

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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THE DAVIDIC COVENANT IN CHRIST

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Jesus was a new David, the true and ultimate King. As a new David, He brought in the Kingdom of God. He is king, and kings always have kingdoms, especially Christ. As background to any understanding of Christ's inauguration of the kingdom, take note of some of the important facts about the Davidic lineage.

The Biblical record of David's descendants indicates numerous *co-regencies* of father and son being crowned and ruling at the same time to emphasize the continuity of the **Davidic** Kingdom. Eight of the thirteen throne-transfers involved co-regencies. At one point even, Israel probably had *three* crowned kings (Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz): father, son, and grandson.

Old Testament Scripture additionally records all the *mothers* of David's line to strengthen the principle of continuity. With only two exceptions (Joram and Ahaz) are the mothers recorded. Regarding the royal mothers of the northern kingdom, nothing is said. The only mother of Israelite royalty mentioned is Jezebel, but she was not Jewish; she was from Sidon, north of Israel. The record of the mothers seems to point to the prominent role that Mary plays in the birth and life of Christ, prefiguring her in some way.

What does co-regency prove? The purpose for co-regency was to assure continuity from one reign to the next. More importantly, if the father's kingdom is the son's then there cannot be a delayed kingdom. The one signals the advent of the other. It seems that modern eschatologies have argued for a delayed kingdom. Dispensationalism, for example, maintains a vacancy on the throne of David. Yet if it can be demonstrated that some kind of Davidic co-regency existed in Christ, then the latter effectively sits on the throne of David.

The evidence is in a Davidic Psalm, the one most often quoted in the New Testament, Psalm 110. The first verse states, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit thou at my right hand until I make my enemies a footstool under thy feet.'" In view of the co-regency principle, consider the implications of this statement. Jesus is said to be David's son and Lord. He is the father and the son. He initiates as well as continues the Davidic dynasty. Unlike any other father-son kingdom, He establishes a realm that guarantees unbroken continuity. There is no gap between the throne of David and Jesus Christ; Jesus is the ultimate, final **Davidic** King. At the Cross, Jesus became king when He was recognized, "King of the Jews." Thus, Jesus ushered in the Davidic kingdom.

The number of *Messianic Psalms* all point to Christ from the life of David. Psalm 110 is the most quoted, but if we had time, we could study all of the Messianic Psalms and compare events in the life of David with that of Christ. One stands out in particular. In the Gospel of Mark (Mark

2:23-28). Our Lord was walking with the disciples on the sabbath when they had no food. He allowed them to glean ("pick the heads of grain") the fields for food. After the Pharisees challenged His actions, He compared himself to David who ate the shewbread out of the temple. Before applying this parallel to see its ramifications, let us clear up exactly what was happening with David and then return to Mark's Gospel.

David and Meals in Mark

The regulations for shewbread are set out in Leviticus 24. It was to consist of twelve loaves. On one occasion, David took five of these loaves. Seven were left. On the basis of John Drury's work in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, the numbers from David's story parallel Jesus' feedings: five, twelve, seven. In his opinion these parallels help to establish that Christ was David's son and David's Lord (Mark 12:34-37).

I Sam. 21	12 loaves	5 taken	7 were left.
Mk 6:35-44	5 loaves among	5,000 left	12 baskets of bits.
Mk 8:1-10	7 loaves among	4,000 left	7 baskets of bits.

"Now we can see that the first of Mark's miraculous meals takes two numbers from the story of David and the shewbread (which Mark has made part of his own story). They are twelve and five. There were twelve shewbread loaves and David took five. But with Jesus the numbers go another, and more wonderful, way. He too takes five loaves: he is David's son. Like father, like son. But he leaves – and this can only be supernatural miracle – twelve baskets of fragments. He is not only, even not really, David's son. He is the Christ who is David's Lord (12:35-37). So what Jesus does numerically resembles what David did, but also numerically transcends it. This is polemical arithmetic in a story about the relation of the new Kingdom of Christ to the old Kingdom of David, the continuity and discontinuity between them. It fits the topographical setting, which is a desert somewhere in Jesus' own and Jewish country."¹

"The second miraculous meal, at 8:1-10, is set abroad and is part of an excursion into Gentile territory. In the region of Tyre and Sidon Jesus heals the daughter of a Greek woman (7:24-30). He is reluctant to do this at first and parries, with imagery directly related to our problem here: 'It is not meet to take the children's [the Jews'] bread, and to cast it unto the dogs' (v. 27). But she takes up the figure wittily and rejoins: 'Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs' (v. 28). This looks very

1. John Drury, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, eds. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 415.

much like a story which we ought to take into account. Between it and the second miraculous meal, Jesus opens the ears and looses the tongue of a deaf and dumb man. The channels of understanding are cleared and liberated. Now to the meal itself.

"In the previous Jewish meal the number seven from the Davidic story was not used. David left seven of the twelve shewbread loaves and they were, as it were, left sitting there. But now they are used: seven loaves which leave seven baskets of fragments. This is a little less miraculous than with the Jewish meal, but only quantitatively. Qualitatively the symmetry of seven and seven, the sacred number of fulfillment, is more resolved. The David story was somewhat fulfilled in the Jewish meal; it is more completely fulfilled in this. The miraculous feeding of Gentiles is a consummation even greater than the miraculous feeding of Jews. This crescendo is in line with the Gentile centurion at the Cross (15:39) who transcends and resolves all previous human attempts to identify Jesus. And it reflects the great question which faced the Church after Jesus, of whether or not to admit Gentiles to its sacred meals, and the positive answer to it. This, however, is a resolution not yet achieved, and Mark knows it, for all the influence it exerts on his mind. So five thousand Jews are fed, in contrast to four thousand Gentiles. The Gentiles are less in the kingdom until Christ's death has opened it to them. . . . There is, after all, one loaf still to be given, and it will matter more than any of the others. At his last meal of all Jesus will take the loaf and say: 'Take, eat: this is my body' (14:22). All the other loaves lead to that. The 'one loaf' in the ship at 8:14, apparently uneaten, prefigures it.

"With the miraculous meals so replete with major significance, the controlled fury of Jesus' interrogation of his disciples in the ship is understandable and apt: 'How is it that ye do not understand?' (8:21). He is desperate. They have missed so much. The argument in the cornfield and the Davidic precedent, the lively exchange with the Greek woman and the miraculous meals before and after it all have been lost on them. More than that, they have lost track of the holy and divine, which, in this long train of coded events associated with bread, has shifted from its accustomed setting into a new place: from old tradition into Christ's life and body and the new community which will be nourished by it."²

The Holy War Camp Principle

David had to flee for his life from Saul. While out on one of his excursions, he ran out of food. He went to the priest at Nob, where the tabernacle resided, to ask for food. He was given the shewbread from the tabernacle on the sabbath, because the bread was taken out of the Holy Place on the sabbath and eaten (Leviticus 24). Why was David allowed to eat this bread? He and his men had been consecrated as a *holy war camp*. When the nation prepared for war, the priests came out and commissioned them, calling for sacrifices and several restrictions that treated the camp as *holy ground*, such as the restriction of "Not going into women" (1 Samuel 21:4). This same limitation was placed on the elders of Israel when they approached the mountain of the Lord, what amounted to *holy ground* (Exodus 19:15). This means that the ground of the holy war camp of warriors was analogous to holy ground. How could this be?

The priests' consecration amounted to making the soldiers holy warriors and in some sense extensions temporarily of the priesthood, like lay Nazirites, perhaps in much the same way that the citizenry of this country is allowed

to bear arms because it is empowered to function in loco (in place) as a magistrate. Holy warriors of Israel were in loco priesthood, guarding ultimately the holy things of God. Further, since God came down in a special way in their midst when they fought holy war, they became a holy place analogous to the holy place in the tabernacle. Consequently, David and his men could eat only the bread that was allowed to be eaten by the priesthood, although the Bible did not expressly say that the shewbread could be eaten by warriors, explaining why Jesus said eating the bread was not lawful (Mark 2:26). It could not have meant that Jesus was advocating the breaking of the law or He would have not been a sinless sacrifice. Thus, David and his men were part of the extension of the priestly *holy war camp* and could be allowed to stand in the holy place to eat holy bread.

Jesus and David

This interpretation explains the parallels made by Jesus. First, Jesus most obviously compares Himself to David. At this point in Jesus' ministry, He was anointed, as was David, but He had not entered Jerusalem triumphantly, meaning His anointing and triumphal entry were parallel to David's being anointed by the people and leading the ark into Jerusalem. Christ entered Jerusalem as the true and final Davidic *king*. This was the fulfillment of prophecy about His glorious entry. Further, just as David died and his heirs ruled the kingdom, so Christ dies, ascends into heaven, and sets up rule for His heirs (Ephesians 1:18-23).

Second, Jesus parallels his men to David's men, who were involved in a holy war camp. He is engaged in the ultimate holy war which is not against flesh and blood. Notice that in the immediate context of the gleanings on the sabbath passage that Christ is accused of being Beelzebub (Mark 3:20-35). Christ tells His disciples that the house cannot be taken unless the strong man is defeated. This is nothing less than an extension of the spiritual holy war to which the disciples had been called. But most important, as David taught his men that they needed the food of God to fight the war, so Christ is telling us that we need the same food, Jesus Christ. What does this say about eating communion on a regular basis? Time and again, the message of the necessity to eat often at the Table of the Lord is driven home. The disciples had to eat with Christ to be nourished for the warfare ahead. So does the Church, explaining why communion was normally on the *first* day of the week (Acts 20:7-12). Bible study and fellowship are not enough to fight spiritual warfare. If you doubt me take a look at the modern evangelical church. Does it take communion seriously? No. Is it victorious in this society? No. Then why don't we (you?) take to heart the simple application of Jesus' feeding of his men on the sabbath and apply it to the necessary place of communion on a regular basis in our lives? I hope you will. You will have to do this by faith, or it will not change you!

Third, Jesus was walking through a *grain field* when He allowed the disciples to glean the fields. What was He telling them? He was making the parallel between the field and the tabernacle, implying that the tabernacle had been and was about to be stretched to the whole world. In fact, He more importantly was saying to the disciples that they would do spiritually to the world what they were physically doing to the field. Do you know what the implications of this are for a *kingdom theology*? Think about it. How many kingdom parables have to do with fields and things related, such as seed and weeds? Several. When do these parables apply? They have to begin to be applied in the ministry of the disciples which means the kingdom came through Christ just as the Davidic kingdom came through

him. How do we know?

The kingdom is referred to as the time of the Church age, not postponed. The Apostle Paul says, "Therefore we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). And the Apostle John says that the Church is a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). What kingdom is this? It can be none other than the kingdom of which Jesus spoke when He said, "Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). Jesus drank of the fruit of the vine with them after He was raised from the dead, meaning the kingdom of God, used interchangeably with kingdom of heaven (cf. Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:20), had begun at the Cross. John the Baptist had not lied when he said that the kingdom was at hand; it was indeed.

Thus, the field and kingdom parables apply to the Church Age. The field is the world (Matthew 13:24-30), implying that the whole world has been claimed as the kingdom of God; it is like the conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua initially conquered Canaan but a mopping up exercise was required. Satan has been defeated by Christ. All that is needed further is a mopping up exercise. The giants that remain need to be cleared out.

Perhaps the one passage that has been most neglected is found in Luke 13:18-21. It says that the kingdom of God, the field, will grow and cover the entire earth. This is the message of the Bible from beginning to end. Our God is Sovereign. He is king because the enemy has been crushed at the Cross (Romans 16:20). He has a kingdom, and it is expanding through history even though it is like the tide coming in, waves lapping on the shore but receding only to return with greater force. Thus, Christ's fulfillment of David means the kingdom has begun and we ought to glean the world as Christ taught His disciples. Moreover, we ought to take seriously the kingdom passages because they apply now!

Let us refresh our memories regarding the Davidic covenant of grant and then observe its application in the Gospels.

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 formulae, 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 formula is directed against those who violate the rights of the vassal or his ruling descendants. If a vassal is him-

self disloyal, he will be disciplined by the great king, often to be replaced by an heir of the dynasty loyal to the great king.

Covenant of Grant in the Gospels

Covenant scholars focus on the unique "father-son" aspect of the Davidic Covenant, which is found in covenants of grant.³ If we turn to the gospels, two striking passages reflect the same remarkable emphasis, the baptism and the transfiguration of our Lord. On both occasions, Jesus is declared to be the "Beloved Son." These references are interestingly found in the Book of Matthew where Jesus is called the **Davidic Heir** from the outset in the genealogy.

Thus, if we use the father-son formula as a kind of watermark in Matthew, the Davidic covenant pattern begins to unfold. By considering what goes before and after this statement, important parallels can be observed.

The Enduring Dynasty

The first aspect of the Davidic covenant of grant is either an emphasis on or a delineation of the bestowal of an enduring dynasty to the vassal. The suzerain's transcendence is manifested through his gracious preservation of a dynasty.

When we turn to the Gospel of Matthew, the book opens with this verse, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). Then the genealogy is given, after which is written, "Therefore all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ fourteen generations" (Matthew 1:17).

From the use of the very word, "generation," to the extensive genealogy itself, a transcendent dynasty is established. Indeed, the specific fact of the Messianic lineage is one of the unique fulfillments of Christ. He is the promised heir of David. The genealogy establishes the point. But it proves the greatest dynasty in the history of man, the one between David and Christ. The great king, however, is not Christ's father, David is his own son's vassal. Christ is called, "David's son and David's Lord."

The son/lord relationship of Christ to David forms an enduring dynasty. As David's Lord, Christ assured that His own heirship was preserved. As David's son, a child who was Very God of Very God and Very Man of Very man, he secured the continuation of the dynasty in a way that no other could. This is expressed in the simple fact that the birth of Christ is recounted by Matthew immediately after the genealogy (Matthew 1:18ff.). In it, Matthew emphasizes how the King of Israel is undone by the Divine protection of the true Suzerain, Christ the Lord (Matthew 2:1-23).

Father-Son Formula

The Davidic father-son formula is quite pronounced in the Book of Matthew. It appears here more than anywhere else. It is mentioned at Christ's baptism (Matthew 3:17), after the famous sabbath feeding paralleling an event in David's life (Matthew 12:1-21), and at the transfiguration 17:5. All three are quite significant.

At the baptism of Christ, He is declared the Son of God at a particular ceremony of baptism. This confirms the precise parallel between the father-son formula of standard covenants of grant and Christ. The father-son formula

3. Moebe Wemfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," JAOS 90 (1970): 184-203; Philip Calderone, *Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty* (Manila: Ateneo University, 1966); F. Charles Fensham, "Clauses of Protection in Hittite Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," VT 13 (1963): 133-143.

was an adoption statement. The heir even though a natural one had to be adopted by the father, which means that it was possible for the son by birth not to receive the dynastic promises. Only if he were adopted was he recognized as the true heir. Considering the baptism of Christ, the most obvious parallel to this feature is that Christ was declared Son of God at the baptism. From other portions of Scripture, He was also the "natural" Son of God, since He was the eternal second person of the Trinity. But at His baptism, He was adopted as well. The inheritance was secured on a legal basis.

At the eventful sabbath encounter between Christ and the Pharisees, a second aspect of covenants of grant emerges, a statement of **servanthood**. When the religious leaders opposed the Lord for gleaning and healing on the sabbath, an important Davidic covenant passage from the Old Testament is cited. Matthew quotes Isaiah saying (Matthew 12:18-21),

Behold, My servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory. And in His Name the Gentiles will hope (Isaiah 42:1-3).

At this critical moment in Jesus' ministry, He is called the "servant." Sonship is defined, in other words, as servitude. Why? Only the true son, the one who receives the inheritance, will be a servant. And, it is on the basis of this service that he extends the dynasty.

Isaiah also mentions the fact that the servant is the one in whose Name the Gentiles will hope. This raises an interesting question, "How will they have hope?" The New Testament answers this question in the important doctrine of adoption, what I now believe is one of the aspects of the covenant that is fully developed in the Davidic covenant. The Gentiles will get to become co-heirs through Christ because they will be adopted as sons at their baptisms in the same way Christ was. This is their (our) hope!

Finally, the transfiguration is the other place of sonship declaration. The transfiguration was a proleptic ascension to explain to the disciples when the New Covenant would take full effect. Why the ascension? Christ wanted the disciples to know that His ascension would announce the transfer of the covenantal dynasty to them. Since He was declared the adopted son at the transfiguration, an anticipatory vision of the ascension, then they would receive the same at the later event. They would actually have the kingdom handed to them as the remaining heirs of the dynasty.

Thus, Christ uniquely fulfills the Davidic covenant through the parallel of the father-son formula. And, the disciples as well will specially accomplish the same since they too are adopted.

Annihilation of Common Enemy

After the father-son formulary, the suzerain would guarantee the protection of his vassal by the undertaking to

annihilate a common enemy, upon demonstration of covenant loyalty. The specific test of loyalty, however, is not to enter into a rival covenant with another king.⁴ Significantly in Matthew's account of the Davidic Covenant, immediately after the baptism scene, Jesus is led into the wilderness. There He fasts for forty days and nights and enters into combat with the Devil. In view of the Davidic Covenant of grant pattern, these events take on even more importance.

Christ fasted as a demonstration of covenant loyalty to God the Father. But He did much more than fast to prove His faithfulness. He encountered a "pretender" to the throne. Satan not only tempted Jesus. He tried to lure Christ into a rival covenant. He asked Christ to do things that would clearly bring the Son of God into an alliance with him. This was a challenge to one of the unique features of the covenant of grant. If Christ had succumbed, He would have not only forfeited the kingdom, but He would have at the same time not contributed to the annihilation of the common enemy of the Suzerain and Vassal. Our Lord was loyal in ways that originally sinful man was not. He resisted the rival covenant and began the clear annihilation of the arch covenantal antagonist.

Complementary Agreement

The fourth feature of the covenant of grant was often a complementary agreement between the suzerain and the people directly to assure them of his oath to the vassal.

Following the battle with Satan, Christ goes away with the people where He delivers the Sermon on the Mount. This is quite unusual and unexplainable apart from the covenant of grant format. For Christ is taking the people of the vassal, David, and He is making a separate agreement with them. He begins by issuing blessings, clearly an inheritance concept on the basis of the context of Scripture. This reassures the people of the Davidic covenant that David's Suzerain is theirs and further that David's Lord will guarantee inheritance and protection to them.

Curse Formulary

The covenant of grant finally issued curse **formularies** against those who violate the rights of the vassal. In the sermon on the Mount, Christ turns to warn against the Pharisees. He contrasts His righteousness with theirs. He speaks of their evil proclivities. He cautions against becoming like them in any way. Finally, He curses them with the concluding lines of His sermon, when He says, "Beware of false prophets . . . Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:19ff.).

Thus, the Davidic covenant of grant is repeated in the Gospels. Christ presents Himself as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. All that David was He is and even more. In so far as David failed to be the Messiah, Christ manifested Himself to be what David could never have been. Christ was awarded the kingdom just as was David. Jesus, however, never lost it and went on to build the temple that David never could. David's Lord and Son was the true and ultimate new David!

4. Fensham, "Clauses of Protection," 136-137, 140; Calderone, *Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty*, 70-71.