

Session 6: The Deuteronomic History

E. The kingdom of David

David was the Napoleon of his day, both a general and statesman. He rose from obscurity to become the ruler of an empire through brilliance and ruthlessness. When he conquered Jerusalem it was a very shrewd political move. Jerusalem was a previously unconquered Canaanite city, on the boundary between the territory of Judah and Benjamin. By making it his capital he took the monarchy out of the control of any one tribe, even the tribe of Judah.

He also took over the city's tradition in which their kings were also priests. 'Melchizedek, king of Salem' appears in Genesis 14 as both priest and king to bless Abram after his victory over some of the neighbouring city-states. Psalm 110, which may originally have been a Canaanite psalm, adapted for the worship of Yahweh, echoes that tradition:

Psalm 110:2-5

The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty sceptre.
 Rule in the midst of your foes.
 Your people will offer themselves willingly
 on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains.
 From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you.
 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,
 'You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.'
 The Lord is at your right hand;
 he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

David was also very keen to bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, as we have seen in Psalm 132. The ark was the symbol of the covenant tradition, dating back to the wilderness wanderings. By bringing old and new together, he could identify his new kingdom and empire with the old traditions of covenant to which Israel was already (theoretically) loyal. This process culminated in the building of the Temple under Solomon: the Temple was right alongside and dwarfed by the royal palace. Effectively it was an annexe of the palace, reflecting the fact that David had annexed Israel's worship to become part of the royal ideology.

This was the origin of the tradition, expressed in numerous psalms and the words of the prophets, of Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God upon earth, the city where his anointed king reigns, the place to which the nations will be drawn to worship. The tradition extends into the New Testament in the book of Revelation, where the holy city of God is the new Jerusalem.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the fulfilment of all the promises made by God to David and his successors. This is made explicit in the announcement of his birth, which recalls the promises celebrated in Psalm 89:19-37

Luke 1:32

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

Thus all the Old Testament texts that exalt kingship lead to Jesus: we are the new Jerusalem, ruled over by our priest-king. But Jesus also fulfils the other side of the tradition, the idea that in setting up kings of their own Israel was rejecting Yahweh. Jesus is also the king rejected by his people, a theme which comes out particularly strongly in John's account of the passion, in which the Jews cry out, 'We have no king but the emperor' (John 19:15).

Even the Bible's anomalies are part of a larger pattern, but the complete picture is yet to be revealed. Jesus told his disciples there were many things he could not yet tell them (John 16:12). We wait for a time of fulfilment, which we know as the 'second coming'. When that takes place, whenever it proves to be, we will have the complete pattern of all God is doing in history.

Further Reading

Background reading for session 6 can be found in:

John Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, chapter 4

Bernhard Anderson, *The Living World of Old Testament*, chapter 7

Preparation

The key Bible passages for session 7 are:

1 Samuel 9 - 20

1 Kings 1 – 2

Proverbs 16

Genesis 37, 39 – 50

Ruth