

## ANOINTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

By Roger Cotton

The Hebrew word for the verb to anoint is *mashach* and is the root of messiah, which means “anointed one.” The basic idea of anointing in the Old Testament culture is a hygienic practice of applying oil or grease to soften and protect the skin in a dry climate (Amos 6:16; compare Ps. 23:5 which uses a different verb for the same idea). It can be used of pouring or smearing. This would be very soothing and refreshing. Oil and grease were also used to protect wounds and aid their healing. In one place the verb is used of oiling a leather shield to keep it from cracking (Isa. 21:5), and in another place it refers to painting a house (Jer. 22:14).

The specific practice of anointing by pouring oil on the head was used as a symbolic act for officially, designating and setting apart a person for a certain, public, leadership function in the community. It was a one-time event much like an inauguration or ordination. Things could also be sanctified or dedicated to a special purpose for God by anointing (Exo. 29:36). The three kinds of leaders anointed for their ministries in the Old Testament were: priests, Exo. 28:41; kings, 1 Sam. 10:1; and prophets, 1 Ki. 19:16. A major difference between Israel and the other nations was that when God had someone anointed or authorized for leadership He also provided the empowering of the Holy Spirit to do the job (1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1).

Thus, an “anointed one” or *mashiach* was an authorized and empowered leader. It is interesting to note that Cyrus, the Persian king in Isa. 45:1, is called by God “my anointed” or messiah, meaning God had chosen him to accomplish a part of His plan whether he was a believer or not. The ultimate anointed king in the line of David, who was promised by God to come and accomplish salvation, later came to be called the Messiah during the intertestamental period, though the first use of Messiah may be back in Dan. 9:26. Otherwise, messiah or “anointed one” was not used as a title with a capital “M” in the Old Testament. (Note that the word christ is from the Greek word for “anointed one.”)

All Christians are anointed, according to 2 Cor. 1:21; and 1 John 2:20, 27, and thus are authorized and empowered agents of God. The message of those 1 John verses is that no Christian needs a mediator between him or her and God. We all have direct access to God and His truth; all believers have the Spirit within who will lead us into all truth, in Christ and enable us to be His witnesses.

Thus, the anointing is not something that comes and goes. What does change is the experience of the demonstration of the results of God's anointing by the Holy Spirit through an individual, according to the need and His purposes in the situation. But the biblical concept of anointing is that all Christians are anointed, meaning they are all authorized and empowered agents of God. All have the Spirit within and thus the power of God can be released through them at any time that He wants to and the person is yielding.