



Davidic Covenant and Its Significance in Christian Understanding of the Messiah

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Abstract

This article aimed to explain how important a Christian understanding of the Messiah based on Davidic covenant. This article used a method of descriptive analysis to explore related texts about Davidic covenant and its relations, both in Old and New Testament. The conclusion is, the text 2 Samuel 7 convincingly shapes the Christian understanding of the Messiah. Theologically, this text is important because the theme of sonship placed right at the center of the chapter. Moreover, this relationship of father to son has crucially important messianic associations, for the notion of sonship is not only played out in the life of David and his immediate progeny, but also in the New Testament in relation to King David's greater Son, Jesus Christ, and with God's sons and daughters who are in solidarity with Him.

Keywords: covenant; Davidic covenant; Messiah; son of David

I. Introduction

New Testament refers to David for 58 times.¹ Those references include the title given to Jesus as the "Son of David." In his letter to the Romans Paul states that Jesus is "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3), while in Revelation Jesus himself is recorded by John as saying, "I am the root and the offspring of David" (Rev. 22:16). Matthew, Mark, and Luke interestingly report, however, that Jesus once asked the Pharisees of whose son the Messiah really is (cf. Matt. 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

In that discourse, as experts in the Old Testament, the Pharisees knew the answer: The Messiah is the son of David. But Jesus probed further: How then can David call the Messiah his Lord? He cited Psalm 110:1 to illustrate the question. In that psalm David called the Person, whom the Lord God exalts to His right hand, as his Lord and Master. From its context, the psalm is clearly messianic – which was likely also well-known by

¹T. H. Jones, "David" in *New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. R. W. Wood, et al (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996).

Jews in the first century.² But still “the religious experts have difficulty reconciling Davidic sonship with the lordship of which the psalm speaks.”³ Thus, seemingly Luke recorded this story with a specific purpose related to the proper understanding of Jesus the Messiah.

This article therefore seeks to trace down the understanding that Jesus and the authors of the Gospel had of the Messiah. Since the issue was the Davidic sonship and the lordship of the Messiah, this article will give first an observation on the main passage in the Old Testament dealing with the Davidic covenant. This paper then will also present some prominent passages in the Old Testament concerning the Davidic covenant. Finally, this article will discuss of how God has been faithful in bringing His covenant with His servant, David, into fulfillment. Readers might then conceive the significance of Davidic covenant in Christian understanding of Jesus the Messiah.

Davidic Covenant

An Overview of Davidic Covenant

The main passage in the Old Testament dealing with the Davidic covenant is 2 Samuel 7, “which is perhaps the most discussed passage in the Bible.”⁴ The other two parallel texts are found in 1 Chronicles 17 and Psalm 89 (esp. vv. 3–4 and 19–37). Although 2 Samuel 7 does not specifically call the arrangement a covenant, the term *b^erîyth* in fact is used in 2 Samuel 23:5; Jeremiah 33:21; Psalm 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 132:12; and 2 Chronicles 13:5.⁵ Furthermore, *chêšêd*, the term used of the Davidic covenant in Isaiah 55:3, is used in 2 Samuel 7:15.⁶

Many believe the importance of 2 Samuel 7 in Scripture cannot be overestimated. This passage is not only “one of the most important chapters of the Bible,” it is also a biblical text that has “inspired a whole people and engender national nationality.”⁷ This passage is also significant for the fact that “it is a long literary unit in the form of a

²In the Babylonian Talmud the kingly role of the Messiah would be fulfilled in “Messiah Ben David.” For a brief discussion on how the rabbis speak about the Messiah please read Rachmiel Frydland, *What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah* (Cincinnati, OH: Messianic, 1993), 3–6. For a fuller discussion about messianic expectations in second temple Judaism please read Michael F. Bird, *Are You the One who Is to Come?: The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 31–62.

³I. D. Campbell, *Opening Up Matthew* (Leominster, MA: Day One, 2008), 138.

⁴Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant*. In *Understanding Biblical Themes Series* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), 66.

⁵Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 392–93.

⁶*Ibid.*, 393.

⁷Trevor J. Burke, *The Message of Sonship: At Home in God's Household*. In *The Bible Speaks Today Series*. Edited by Derek Tidball (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 70.

narrative where the reader is invited to pause and take a deep breath in view of the magnitude of the events that are about to unfold.”⁸ Bergen in his commentary of 1–2 Samuel says, “The Lord’s words recorded [in this passage] constitute the longest recorded monologue attributed to him since the days of Moses (197 words).”⁹ He therefore concludes that “the exceptional size of this divine pronouncement suggests that the writer intended it to be interpreted as centrally important—perhaps on a plane with the Torah itself.”¹⁰

In his book *Covenant* McKenzie makes an assertion: “The Davidic covenant is one of the most complicated and controversial topics in the Hebrew Bible.”¹¹ As found in 2 Samuel 7, this covenant contains God’s promise to David of an eternal (or enduring) dynasty. David’s throne, dynasty (“house”), and kingdom would be established forever, and this is echoed in 1 Kings 9:5. A different expression occurs in 1 Kings 11:36 where David’s line is assured a domain in Jerusalem “always.” Although Jeremiah 33:14–26 does not use either of these expressions for the Davidic covenant, the whole point of the passage is that God will never break His covenant with David (esp. vv. 19–22). Psalm 89 repeatedly quotes the Lord as saying that David’s descendant (lit. “seed”) and throne will be established forever (in vv. 28, 29, 36, and 37). Psalm 132 informs that David’s sons will sit on his throne “forever” (v. 12). Years later the prophet Isaiah confirmed that the Lord’s promise to David is an eternal covenant (cf. Isa. 55:3). Its language of an “eternal covenant” nevertheless should also raise questions about what is meant by “forever.”¹²

An Analysis of Davidic Covenant

Although “covenants were typically intended to be in perpetuity, that makes this feature is not unique to the Davidic covenant, still “it is curious that this particular covenant is repeatedly and explicitly designated ‘forever’ while others, such as the Sinai covenant, are not.”¹³ One must do therefore an analysis of the Davidic covenant to find out the exact sense of “forever” in 2 Samuel 7, in term of its scope and significance.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Robert D. Bergen, *1-2 Samuel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. Vol. 7 in *The New American Commentary*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, Kenneth A. Matthews, and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 336.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹McKenzie, *Covenant*, 65.

¹²McKenzie, *Covenant*, 5.

¹³*Ibid.*, 72.

Walvoord argues that “the main features of the covenant” are included in verses 12–16.¹⁴ However, for the purpose of this article, it is better to treat this passage as a whole. Thus, as one literary unit, “the passage is divided in half, with the first half narrating the revelation of divine promises given to David [vv. 1–17] and the second half recording David’s response in worship [vv. 18–29].”¹⁵

The first half is divided into two parts: David’s proposal and God’s response. In the first part, after Hiram’s stonemasons and carpenters had built David’s palace (cf. 5:11), after the Lord had given David “rest on every side from all his enemies,” and after the ark had been deposited in Jerusalem (cf. v. 2), David proposed “to build a grander sanctuary of cedar paneling than the present temporary tent.”¹⁶ At first, Nathan approved David’s plan. Yet, being given a divine revelation by dream or vision “that night,” Nathan then conveyed the Lord’s message to David that would dramatically change his life and the future of his dynasty forever.

In the second part of the first half division, as the response of David’s proposal, the Lord did not accept David’s idea, but He did not exactly reject it either. He asked David, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?” (v. 5); the pronoun “you” is emphatic. After explaining that He had never demanded a house (vv. 6–7), the Lord recounted His elevation of David from shepherd to king (vv. 8–11a) and then declared that He will build a house for David (v. 11b). Accordingly, rather than allowing David to build a house for Him, the Lord will build a house for David instead.

It is obvious that there is a play on the word “house” (*bayith*) here. The “house” David wanted to build for the Lord is a sanctuary or temple. The “house” the Lord will build for David is a dynasty or royal family line on the other side. Yet it is quite understandable since the Old Testament uses the phrase “to build a house” in two quite distinct senses—the erection of a material dwelling or the founding of a family in Israel.”¹⁷ Therefore, “this play on words is taken up again and again in the Old Testament” (cf. Amos 9:11).¹⁸

¹⁴John F. Walvoord, “The Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 102, no. 406 (April-June 1945): 153.

¹⁵Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 393.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 394.

¹⁷Edward Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament: Studies in the Beginnings and Growth of Messianic Prophecy* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee, 1926), 71.

¹⁸Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 394.

Although Grisanti did a very excellent job on discussing many features of the Davidic Covenant¹⁹, but again for the purpose of analysis, it is helpful to observe what Gentry and Wellum wrote on it:

“In verses 8–16, the section detailing the divine gift and promises to David, several key markers of the literary structure need to be observed. First, the shift from perfect and *waw*-consecutive imperfect verb forms in verses 8 and 9a to *waw*-consecutive perfect forms marking future time in the middle of verse 9 clearly marks the break between the past blessings and future promises. Second, the messenger formula which opens verse 8 is repeated in verse 11b (הִנֵּנִי אֶבְרָאִית (כִּי הָאֵל אָמַרְוּ (וְהָגִיד לְךָ יְהוָה). This is a clear marker in the text, along with the temporal clause beginning verse 12, which refers to a time after David’s death, to separate the promises to be fulfilled during David’s life from the promises to be fulfilled after David’s death.”²⁰

They also noticed that the covenant explicitly confines both divine and human obligations – in Grisanti’s term, the covenant is both “unconditional” and “conditional.”²¹ Gentry and Wellum therefore inform that:

The divine obligations or promises are divided by the literary structure into promises to be fulfilled during David’s lifetime and promises to be fulfilled after David’s death. The former are listed in verses 8–11a: (1) a great name, (2) a firm place for Israel as the people of God and, (3) rest for David from his enemies. The latter are listed in verses 11b–13 and 16. Here what the Lord promised David is a lasting dynasty, kingdom, and throne . . . Nonetheless, as verses 14–15 show, faithfulness and obedience are expected of the king, and these verses foreshadow the possibility of disloyalty on the part of the king, which will require discipline by the Lord. In effect, verses 14–15 are saying that the covenant will be fulfilled not only by a faithful father alone (i.e., [the Lord] keeping His promises), but also by a faithful son (i.e., the obedience of the king to [the Lord’s] Torah).²²

David’s further response to God’s promises through the prophet Nathan in verses 18–29 reveals his understanding of the covenant. At this point readers need to consider verse 19. Previously in verse 18 David expressed the fact that he and his house had been highly exalted by the Lord. Here, he realized that the covenant has a much broader coverage since it is “God’s charter or instruction for humankind.”²³ Therefore, Gentry and Wellum suggest that the phrase “this is the custom of man” (NASB) should be translated “this is the instruction for humanity.”²⁴ They argue that in verses 14–15 the human obligations in the relationship between the Lord and the Davidic king are indicated by establishing a

¹⁹Michael A. Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant.” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 233–250.

²⁰Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 394.

²¹Please read Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” 240–43.

²²Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 394–95.

²³Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 400.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 399.

father-son relationship.²⁵ This explains how the king could be called the son of God. Therefore, as the divine son, the Davidic king was to effect the divine instruction or Torah in the nation as a whole and was, as a result, a mediator of the Mosaic Torah, because “the only positive requirement is that the king embodies Torah as a model citizen.”²⁶

However, since the Lord whom the Davidic king represented was not limited to a local region or territory, but was the Creator God and Sovereign of the whole world, the rule of the Davidic king would have outcomes for all the nations, not just for Israel. This is developed in Psalm 2 and many other psalms, but is already suggested in 2 Samuel 7. Thus, faithfulness on the part of the Davidic Son would affect the divine rule in the entire world, much as God intended for humanity in the covenant of creation as indicated by the divine image in Genesis 1:26ff.

This is understandable then when David claimed that a covenant that makes the Davidic king son of God is the instrument of bringing the Lord’s Torah to all the nations (v. 19). 2 Samuel 7:19 therefore is “the key to the universalization of the messianic vision in the psalms and prophets.”²⁷ The “royal psalms” (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144) and many messages of hope proclaimed by Hebrew prophets (ex. Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-16; 16:5; 55:3; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:8; 33:15-26; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Mic. 5:2-5; Zech. 12:7-8) are a few of them.²⁸

Davidic Covenant in Psalms and the Prophets

Psalms

From the “royal psalms” this article will only take two examples to be considered: Psalm 72 and 89. Psalm 72 is David’s farewell blessing.²⁹ This psalm has the peculiarity of having two different titles, one at the head, ascribing it to Solomon, and another at the end, including it among “the prayers of David.” In this psalm by personal example and deed, the Davidic king was to promote righteousness and justice in the land (v. 1). He would do this by defending the cause of the afflicted, weak, and helpless and by crushing

²⁵Grisanti argues that the background for the sonship imagery (and the form of the Davidic Covenant) is the ancient Near Eastern covenant of grant, whereby a king would reward a faithful servant by elevating him to the position of sonship and granting him special gifts, usually related to land and dynasty. Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” 241.

²⁶Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 399.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 401.

²⁸Scholars have categorized a number of psalms under the heading of “royal psalms” because they share a common motif – the king. These psalms draw heavily on the idea of a Davidic dynasty and presuppose the covenant God established with David. Please read Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” 24

²⁹Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament*, 83.

their oppressors (vv. 2, 4, 12–14). The ideal Davidic ruler would occasion the national experience of peace, prosperity, and international recognition (cf. vv. 3, 5–11, 15–17). God promised to give His anointed king dominion over the entire earth (vv. 8–11). Although this psalm may have been written at the beginning of Solomon's reign, it envisions ideals never fully realized in Israel's history. The king “could not have been Solomon, or any earthly king.”³⁰ Only during the millennial reign of Christ “the peace and prosperity depicted by this psalm find fulfillment.”³¹

In Psalm 89 the psalmist affirms that the Davidic king enjoyed the status of God's “firstborn” (vv. 26–27). God promised His chosen king a continuing dynasty (v. 4), victory over his enemies (vv. 21–23), and dominion over the whole earth (v. 25). If a Davidic king failed to obey God's Word he would be severely disciplined and forfeit full participation in the benefits of the covenant (vv. 30–32). However, even in the wake of disobedience the Lord would not revoke His promise to the house of David (vv. 33–34). God's loving kindness to David will endure “forever” (vv. 28, 29, 36, 37). The psalmist affirms that God's promise to David was as certain as the constantly occurring day or night cycle (v. 29; cf. Jer. 33:19–21) and as reliable as the continuing existence of the sun and moon, which never fail to make their appearances in the sky (vv. 35–37).

After explaining that in Psalm 89 the author seeking to resolve his belief in God's oath to David and the reality of his day, Grisanti made a valid point:

The psalmist's frustration demonstrates at least two truths. First of all, at this point in Israel's history, the ideal of a just king who would bring the nation lasting peace and prosperity was still an unfulfilled ideal. Secondly, the inability of Davidic rulers to live and rule in accordance with God's demands causes the reader to look forward for a Davidic figure who would one day perfectly satisfy those divine expectations.³²

Mack accordingly asserts that “such words as these forbids in themselves fulfillment in David, or in any merely human son of David.”³³ Gentry and Wellum rightly assert, “What the subsequent course of history shows is that the Lord must not only keep the promises but also provide the obedient son, if the covenant is to be maintained.”³⁴

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” 244.

³²*Ibid.*, 245.

³³Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament*, 72.

³⁴Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 405.

The Prophets

“The Prophets” here are understood to be the sixteen canonical books of the English Bible, called by the Jews “the Latter Prophets.”³⁵ However, due to the rich contents of the books, this article will limit the discussion only to a very small fraction of the material.

After a careful observation on Isaiah 55:3 Gentry and Wellum conclude that the text speaks of a future king – a new David who is an obedient son succeeds in bringing the Lord’s Torah to all humans. They build this conclusion on the point of view of the phrase “the faithful mercies shown to David” (NASB) as subjective genitive, rather than as objective genitive. They assert that “if we follow through on the subjective genitive, the kindnesses of David could involve sharing the victory of the one with the many (see Isa. 53:10-12) so that all are now sons and daughters of God, just as all are now servants.”³⁶

Gentry and Wellum then argue that “the faithful or obedient acts of loyal love are those of the servant king in Isaiah 53, whose offering of himself and whose resurrection enables him to bring the fulfilment the promises of the Lord in the Davidic covenant and who is at the same time the basis for the new or everlasting covenant.”³⁷ This future King then fulfills the roles required for the king in Deuteronomy 17 and 2 Samuel 7 by bringing the divine instruction or Torah to Israel (Deut. 17) and, indeed, to all the nations (2 Sam. 7:19). He is therefore a leader and a commander of the peoples and becomes a covenant witness in himself to the nations. This is exactly how Acts 13:34 interprets Isaiah 55.³⁸

The messianic passages in Hosea and Amos are “general in character, referring usually to the restoration of a united Israel under the house of David.”³⁹ These two prophets did not let go their hold upon “the sure mercies of David” although their people had thrown off the temporal rule of David’s sons (Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11-15).⁴⁰ They took hold the hope of “the fulfillment of the covenant with David for an everlasting kingdom and a never-dying king.”⁴¹ Hosea said, “Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king” (3:5). Similarly, the Lord spoke through Amos saying, “In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David” (9:11). Since David was no

³⁵Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament*, 91.

³⁶For a fuller discussion on this matter, please read Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 410-17.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 421.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament*, 94.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 95.

longer alive, it is obvious that the prophets were not speaking of the historical David, but of the new and the greater David – the Messiah.

Remembering the choice of David in old day and the covenant promise to David, the prophet Micah drew the Judean's attentions to Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2-5). He told them that when there would be no king any longer over the people, when the line of David physically and civilly would have been put aside from ruling, the promised ruler shall come from that little town. This promised ruler will be born from a virgin, of which Isaiah the prophet had spoken so clearly (Isa. 7:14). He will gather the remnants of his scattered people, be their good shepherd, and establish them securely.⁴² Micah told the people that this ruler will be "our peace." Here the prophet might have been calling to remembrance the well-known messianic title of Isaiah, "Prince of Peace," of whose extending government and of peace, there would be no end (Isa. 9:6-7).⁴³ Micah the prophet here could not have been speaking of David since this "ruler" is one who was "from long ago." Also, he speaks of the future and David was buried by the time Micah spoke.

Of the latter days the prophet Jeremiah assigned the ineffable name to this Branch of David when he prophesied, "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch. . . and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness'" (Jeremiah 23:5-6). In this chapter Jeremiah described and denounced Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin as false and wicked shepherds, who misled and despoiled Israel. Yet, David is the Lord's beloved one, with whom the covenant must stand forever. The prophet therefore turned from those unworthy and wicked kings to the ideal king of the messianic hope. This prophecy is close to Isaiah 4:2 and Micah 5:1-5.⁴⁴

II. Analyze and Result

Views of the Fulfillment of Davidic Covenant

As mentioned earlier, the promises entailed in the covenant with David are divided by the text into two: (1) those to be fulfilled during his lifetime and (2) those to be fulfilled after his death. Second Samuel 7:8-11 gives the promises to be fulfilled during David's lifetime: (1) a great name, (2) a firm place for Israel as the people of God, and (3) rest for David from his enemies. Second Samuel 8 gives a list of David's victories and is placed by the author strategically after chapter 7 to show the fulfillment of these three promises. According to 8:13, "David made a name *for himself* when he returned from

⁴²Mack, *The Christ of the Old Testament*, 100.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 107.

killing 18,000 Arameans in the Valley of Salt.” The defeat of the enemies listed in chapter 8 shows that God made a firm place for his people Israel through these victories. In 1 Kings 5:4 Solomon attests to the fact that he has rest on every side – a legacy received from his father David.⁴⁵

The promises to be fulfilled after the death of David are also three: (1) an eternal house, (2) kingdom, and (3) throne. To David in verses 10-11 the Lord promised that He would provide Israel a secure and peaceful homeland, justice, and continued and increased freedom from the threat of non-Israelite aggressors. “These promises, however, were not fulfilled in David’s lifetime; later prophets understood them to refer to a future period (cf. Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16).”⁴⁶ Bergen therefore contends, “The Lord’s words become eschatological in character as they describe the benefits that will increase for Israel with the magnification of the house of David.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Lord also pronounced to David that it would not be him but his successor who would “build a house for [His] name” (v. 13). This prophetic reference, “viewed in its immediate historical context, was to Solomon, who constructed the temple for the Lord in Jerusalem between 966 and 959 B.C. (cf. 1 Kings 6:1-38).”⁴⁸

The Lord’s promise to David to establish the throne of his kingdom forever however seems “to vault this portion of the prophecy beyond the bounds of Solomon’s reign and give it eschatological and/or messianic overtones.”⁴⁹ Bergen rightly points out that “the throne of Solomon’s kingdom was not permanently established; in fact, his kingdom – in the strict sense of the word – ceased to exist immediately after his death (cf. 1 Kings 11:31-38).”⁵⁰ Solomon did not reign as king forever. In fact, Solomon, besides of his incredible wisdom, is also “well-known as the king who committed many sins by marrying pagan wives and succumbing to their idolatrous influence.”⁵¹ It is not to mention the wicked descendants of David afterward. They all were failed to fully obey the Lord who has made the covenant with their father, David. The Lord therefore has spoken through his many prophets that the eternal throne would be held by Messiah himself.

This fact eventually has become the basis for the New Testament writers. Although they do not deny that some aspects of the prophetic revelation of v. 13 referred

⁴⁵Gentry and Wellum. *Kingdom through Covenant*, 421.

⁴⁶Bergen, *1-2 Samuel*, 339.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 340.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰Bergen, *1-2 Samuel*, 339.

⁵¹Frydland, *What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah*, 32.

to Salomon (cf. Acts 7:47), they primarily apply this verse to Jesus, the ultimate “son of David” (e.g. Matt. 1:1).⁵² Bergen states, “This incongruity between divine prophecy and human history invited the New Testament writers to look to a different son of David for the fulfillment of the word.”⁵³ He needs to be both the son of David and of God.

The Messiah is both the Son of David and of God

The Messiah needs to be both David’s descendant and God’s begotten Son. Psalm 89 once again is a great source of this teaching. The psalmist, Ethan the Ezrahite, recognized that the throne referred to in Nathan’s prophecy was not simply an earthly throne but one which would be occupied eternally by a new and greater David. He says, “I also shall make him *My* firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth...So I will establish his descendants forever and his throne as the days of heaven...My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful” (Psalm 89:27, 29, 34-37). Here, Ethan is no doubt longing for the new and greater David for he was expecting a Messiah who would endure forever, and who is God’s firstborn. A Midrashic portion has the following comment about this psalm: “Rabbi Nathan said that God spoke to Israel, saying, ‘As I made Jacob firstborn, for it is written ‘Israel is my son even my firstborn’ (Exo. 4:22), so also will I make Messiah my Firstborn as it is written, ‘I will make him my Firstborn’ (Psalm 89:27)’.”⁵⁴

Other scriptures reveal details about the fact of the sonship of the Messiah. Psalm 2 proclaims that Messiah, God’s begotten Son, will rule the nations and they will worship him; otherwise they will be punished. It says “Why are the nations in an uproar...against the LORD and against His Anointed...But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’” (vv. 1-2, 6-7). Agur ben Yakeh, one of the writers of a portion of the book of Proverbs, further identified Messiah as the Son of God when he poses a riddle: “Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all

⁵²Bergen, *1-2 Samuel*, 339.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Midrash Rabbah Shemot 19 as quoted in Frydland, *What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah*, 33.

the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!" (Pro. 30:4).

The prophet Isaiah who lived several centuries after David also referred to the Son of God who would sit upon the throne of David forever when he said: "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us. . . And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. . ." (Isa. 9:6, 7).

The prophet Daniel also "kept looking in the night visions" of the Messianic Son coming "with the clouds of heaven": "And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14). Thus, Messiah was to be the Son of David. He was also to be the Son of God.

Jesus is the Promised Messiah

Jesus' Davidic descent was not a theological invention of the early church. It was attested as early as Paul (Rom. 1:3) and in the letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 7:14). Further, Jesus' immediate family, which was prominent in the early church, would have had to accept the claim. The Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings, repeatedly charges Jesus with being born out of wedlock, for example, to Pandera a Roman soldier, so this is a polemic against Jesus' lineage. But there is no polemic against Mary's or Joseph's lineages.⁵⁵ New Testament writers knew well that it is really significant to show their readers of "Jesus' status as the promised messianic son of David, the king of Israel."⁵⁶

To show the identity of Jesus as the Son of David, New Testament writers linked Jesus to the Davidic concept of messiah in the Old Testament. Inspired by the Holy Spirit they accepted the claim of the Lord, "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me" (2 Sam. 7:14) literally."⁵⁷ Thus, Jesus is unambiguously understood in the New Testament to be the Son of God (Mark 1:1; John 20:31; Acts 9:20; Heb. 1:5) – "an understanding

⁵⁵T. Cabal, et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2007), 1403.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Bergen, *1-2 Samuel*, 341.

fostered by Jesus' own self-claims (cf. Matt. 27:43; Luke 22:70).⁵⁸ The New Testament therefore, taking this verse literally and applying it to Jesus, connected it with Jesus' virgin birth (cf. Luke 1:32).⁵⁹

Having given only one comment about David in Acts 13 Paul gives an important assertion: "he will do everything that God wants." This is the faithful king of 2 Samuel 7. Paul then attempts to show that Jesus is the Savior whom God promised to bring to Israel from the line of David (v. 23). He asserts that Jesus' death and resurrection fulfill the words of the prophets (v. 27). In verse 32 Paul offers another good news to his audience: "what God promised to the fathers is now fulfilled for us, their descendants, when He raised Jesus from the dead." Here he cites Psalm 2:7 and then affirms that God raised Jesus, no longer to return to corruption. Furthermore, Paul cites Isaiah 55:3 because the passage is the text that applies the work of the servant to the nations.⁶⁰ In addition, without affirming Jesus' need for punishment due to personal sin, the assertions given by the writer of the Book of Hebrews of 2 Samuel 7:14b, 16 are likewise messianic (cf. Heb. 1:8, 9; 5:8-9).⁶¹

Thus, according to the New Testament, this is what happened as the fulfillment of Davidic covenant: the eternal house/seed is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, a descendant of David who according to His resurrection is an eternal person. And through the coming, person, and work of Jesus Christ, an eternal kingdom has been already begun (2 Pet. 1:11). When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father after His resurrection, the authors of the New Testament make plain that He is ruling from an eternal heavenly throne (Acts 2:29-36; Heb. 12:22-24).

III. Conclusion

One of the key points in the narrative plot structure of Scripture is the covenant that God initiated with David as it is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. This covenant functions in the larger story of the Bible in some significant ways. Those events that have been known as Davidic Covenant may rightly be understood as "the flowering of a Torah prophecy, the climax of David's life, and the foundation for a major theme in the writings of the Latter Prophets."⁶²

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Gentry and Wellum. *Kingdom through Covenant*, 419-20.

⁶¹Bergen, *1-2 Samuel*, 341.

⁶²Bergen, *1-2 Samuel*, 336.

The eternal covenant between the Lord and David is very significant for the New Testament writers as well. As Bergen says, “The divine declarations proclaimed [in 2 Samuel 7] through the prophet Nathan are foundational for seven major New Testament teachings about Jesus: that He is (1) one who would rise from the dead (cf. Acts 2:30; 13:23); (2) the builder of the house for God (cf. John 2:19-22; Heb. 3:3-4, etc.); (3) the possessor of a throne (cf. Heb. 1:8; Rev. 3:21, etc.); (4) the possessor of an eternal kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-25; Eph. 5:5; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:11, etc.); (5) the product of an immaculate conception, since He had God as His father (cf. Luke 1:32-35); (6) the son of David (cf. Matt. 1:1; Acts 13:22-23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16, etc.); and (7) the son of God (cf. Mark 1:1; John 20:31; Acts 9:20; Heb. 4:14; Rev. 2:18, etc.).”⁶³

Finally, 2 Samuel 7, as Walter Brueggemann has noted, is “the dramatic and theological center of the entire Samuel corpus and one of the most crucial texts in the Old Testament for evangelical faith.”⁶⁴ It convincingly shapes the Christian understanding of the Messiah. Theologically, this text is important because the theme of sonship placed right at the center of the chapter. Moreover, this relationship of father to son has crucially important messianic associations, for the notion of sonship is not only played out in the life of David and his immediate progeny, but also in the New Testament in relation to King David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ, and with God’s sons and daughters who are in solidarity with Him (cf. Luke 1:31-33; Rom. 1:3-4; 8:3, 12-17; Heb. 1:5).”⁶⁵

IV. Refference

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⁶³*Ibid.*, 337-8.

⁶⁴Walter Brueggeman as quoted in Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 70.

⁶⁵Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 70.

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