

The Priestly Implications of the Davidic Covenant

I. Introduction

1. The Davidic Covenant was a significant development in the salvation history, being situated within and carrying forward God's covenants with Abraham and with Israel at Sinai.
 - a. The Abrahamic Covenant pledged to Abraham royal descendents and a kingdom land, and the Sinai Covenant ratified those promises to Abraham's covenant family; Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, a royal nation manifesting Yahweh's rule in the world.
 - b. The Davidic Covenant presupposed these promises, but further developed them by focusing them in David and his kingship and kingdom. If Israel was a regal and priestly nation, holy to the Lord, these qualities were preeminently true of David as Yahweh's regal image-son.
2. God's covenant with David, then, took up in itself all of His previous promises and covenantal provisions. Thus the scriptures subsequent to that event associate Yahweh's fulfillment of His purposes and promises with His faithfulness to David and His covenant with him. * ref. Psalm 89, 132; Isa. 9, 11, 55; Jer. 23, 33; Ezek. 34, 37; Hosea 3

II. The Priestly Implications of the Davidic Covenant

A. General Considerations

1. While priestly matters are not directly addressed in the Davidic Covenant, the biblical text clearly establishes the priestly component of David's kingship. * 2 Sam. 6:13-19
2. David's priestly activity was unique among Israel's kings as being approved by Yahweh, and this reflected both his prophetic significance (indicated by God's covenant with him) and his unique representation of Israel's covenant status as a regal and priestly people.
3. Israel – and preeminently Israel's king – was Yahweh's *image-son*, and this is the most basic reason for the nation's regal and priestly status. * Exod. 19:1-6
4. Indeed, the creation account itself indicates that man's status as image-son is unto the human vocation of *mediated lordship*. God created human beings in His own image to mediate His relationship with His creation, both in administering His lordship in the creation and in stewarding on His behalf the creation's devotion and service in its delight and flourishing.
5. This is why Jesus, the True Man, is the preeminent priest-king, and it is also the reason that the regal and priestly vocation is the destiny of the renewed human race. * 1 Pet. 2; Rev. 5

B. Psalm 110

1. Because David was the preeminent prototype of the Messiah – the man (image-son) in whom Israel, Yahweh's regal priesthood, would become Israel indeed – it was necessary that he should be distinguished as a priestly king. *This aspect of David's kingship, particularly as it functioned as a prophetic prototype, finds its greatest scriptural articulation in Psalm 110.* This psalm presupposes the Davidic Covenant, and it gives deeper insight into David's perception of the regal son promised in the covenant and his own relationship with this son.

2. Yahweh promised that He would build David's house in this son, and that this son would build His house in the context of enduring peace and rest that He secured. Psalm 110 presents a unique king – a king whom David exalts as his lord and Yahweh exalts to His right hand – who overcomes his enemies by *vanquishing enmity* (vv. 2-3), and who then exercises his sovereign rule as an abiding priest. *But a priest according to a new priestly order associated with Melchizedek, the enigmatic priest-king of ancient Jerusalem.* * Gen. 14:17-20
3. If this psalm – which was widely regarded as messianic during the Second Temple era (Mat. 22:41-46) – did indeed speak of David's covenant son, it revealed that the Davidic Covenant didn't simply look to the "distant future," *but to a future beyond the Law of Moses*. A new priesthood implies a new covenant (Heb. 7:11-12), so that God was promising the end of the present Israelite kingdom and its covenant and a new dynasty and covenant kingdom.

C. Zechariah 6

1. Centuries later, while the second temple was under construction, the prophet Zechariah also spoke of a Davidic king having a priestly rule. Echoing the Davidic Covenant, he proclaimed that *this* king-priest would complete the work of building Yahweh's sanctuary. * 6:9-15
2. Solomon built the house for Yahweh that David had in mind, but that sanctuary stood for only four centuries before being destroyed by the Babylonians along with David's city. Seventy years passed before the second temple was completed in 516 B.C. by the Jewish exiles who returned to Judea under Cyrus's decree. The new temple took four years to build, and it was during that time – *and with that project in view* – that the prophet Zechariah issued a physical prophecy in the sight of the Judeans who were with him in Jerusalem.
 - a. That prophecy involved crowning the high priest Joshua, and then identifying him with the "Branch" who would build Yahweh's house – a clear reference to the son pledged to David in His covenant with him. * cf. Zech. 3:8; also Isa. 11:1-12; Jer. 23:1-8, 33:14-22
 - b. The circumstance surrounding this prophecy is profoundly important. The returned exiles were engaged in rebuilding the temple, but under duress and with great discouragement. *Even if they were able to complete their arduous task, this new sanctuary would be only a pale shadow of the glory of Solomon's temple.* * ref. Ezra 3-6; Hag. 2:1-3
 - c. Through Haggai, Yahweh exhorted the people to be enthusiastic and zealous in their labors, not because of any glory in this new temple structure, but because of the glorious destiny He'd appointed for it. *This latter temple would be the "house" to which Yahweh would return when He ended Israel's exile, purged the nation's covenant guilt, and renewed His covenant relationship with them* (cf. Isa. 40:1-11 with Mal. 3:1). *And when He restored the Abrahamic household, they would undertake their covenant mission to mediate His blessing to all the earth. Thus Yahweh would "shake the nations" in order to "gather their precious value" into His house, and so fill it with glory vastly beyond that of Solomon's temple* (Hag. 2:4-9). He had gathered in the wealth of the nations to build the tabernacle and two temples, and so He would do with His everlasting sanctuary.
 - d. Thus Zechariah's prophecy illumined the fact that Yahweh's intent to gather the earth's inhabitants to His dwelling place (Isa. 2:1-4) was for the purpose of building His ultimate sanctuary, which work He'd accomplish in David's "Branch." *He would build Yahweh's house as "a priest on His throne," drawing in people from all mankind to co-labor with Him, even as they themselves were built into the house.* * 6:13-15; cf. Eph. 2:11ff

Conclusions:

1. David is the point in the salvation history at which the priestly function was directly connected with the regal function that had, to that point, been the central motif in the Scripture's depiction of the promised "seed" of Eve and Abraham.
 - a. The regal human function was introduced with the creation of man (Gen. 1:26-28), and further suggested at man's fall by the conflict/triumph depiction of Eve's offspring (Gen. 3:15). This motif later came to the forefront with the Abrahamic Covenant and its promise of regal offspring (Gen. 17), which Jacob's blessing then focused upon Judah (Gen. 49:10). This blessing was later realized when Yahweh gave the scepter of His kingdom to David, His chosen and anointed *Shiloh* ("the one to whom it belongs").
 - b. Similarly, the priestly motif had its origin in Eden, though not explicitly as was the case with its regal counterpart. But administering God's rule on the earth implies mediating the relationship between Him and His creation, and this explains why the issue of mediation was central to Israel's election and calling as son of God: *Israel – the Abrahamic "seed" – was God's chosen instrument for addressing the curse of creational estrangement in order to reconcile the creation to Himself.*
2. Thus the concept of a human royal priesthood was fundamental to the Abrahamic Covenant, even as it defines the human vocation in God's design for His creation, and He established His covenant with Abraham to see that design realized. Yahweh set Israel apart to Himself to be a regal and priestly people for the sake of the world, and this identity and calling later became epitomized in Israel's king. If the nation was "son of God" in this sense, this was preeminently true of Israel's king.
3. And yet, the Sinai Covenant had formalized an absolute separation between the kingship and priesthood in Israel, assigning them to two distinct tribes. Thus David – as every king in Israel – could not hold the priesthood, and yet Israel's king was to epitomize Israel's regal and priestly status and role in the world. Yahweh's intent was to flood the world with His glory, which would mean enlarging His sanctuary to fill the whole earth, and the Abrahamic household was charged with building this global "temple" through their faithfulness as image-sons, executing His loving reign and mediating His blessing to all the nations.
4. Israel was to build Yahweh's sanctuary by fulfilling its calling as a royal priesthood, and Israel's king was the epitomizing Israelite. Thus David's action in installing the ark in Jerusalem and Solomon's consecration of the temple both involved priestly ministrations. And yet, the Law of Moses precluded the possibility of a priest-king – one person holding both offices, *which itself testified that Israel's status as priest-king had not yet been realized, and indeed could not be realized until a time of covenant renewal that would see the existing covenant order replaced.*
5. This is the great implication of Psalm 110 and Zechariah 6. What Yahweh pledged to David in His covenant with him would not be fulfilled under the present covenant and its theocratic structure. It looked to the future and a regal son who would hold an everlasting priesthood according to a new priestly order represented by the priest-king Melchizedek ("king of righteousness"). Yahweh would unite the kingship and priesthood in this son, thus fulfilling Israel's identity and vocation. And through this Son of David and True Israel, He would establish peace and build His everlasting sanctuary as He'd pledged, filling the earth with His glory through the priestly rule of His image-children. * Isa. 11:1-10, 49:1-13; Rev. 5:1-14