

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT
2 Samuel 7:16, 23:5, Matthew 1:1
By Raymond White

The New Testament opens with this verse —

Matthew 1:1 *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

What is that all about? What does “son of David” have to do with anything? Since it’s the kickoff verse to the entire New Testament and all our ideas of salvation, it must be important.

Most Christians have some idea of God’s covenant with Abraham and how Christ figures into that, but few Christians have any idea about God’s covenant with David and how Christ figures into that. But it is crucial and we ought to understand it.

This was not a trivial thing. The Jews expected Christ to come, but more, they expected that when he came, he would be the “Son of David.”

Matthew 12:23 *And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?*

Matthew 21:9 *And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest.*

Matthew 22:42 *Saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They [the Pharisees] say unto him [Jesus], The son of David.*

Luke 18:38 *And he [a blind man] cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. :39* *And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

Acts 13:22 *And when he [God] had removed him [Saul] he raised up unto them David to be their king ... :23* *Of this man’s seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:*

Revelation 22:16 *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright morning star.*

This was the common expectation, that Christ would be the son of David, more so than merely the son of Abraham which they all were. The point was that they expected him to be their king, their ruler, the one who would pick up the Davidic dynasty as legitimate heir to the throne.

Why did they believe that? And why was Matthew so intent on making that very point? First note that Matthew was indeed intent on making that very point. That’s why Matthew began his gospel with the dynastic claim “the son of David” and why he provided proof — opening his book with the genealogy of Jesus Christ back to David back to Abraham.

Matthew 1:6 *And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon [not the king] of her that had been the wife of Urias.*

Notice that David is not “a” king but “the” king. Solomon was not “the” king nor were any of their successors (Josiah, etc.) There was only one “the” king and that was David.

Why? What was that all about? What it was all about was the forever dynasty, that dynasty that would never end.

The world has had many dynasties, some long, some short. Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte created a dynasty which was short lived. There was only one king in it, himself. His French army was defeated at Waterloo and thus ended his brief dynasty — his son did not inherit the French throne.

The world’s longest dynasty, on the other hand, was an unbroken chain of Egyptian Pharaohs which lasted over a thousand years and ended with its final Pharaoh, Hophra. One interesting detail of that dynastic fall was that Jeremiah the prophet predicted it.

Jeremiah 44:30 *Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give Pharaohhophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life.*

This was a stunning prediction. A dynasty that has survived a thousand years was about to collapse? How could that be? But that is exactly what happened. A revolt in Egypt cost Hophra his life and the dynasty was extinguished. Jeremiah had good inside information. Prophets generally do.

But longer even than a thousand years, is forever. That’s the promise that God made to David.

The story begins when David the King decided to build a house for God. David was enjoying his grand palace and thought it too bad that God still lived in a crummy old tent. So David decided to do something nice for God and build a temple for God to live in.

David asked the prophet Nathan what he thought of that and Nathan said, good idea, do that. But when Nathan returned home, God said to him you should have asked me first. No way will David build a house for me, but his son will.

So that’s the background.

Here’s the promise.

2 Samuel 7:12 *And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. :13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. :14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: :15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. :16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.*

That, then, is the Davidic covenant. David's dynasty will not be short, it will not be long, it will be forever, eternal. That's a one-of-a-kind dynasty. There had never been a dynasty like that, Hophra's thousand year dynasty was tiny by comparison.

But what about David's failures, his problems with Bathsheba and Uriah? Surely David was not worthy to receive such a blessing, was he? Surely God would not keep his promise to such a man as David who would murder his friend and take his wife, would he? (Actually, that's not quite the way it happened but that's a story for another time.) The question here is: did God keep his promise to David or did he cancel the promise because of David's failings?

Here's the answer.

After a life of ups and downs, good and bad, David finally arrived at his deathbed. Determined to put things right as best he could, he made final arrangements with his son and successor, Solomon. Solomon would indeed see the project through and build the temple to God. But more important even than that, was the surety of the covenant, the eternal dynasty.

2 Samuel 23:1 Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, :2 The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue, :5 Although my house be not so with God [I've had my failings]; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.[The final clause is a bad translation. Most translations translate it as a rhetorical question: "Will he not make it grow?"]

So, in spite of David's foibles and failures, God will not recant. His promise to David is sure, David's dynasty will stand forever, without end.

But that creates a problem: David's dynasty did end, when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and deposed the last Jewish monarch Zedekiah. There were successive governors as Gedaliah and Zerubbabel, but there were no Jewish kings. Later, the Romans did appoint kings in Judah, Herod and his successors, but they were not Jewish, and certainly not Davidic, not of the royal family, and the Jews were anxious to be rid of them.

Contemporary historians documented the mood of the times.

Suetonius wrote: "There had spread all over the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Israel to rule the world."

Tacitus wrote: "There was a firm persuasion that at that time, that the East was to gain powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire."

Josephus wrote: "About that time the Jews believed that one from their country should become governor of the habital earth," and also, "What chiefly incited the Jews to the war was an ambiguous prophecy, found in their sacred writings, that about that time, one from their country should obtain the empire of the world."

That was the general sentiment that finally led to Judah's war against Rome and their annihilation in 70 A.D. That sentiment, in the end destroyed their nation, but it was not baseless. It had its roots in the Davidic covenant. And it was, in fact, fulfilled.

One day, a carpenter named Joseph and his espoused wife Mary arrived in the City of David to pay their taxes. Joseph was a direct descendent of David and a proper heir to the throne. Mary gave birth to Jesus and Joseph adopted Jesus with full inheritance rights including the right

to inherit the throne of David. Thus the “son of David” had arrived, and magi from the east came to remind Herod that he was not a legitimate Jewish king and never was.

***Matthew 2:2** Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews?*

The Jews had been very anxious about the Davidic covenant. How would God keep his promise? How would God pick up where he left off and continue an eternal dynasty that had been dead for centuries? Would God raise a king from David? And if he did, how could that dynasty continue forever?

These are fair questions. Dynasties are never forever, but this one must be.

***Psalms 89:34** My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. :35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.*

That God swore an oath to David cast God’s promise in concrete. Once sworn, an oath cannot be rescinded, reversed, taken back, undone, or annulled in any way.

***Hebrews 6:17** Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.*

God takes oaths. So, whether the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, the Messianic covenant (***Hebrews 7:21***), or some other covenant, once God takes an oath he has bound himself to keep that covenant.

And so the Jews knew that sooner or later, eventually their Messiah would be born. So certain were they of this that they even knew where. And where was that? Why, the City of David, Bethlehem of course. Where else?

***Micah 5:2** But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

And so, a few centuries later, the story began, again, and this time, forever.

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