city-state.
2. The establishment of a "father-son" relationship between the suzerain and the vassal (by means of a declarative adoption formula) creates a legal basis for the gift of an enduring dynasty, alongside the vassal's covenantal designation as "son" of the suzerain, he is also known as his "servant."
3. As part of ancient Near Eastern treaty formulary, the great king guarantees the protection of the vassal or his ruling heir by undertaking to annihilate a common enemy – provided the current ruler is loyal to the great king, and reports any evil word against the great king.
4. The suzerain undertakes to protect the people of the vassal by virtue of the suzerain's agreement with the vassal, though on occasion the suzerain may contract an agreement directly with the people of the vassal. In such an instance, the separate agreement between the suzerain and the people serves as the complement of the suzerain's (primary) agreement with the vassal.
5. In the Covenant of Grant, the curse formulary is directed against those who violate the rights of the vassal or his ruling descendants. If a vassal is himself disloyal, he will be disciplined by the great king, often to be replaced by an heir of the dynasty loyal to the great king.

When we turn to the unique period after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, we find the Davidic Covenant fulfilled in Cyrus. All of the parts of the Davidic Covenant are carried out through him.

Transcendence (Isaiah 45:1)

The Cyrus Covenant begins with a standard covenant formula, "Thus says the Lord to Cyrus" (Isaiah 45:1). This verse speaks of a new covenantal head, signaling the beginning of another covenant, this time with a Medo-Persian king who was made emperor of the world. Here is the most unique feature of this covenant. Up to this time, a world ruler of a true empire who kept his covenant with and Israel had never existed. Cyrus is the culmination of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in that he rules the world. He is different in that he keeps God's covenant for the covenant people. He leads them home when no one else will or can.

How do we know that Cyrus is a covenantal head? He is called the "anointed," literally the Could the text be any more clear? He is the redemptive deliverer, just as we have seen at the beginning of all of the covenants. Again, he fulfills all the preceding covenants, going beyond any of them at the same time.

Cyrus is utilized to re-create the world, fulfilling the Adamic Covenant. Notice the creation language in Isaiah 45. He is used by God to make a new world where he is king but he does not live in the land of the temple. He rules from a distance. He is a universal king but he does not ignore the temple. He represents rule bigger than any

1. A good summary of these, on which I am relying, is found in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration* by Abraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Saker Publishing, 1988), p. 158.

dominion Israel or the world had ever known. Yet, he did not have this of his own accord. He was given it by God. The point: He conveyed the sovereignty of God in a way that no Davidic king had ever communicated Yahweh's rule. In other words, if God sets up emperors of the world then He controls the world. Thus, in an unprecedented fashion, Cyrus demonstrated the sovereignty of God, covenantal headship, more than Noah, Abraham, David, or any of the covenantal heads to date.

Cyrus delivers the world from tyranny, fulfilling the Noahic Covenant. He was greatly outnumbered and faced an enemy that never expected to be defeated, just as Noah had. He conquered the Babylonians by his ability to manipulate the water around the city, just as Noah had emerged as the new leader of the world after the waters subsided. He drained off the water and took the city without "firing a shot," just as Noah had done with his ark.

Cyrus sets up a kingdom, a fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. He is told, "Whom I have taken by the right hand to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings" (45:1). He fulfilled what Israel could not. The sons of Abraham had conquered nations but they had never been able to have a multi-national kingdom. They could and did enter into covenants with the other nations, but they never created a covenant with all of the nations all at once. Cyrus did.

Cyrus led the people back to the land without entering himself, fulfilling the Mosaic Covenant. The Gentile leader initiates a second Exodus, judging by this description of what Yahweh did for him: "It is I who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!' And I will make your rivers dry" (Isaiah 44:27). Cyrus didn't get to take the people into the land, for there is no indication that he personally ever visited the land. He led Israel there but he did not go in. Cyrus became like a second Moses.

Cyrus, financed and commanded the rebuilding of the temple, fulfilling the Davidic Covenant. He is referred to in Davidic language when Isaiah says, "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'" (44:28). Like David, Cyrus is called God's "shepherd." Like the great king, Cyrus takes Jerusalem. Yet, unlike the man after God's own heart, he rebuilds God's house.

Thus, Cyrus is the new Adam, who sets the stage for the New Covenant.

— I Hierarchy (Isaiah 45:2 7) —

Cyrus is referred to by Isaiah in the language of sonship. God calls the emperor by to build God's house (44:28; 45:4), a characteristic of a Davidic son (II Samuel 7:1 1-14). Cyrus creates through the power of God what David could never do, a Davidic

As for a specific type of rule, Cyrus sets up a kingdom very similar to Moses'. He rules by and local leaders, just as Jethro had advised Moses to do. He rules through a de-centralized system with leaders such as Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The difference is that he is not a local Cyrus was a universal lord. He ruled from a distance analogous to the Sovereign God. He was not a local "god" like other national gods, as Israel had wanted. He was supposed to remind Israel of God had to break Israel

of its desire for a local in the form of a king. He had not wanted them to have a king like the world, a god such as Baal and so forth. He had wanted a shepherd-like-leader who would rule by wisdom and not might. Because Israel's kings kept turning away and turning the hearts of the people away, He had removed their rulers, even the Davidic kings. He gave them a universal lord to teach them

more effectively about His rule, often portrayed in the parables of Christ. Notice the number of parables having to do with the landlord (Matthew 21 :33-46; 22:1-14; 25:14-30). Jesus' time was still in the Cyrus covenant, except that the "Cyrus" of His day, Caesar, had become a covenant-breaker. The Cyrus Covenant had been corrupted by the Jews because they had not properly represented God and His covenant head, Cyrus. Eventually, the fallen Cyrus in the form of Pilate broke covenant by entering a covenant with the Jews to kill Christ, sentencing the Savior of the world, the true Lord, to death, which brought the Cyrus Covenant to an end forever. The fourth kingdom of Daniel came to an end (Daniel 2). Never again would there be a true empire. The "fifth kingdom," the kingdom of God, became the only truly universal kingdom.

Ethical Stipulations (45:8)

The law of the Cyrus Covenant, "righteousness," sounds very similar to the Mosaic Covenant. It came from the "heavens" above just as the law had been given from heaven to Moses (45:8). Yet, the righteousness of the Cyrus covenant lacked the to overcome the unrighteousness of the unbeliever. When Nehemiah rebuilds the city, marriage to unbelievers takes place. The righteous governor commands the believers to put away the foreign wives, in contrast to the Apostle Paul's admonition not to put away an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:14). The law was transformed by new

The movement of boundaries in the Cyrus Covenant, however, presented an interesting situation. The law of kept land. Daniel, for example, kept the law and would not eat unclean foods, applying the Mosaic law to Babylon. And, as long as God's people were in the midst of the Gentiles, acting as "lights to the world," the Deuteronomic sanctions of war, plague, and pestilence were applied to Gentile nations. The key is the presence of the people and the Temple, or to be precise, the furniture of the Temple. As long as one or the other was in the midst of the Gentiles, the sanctions applied. When Nebuchadnezzar took the vessels to Babylon, God miraculously protected Daniel. But, when the Temple was rebuilt and the people returned, the sanctions were lifted from the Gentile nations. Nevertheless, we are prepared for the coming of the New Covenant when the people and the Temple in a new form will be sent out among the nations, bringing them under the sanctions of God's covenant.

One other comment about stipulations in the Cyrus Covenant needs to be made regarding the captivity dynamic of obeying the law. The captivity application of the Word of God is presented through the actions of Daniel and his friends. They submit to the king's laws and each time they are exalted to positions of national and international leadership. These captivity principles come to full expression in the Sermon on the Mount where Christ speaks to believers in It is important simply to mention at this point, however, that Jesus' captivity laws in the Sermon on the Mount are further expanded in the passages of the Kingdom Covenant such as Romans 13, where the Word of God addresses not only a captive situation but one in which the magistrates are "servants of God," wielding the sword for Him.

Oath/Sanctions (45:9-13)

Isaiah refers to specific curses and blessings, sanctions (45:9). Importantly, this is an international application of Mosaic sanctions. God places sanctions against anyone who would oppose His Cyrus, whether in the land of Israel or not, meaning the Mosaic sanctions are applied to a Gentile leader. This Mosaic sanction principle explains the rapid success of these Cyrus types of leaders: Alexander the

Great, Caesar and so forth. They were raised up and even protected by God to guard the people of God. For example, Alexander was turned away from Jerusalem when the prophesy of his success was shown to him. He was not only turned away but he provided protection for the people of God until his death.

But, the presence of Mosaic sanctions also explains the rapid fall of the great world empires. If one traces the fall of these kingdoms, it will be discovered that basic covenant patterns occur. The leaders unavoidably imitate Nebuchadnezzar's **covenantal** downfall. They begin by assuming deity to themselves and their representatives. They break the Ten Commandments. They received sanctions and even warnings for their offenses. Eventually, they lost their kingdoms and another arose in their place.

This pattern of the fall of gentile emperors is clearly **covenantal**, Mosaic and Davidic. The Davidic dynasty was sanctioned according to the Mosaic Covenant, as evidenced by the message of the prophets; they always addressed specific commandments that were broken and called the people back to the Deuteronomic Covenant.² Under the Cyrus covenant, this entire process was applied to a Gentile international ruler. Thus, we see anticipated the day when all of the Gentile leaders, a time mentioned in Psalm 2, will be brought under the Davidic kingdom through Jesus Christ. This happened with the advent of the New Covenant and we live under this time today.

Succession (45:14-25)

The "labor of Egypt" is given to the Jews (45:14). Does this sound familiar? As the people of God disinherited the Egyptians, so they again are financed in the building of the kingdom of God by the Gentiles. The Gentiles even become the slaves of the Jews, which is what happens in the time of Esther.

The condition for the inheritance given to the Jews is that they are to be a new concept appearing in this **covenantal** period. We catch glimpses of it with Daniel and his friends. But in Isaiah, the people of the Cyrus Covenant are specifically told to "set forth the case" (45:21), interestingly a title of a very popular book on evangelism. The role of witness was new to the Jews. They were not concerned with evangelism, for the Gentiles were supposed to be brought to them. They didn't need to witness. Now,

when the Word of God goes outside the land, they are called upon to take the Word to the "ends of the earth" (45:22).

The issue of succession, however, is a problem during the Cyrus Covenant. Remember, Cyrus is a Gentile king and prior to Christ. The Gentile cannot enter the covenant without being circumcised and without giving up his own nationality to become a Jew. This presents a major problem of succession, the transfer of the covenant from one generation to another, evidenced by the failure of the emperors in the time of empire to transfer their kingdoms to the next generation. Cyrus himself was not related to Nebuchadnezzar. He received the transfer by force and power. When Alexander the Great died, his kingdom was divided into four parts under his generals. And so it was with Caesar. Succession was a problem for the Gentile until the universal king appears who is both circumcised and Jesus Christ.

Finally, a comment needs to be made about the prophecies during the Cyrus Covenant period. Unless they are seen as fulfilled in some primary sense in the return of the exiles, they become extremely forced. This implies of course that there are secondary and even tertiary fulfillments. But often, the primary fulfillment is glossed over. There are many examples, but one will suffice. Ezekiel 37-39 should be understood as having its initial fulfillment after the return of the exiles. The warfare is with bows and arrows, something that was fulfilled before Christ, that is, if we want to take the passage literally. Thus, the temple of Ezekiel that was turned on its side was fulfilled at the time of Christ. He was the true temple turned on His side, for He said, "Out of my belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 4). Thus, there is no temple to come that could possibly fulfill Ezekiel 40-48 any better.

In conclusion, the Cyrus Covenant uniquely prepared the people of God for a worldwide kingdom, the kingdom of our Lord!

2. Watter Brueggemann, *Hosea: Tradition for Crisis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), pp. 55-105. Brueggemann categorically proves that the prophets were not introducing new standards to Israel but calling the nation back to the old ones, the Mosaic Covenant. See also, James A. Sandera, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 54-90.