

## Anointing

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by Bill Crews

The English word “anoint” is defined: “1. to pour or rub oil or ointment on. 2. to put oil on in a ceremony of making sacred or consecrating to high office.” It is from a Latin word (*ungere*) meaning “to smear.”

The basic meanings of the various Hebrew and Greek words that are used in the Bible and translated “anoint,” are “to smear, to rub in, to rub, to pour out.”

We see, first of all, a secular or ordinary use of oil on the skin, especially in dry climates and dusty areas, to protect and soothe the skin. Poorer people might use animal or vegetable fat for the purpose, but those who had it or who could afford it would use the oil pressed from olives and often mixed with various natural perfumes. On rarer occasions an expensive or precious ointment was used. It came to be:

1. **Associated with good hygiene and prosperity.** Often it followed washing or bathing (Ruth 3:3; 2 Sam. 12:20; Ezek. 16:9). It was regarded as healthy for or protective of the skin (Ps. 104:15 speaks of wine to make the heart glad and oil to make the face shine).
2. **A symbol of wealth and prosperity.** God warned the Israelites that after they came into the land of promise and in the event they should disobey God: “You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil; for your olives shall drop off” (Deut. 28:40).
3. **An act of hospitality or love or devotion.** Simon the Pharisee had failed to anoint the head of Jesus, but the sinful woman had anointed His feet with ointment (Lk. 7:36-50). Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with ointment (Jn. 12:1-8). The twenty-third Psalm says in part: “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: / Thou hast anointed my head with oil; / my cup runneth over” (v. 5).
4. **Used as a medicinal treatment for the wounded or the sick,** Lk. 10:34; Mk. 6:13; James 5:14. It accompanied some miracles and some prayers for the sick.

We see also a religious and sacred use of anointing. Both things and individuals were set apart for special use by anointing. This was true:

1. **Of some things.** Jacob anointed the stone at Bethel (Gen. 28:18; 31:13). The tabernacle and the things in the tabernacle (the brazen altar, the laver, etc.) were anointed (Ex. 29:36; 30:26; etc.).
2. **Of kings.** Saul was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1). David was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:1-13); and others were anointed. A king was “the Lord’s anointed.”
3. **Of at least one prophet.** Elijah was to anoint Elisha (1 Kings 19:16).
4. **Of the high priest and the priests that served in the tabernacle,** Ex. 29:7; Lev. 8:12; Ex. 30:30; 40:13-15. A special holy anointing oil is prescribed for anointing the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priests in Ex. 30:22-30.

Both the word “Messiah” (Hebrew) and “Christ” (Greek) mean “the Anointed One” and refer to the promised Savior of the world, the Son of God. Metaphorically, He was anointed with the oil of gladness (Ps. 45:7; Heb. 1:9); anointed to preach good tidings (Is. 61:1; Lk. 4:18); anointed by God (Acts 4:27); anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38).

Christians are said to be anointed in 2 Cor. 1:21 and 1 Jn. 2:27. We have been chosen and set apart unto the service of God. We must fulfill our purpose as Christians.

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