

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

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The Davidic Covenant makes many leaps forward in covenantal progress. To appreciate these developments, David's covenant should be considered in light of the dramatic background books: Joshua, Judges and Ruth. They are actually part of the Mosaic covenant, because each demonstrates an aspect of the success and failure of the Mosaic Covenant. They show how *blessing* came through obedience to Moses' commission and how *cursing* resulted from disobedience.

These words, blessing and cursing, should be redemptively and historically understood. They are not to be invested with, any particular modern meaning, such as the power of positive thinking reflected in the Schuller book, *The Be Happy Attitudes*, his interpretation of the word blessing. This is pure rubbish and a perversion of the word. Rather, blessing is directly connected to the promise in Genesis. The promise is initially given in Genesis 3:15. God promised that the head of the seed of the serpent would be crushed and the heel of the women's seed would be bruised. Throughout Genesis a struggle prevails over the inheritance of this promise, which is specified by the word blessing. For example, God transfers the promise given previously to Abram in Genesis 12:1ff. He specifies it as blessings. Thus, blessing is the inheritance of the promise of God.

Cursing is the opposite of blessing. it is the loss of the promise. When Cain killed his brother, he was cast out. He lost the promise. And so, in the Book of Genesis, to be cursed is to lose or miss the promise. Ultimately, the promise or blessing was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This does not preclude testing or suffering just as Christ Himself experienced both. Sometimes a person may not even be happy, although he (she) will be content. Here is the problem with defining blessing in some subjective sense such as happiness. The objective meaning of blessing means inheritance of the promise of God in Christ, regardless of the subjective feelings.

Thus, in the case of the historic books of the Old Testament that follow the Pentateuch, we find two excellent examples of the objective view of blessing and cursing. Joshua is the book of blessing. The great commander-in-chief had been essentially told by Moses to establish a new land, the prototype of the *new heaven and new earth*. As long as he and Israel kept the covenant and followed Moses' directions, the land was conquered. The problems began when the land was not thoroughly conquered.

Judges is the book of cursings. After the death of Moses, Israel failed to go ahead with conquest, leaving areas such as Philistia in the hands of the unbelievers. God raised up a series of new deliverers, judges, to lead God's people into the fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant. Anyone who has ever read Judges knows, however, that one fail-

ure after another is recorded' as each judge rises and fails.

The Book of Ruth is a period of reprieve during the time of the judges. it tells how a Jew from Bethlehem, meaning *house of bread*, went into Moab during a time of famine; the man from the town of bread was forced out because there was no bread, telling us something about the spiritual condition of Israel. During his sojourn, he died along with his sons, leaving only his wife, Naomi, and daughter-in-law, Ruth, after whom the book is named. She is taken in by the nearest of kin to her father-in-law on the basis of a special law of the Old Testament, the law of the kinsman redeemer. In other words, she was redeemed through the covenant of Moses and as a result she became the great grandmother of David, the strongest type of Christ in the Old Testament. His being made king in itself shows compliance, however, with the Mosaic covenant. David was the tenth generation from Perez, the Biblical law time requirement for a foreigner before becoming a full member of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:2). Thus, Ruth proves God's faithfulness to His covenant with Moses, bringing us to the time of the Davidic Covenant.

The Redemptive/Historical Perspective

The covenant can be observed from a redemptive/historical perspective. in other words, if we examine closely the historical books, we can see the covenantal sequence according to the suzerain pattern. This is perhaps easiest to follow in the life of David, who is the ultimate example of the Great Suzerain King.

Before considering the actual' specification of the Davidic Covenant, let us consider its application in the broadest sense to history. Understand that i have received my greatest criticisms probably at this point because some have argued that my analysis is arbitrary. Perhaps, but i believe that a close reading of the text will generally follow the suzerain pattern without forcing the text. Granted, some of the boundaries between points of the covenant may be vague even though larger movements may not. At this level of covenantal development, i will concede some ambiguity. Nevertheless, i believe that an overall covenantal flow to Biblical history will be noticed.

The Davidic covenant starts with the Books of Samuel. Why? Samuel is the prophet, symbolizing the *Word* of God. Remember, the beginning of all covenants involves some sort of new creation. And a new creation is established by the Word of God. in the case of the Davidic Covenant, Samuel the prophet is the Word of God that will raise up the king. As we shall see, this in itself is a fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant in the Davidic Covenant because the prophet will always interpret, tail, and recall the law of Moses to the king. For this reason, he is extremely important to the king. Without him, or without the king's compli-

ante, the land always dies.

Transcendence (1 Samuel 1-3)

The start of any new covenant is a new beginning. This appears in some important ways in the opening chapter of Samuel. The father of Samuel is named, Elkanah, whose name means, God *has created*. Could any name speak any clearer of a Genesis, new beginning?

In addition, the *birth* theme is prominent at the outset of I Samuel. The Lord opens the womb of Hannah to bring about Samuel's birth. Add to this that the two wives of Elkanah provide an occasion for our seeing a *second birth* theme, which only serves to underscore even more that a new covenant is beginning. These wives represent the classic two women of Scripture: one wicked and one good; one wise and one foolish (Proverbs 9). They are named, Peninnah, meaning *coral*, and Hannah, meaning *grace* or *favor*. One wife was a woman of the sea, *coral*, probably an allusion to the serpent himself. The other wife's name refers to the work of the Lord, the covenant. Samuel is born of grace or favor, which is rebirth.

Hannah's prayers point to a new covenant theme. She made a vow to God, a covenant, to be fulfilled in the event that she received her answer.

The new creation, new covenant theme occurs regarding the situation with Eli, the High Priest, and his sons. He is pictured as *darkness* in contrast to Samuel who is new *light*. Eli is *blind* and unable to see (1 Samuel 3:2), meaning a time of darkness has entered the House of Israel and confirmed by the wickedness of his sons.¹ Samuel becomes new eyes or new *light* as in the first day of creation to Israel. In him, the prophet literally becomes a secondary or replacement priesthood, because the same sacrifices were offered for the anointing of a prophet as there were for the anointing of the priest.

The prophet as a secondary priesthood becomes important in understanding the role of the prophet from this point forward in the Old Testament. The prophet takes precedence over the priesthood because the Aaronic priesthood always tends to fall. So, when the priesthood fails, the prophet is always there, unless the nation kills the prophet, to lead the nation, the king, and even the priests if they will allow it. The prophet was to precede the king because the Word of God was to be the basis of his rule, graphically illustrated after Elijah's defeat of the false prophets of Baal as he runs before the king's chariot (1 Kings 18:46). As long as the prophet went before the king, the monarch ruled correctly. Whenever the king outran the Word of the prophet, he fell.

Hierarchy (1 Samuel 4-10:16)

This section in Samuel begins to unfold hierarchical themes of the Biblical covenant. We should remember that hierarchy is not simply a matter of structure of authority in some legalistic sense. Rather, the issue is one of *kingdom*. The structure, or re-structuring as the case may be, concerns the establishment of new kingdom *rule*. One kingdom is replaced by another and the structure therefore is prominent. Thus, the emphasis of hierarchy is one kingdom over another, precisely what we see develop in the following section of Samuel.

The establishment of new kingdom order begins with an *exodus* as generally happens in the hierarchical section of the covenant and is specifically referenced when the Philistines say, "These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues" (1 Samuel 4:8). But the Philis-

tines were fighting a *disobedient* covenant people. They defeated God's people. As a result, the Israelites tried to manipulate the Ark of the Covenant to gain a victory. They attempted to defeat the enemy by making God do what they wanted Him to do. They found out that the opposite happened. The ark was captured and it was only returned because the Philistine were judged and plagued (1 Samuel 5-6). Like the Egyptians, they would rather have God out of their sight than submit. They lost to the Israelites in this round of kingdom battles because they sent the Ark away from them in much the same way Egypt drove out the Israelites. Through Samuel's counsel, the prophet was then able to lead Israel into a period of national repentance (1 Samuel 7). He taught the nation the Word of God and he implemented the Word of God from one end of the nation to the other.

But, the prophet by himself is not able to establish the new kingdom. The priesthood had failed to do so under Eli, which meant under Moses because he was of the priestly line. But Samuel like Eli had failed to train up his sons to carry out Biblical rule (1 Samuel 8:3), a de-centralized form of Biblical government where the Bible would be applied from the lowest level of society up.

The people called for a *king*. Notice, they did not want a king because God had ordained it; as a matter of fact, the law of God gave specific instructions for the king (Deuteronomy 17:8-20). They did not want a de-centralized system of righteousness. They wanted a *centralized* power to guarantee their success even if they did not obey. Saul is the people's choice.

Ethical Stipulations (1 Samuel 10:17-II Samuel 5)

The basic Mosaic laws are applied. Saul is anointed and then violates the laws of Moses in Deuteronomy. He proves to be a wicked king because he disobeys the Word of God in a variety of ways. He does not wait on the prophet to offer sacrifice (1 Samuel 13:8-10), which is a violation of the second and fifth commandments. Again he fails to carry out the prophet's command on Aggag, a breach of the fifth commandment; he does not obey his father in the faith. Moreover, this time he is charged with breaking the second commandment when Samuel rules that he is guilty of the sin of witchcraft and idolatry (I Samuel 15:23). Hence, the prophet concludes, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments" (1 Samuel 15:11).

God raises up an obedient son. He sends His prophet to anoint another, David. The events that follow David's anointing are the opposite of Saul. He kills Goliath in compliance with the law/curse of Genesis 3:15, when he beheads the pagan leader (1 Samuel 17:26). A series of wilderness-wandering/ensues and we see a dramatic contrast between a king who cannot distinguish good from evil, Saul, and his successor who does not violate the fifth commandment by killing his "father" in the civil realm. Whereas Saul had constantly not followed the prophet, David does not retaliate against even the wicked king. Saul persecutes the Lord's anointed. The situation culminates with war on the Philistine. Saul is sanctioned from without, just as the Deuteronomic curses promised. The conflict is brought to an end and a new heir assumes the thrown. The covenant is ready to be renewed.

Oath (II Samuel 6-7)

The chapters provide the specific publication of the Davidic covenant. Since I will go into considerable detail on this section in a moment, I will not make any more than a general statement. After the death of Saul, David's immediate response is to rally the nation and renew the COVE-

1. This passage explains why *healings* of blindness are a symbol of *new birth* and *resurrection* all through the Bible.

nant. He does so in terms of the worship of the covenant community. He takes the ark to Jerusalem, establishes true worship, and renews the covenant.

Succession (II Samuel 8-I Kings 2)

David leads the people into covenant renewal, keeping intact the inheritance of Saul. After this, a series of successional problems occur because David has taken too many wives. He has problems with his sons, who all become pretenders to the throne. One by one they are disciplined by God because David will not deal with his own children. Finally, Solomon is recognized as the true heir, who succeeds his father. Eventually, Solomon becomes the heir. Succession finally occurs.

"Forever"

The Davidic throne is said to be established "forever." in what sense would this be? The Aaronic priesthood is also said to be established forever (Exodus 40:15), yet we know that it cannot possibly exist after the death of Christ. There is no need. The word "forever" basically means until the end of the lineage. For example, Samuel was taken up to serve before the Lord "forever" (1 Samuel 1 :22). But his temple service came to an end when he died. So forever is not necessarily forever in the sense that we may think.

The Davidic throne had no heir after the last Davidic king. Herod of Christ's day was not a Davidic king, meaning he was not of the line. Only Christ was. Thus, Christ was the last Davidic king to sit on the throne.

Specification of the Davidic Covenant

Up to this point, we have over-viewed the Davidic Covenant by considering the distinctive place of the prophet and king. The prophet was a buffer between the priest and the king, who assured the preservation of the Word of God in the event of the priesthood's failure. This happened consistently. He also served the king, assuring his understanding of the Word of God as in the unique way Samuel wrote the Scriptures for the king and not the king himself, as the Mosaic Covenant required (Deuteronomy 17).

The king joined the prophet as a buffer. He was supposed to guarantee that the Word of God was being applied by the priesthood among the people; this explains why the king was so instrumental in rallying the priesthood, as in the case of Josiah (II Kings 22). The king was further required to protect the people of God from the influence of the other nations. He was not to do this by force necessarily, even though it was allowed. Rather, he was to protect from the other nations by ruling with wisdom. The people of Israel did not initially understand this. They desired a king out of a felt need on their part for protection. As if the Lord were not enough, they wanted a king to keep them safe. More importantly, they asked for a king who would do this primarily by force. They wanted a violent not a peaceful king. So they got Saul. This king, however, did not thoroughly protect them, even allowing the Agagites to continue as an enemy. This eventually comes to a head much later in Israel's history in the person of Haman in the time of Esther. Saul attacked the institutions of his own society, even the prophet when he did not wait on Samuel's sacrifices; he made his own as if he could be the priest of Israel. Saul was a man who did not know or observe God's boundaries as they had been established through the Mosaic Covenant.

Therefore, we primarily considered these features of the Davidic Covenant by observing its basic development in I & II Samuel. We did not, however, examine the covenant itself in II Samuel 7.

II Samuel 7

I have pointed out from the beginning of our study that the Biblical covenant is in the form of ancient *suzerain-vassal treaties*. One particular variation on this type of covenant is called a *covenant of grant*, where certain things are bequeathed to the vassal from the suzerain Lord. A quick summary of the elements of a covenant of grant will be helpful in seeing their relationship to the Davidic Covenant as it is specified in II Samuel 7.²

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.

Transcendence (7:8-11): Notice in these verses how God displays His Lordship. He recalls to David that the king did not have anything to do with being called. He made David a great king by taking him from the pasture (v.8). And, He was uniquely present with David as He had been with the Tabernacle (cf. 7:9 with 7:6), the Immanuel principle.

God further demonstrated His Lordship by making David a great name among men, giving to him a special *place*, a continuing throne on which his descendants will sit (w. 10-12). He was given a *dynasty* and a *dwelling place*. Notice that David begins by offering to build God's house and the passage ends explaining how God will build *David's house*, dynasty. Then, the dynasty will build the Lord's House. "The net effect of this close interchange on the basis of the 'house' figure is to bind David's rule to God's rule, and vice versa. God shall maintain His permanent dwelling-place as king in Israel through the kingship of the Davidic line."³ Most important, the *son of David* will fulfill this promise.

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."

Hierarchy (7:12-14): In this verse, David's son is established as God's son! The future descendant of the king of Israel is God's rule on the earth. *Throne and sonship* are related. Notice that sonship exists simultaneously with the throne, as was the case with Solomon who built the temple and of whom the Chronicler says, "The Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 29:22). Where the son is, there is the throne, ultimately revealed in Christ because David's Son is Jesus Christ (Psalm 2:7). This psalm declares the Messiah to be the Son, and the Epistle to the Hebrews (1 :5) tells us that this Son is Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if this is true, then the throne of David is in *heaven* at the right hand of God: where the Son is, there is the throne. The Apostle Peter makes this point extremely clear to his mostly Jewish listeners at Pentecost, as we would expect him to do. He refers to David's psalms to prove a series of points that tie the ancient king's throne to God's, which was God's original point to David!

Peter first speaks of David's psalm where he sees the "Anointed One" sitting at *his* right hand (Acts 2:25-28), meaning his Son is on *his* throne because this Son has been resurrected, which in turn brings him great joy because it means that he has been resurrected. Thus, the new Davidic throne is the place of the Son's throne!

Peter secondly, refers to Christ's Ascension as sitting

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

3. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the covenants* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980), p. 233.

on a throne. Clarifying that it was not David who *ascended* (Acts 2:34), he says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit Thou at My right hand until I make thine enemies a footstool under Thy feet'" (Acts 2:34-35). Notice that this language implies a throne by speaking of a "footstool," historically placed at the foot of the throne. Again, this means that David's Son has ascended to his throne, which is actually the true throne of God's house. Dr. John Walvoord (my former professor) is therefore wrong when he says, "A search of the New Testament reveals that there is not one reference connecting the present session of Christ with the Davidic throne."⁴ The problem is that Walvoord assumes the throne of David remained literally in Jerusalem. But, the Davidic kings died off, meaning the word "forever" (in perpetuity) was not literally fulfilled in a physical sense. The throne went to where God was, heaven. It was this Davidic throne that would be established forever in a literal sense. I don't know how Peter could have been any more clear in his interpretation of David. For that matter, I don't know how David could have been any more clear.

The Book of Hebrews goes a step further. It implies that we rule with Christ because we are "chastened as sons," referring back to the mark of David's sonship mentioned in the II Samuel passage: "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me: when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men" (cf. II Samuel 7:14 and Hebrews 12:1ff.). Furthermore, Hebrews says that the new Jerusalem is in heaven (Hebrews 12:22). Thus, Christ sits on the Davidic throne in Jerusalem, the true one that is!

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.

Ethical Stipulations (7:15-17): The behavior of the king and the people was critical. If the king became corrupt, then God removed him, explaining the accounts in the books of Kings and Chronicles. There are many examples but take the case of Ahaz for instance (II Kings 16:7-8), because it addresses what was said earlier about the relationship between David's throne and Christ's.

Ahaz was assured that Aram's and Ephraim's plans to put a puppet king on the throne would not succeed, his name being, "Son of Tabeal" (Isaiah 7:6), which means a "no-good/non-covenantal vassal."⁵ "In its context of YHWH'S unconditional promise to Ahaz, therefore, the name asserts that he was non-Davidic. In the same pas-

sage, the shattering of Ephraim as a nation, sworn to by YHWH (7:8), represents a covenant curse on those violating the rights of YHWH'S vassal, Ahaz."⁶ But, "by sending tribute monies to the king of Assyria and calling on his aid against Aram and Israel (II Kings 16:7-8), Ahaz rejected YHWH'S suzerainty. By referring to himself as the king of Assyria's 'servant' and 'son' (II Kings 16:7), Ahaz made the king of Assyria his suzerain. In accordance with ancient Near Eastern treaty procedure, YHWH'S first response was to choose another 'son'/vassal, namely Immanuel/ 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14). His second response was to deny his protection to king and people: the king of Assyria would come 'upon you and your people and your father's house'. (7:17). As it transpired, Ahaz' unsuspecting rejection of the sign of Immanuel (7:10-14) was nothing less than a rejection of the sign of the Davidic Covenant. When YHWH is *with* his people, there is an assurance of his protection (compare Psalm 46:5-7); when he is not, there is evidently no such assurance."⁷ Therefore, the ultimate son of Ahaz was Christ who sits on the real physical throne in heaven all because the Davidic king's response determined the Lord's protection, which was removed from the kings of Israel and given eventually to Christ and His people.

On the other hand, if the people became wicked, then God either gave them a righteous king to restore them like Josiah (II Kings 22), or, He gave them an even more wicked king like Ahab to provoke them to repentance.

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.

Oath (7: 18-28): David enters into the covenant with YHWH. Notice that the oath is based on God's *promise* (7:27). Our faithfulness is always established by God's.

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.

Succession (7:29): The final verse speaks of blessing because the succession was always in terms of the blessing (Genesis 49). Before David's death, he gave Solomon the blessing and the Lord's throne was established through him. Finally, however, the throne of David and the Lord was set up by Christ Himself, when He ascended into heaven.

4. John F. Walvoord, "The Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 102 (1945): 163.

5. Abraham Gileadi, *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, p. 161.

6. *Idem.*

7. *Idem.*