

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

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The centrally important Davidic Covenant was one of the “grant” covenants, along with the Abrahamic Covenant, in contrast to the Mosaic Covenant that was a “suzerain-vassal” treaty. Second Samuel 7:8-16 articulates the Davidic Covenant in two parts: promises that find realization during David’s life and promises that find realization after David’s death. Though “grant” covenants such as the Davidic are often considered unconditional, conditionality and unconditionality are not mutually exclusive. God’s covenant with David had both elements. Psalms 72 and 89 are examples of ten psalms that presuppose God’s covenant with David. Various themes that pervade the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants show the continuity that connects the four.

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God’s establishment of His covenant with David represents one of the theological high points of the OT Scriptures. This key event builds on the preceding covenants and looks forward to the ultimate establishment of God’s reign on the earth. The psalmists and prophets provide additional details concerning the ideal Davidite who will lead God’s chosen nation in righteousness. The NT applies various OT texts about this Davidite to Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 1:1-17; Acts 13:33-34; Heb 1:5; 5:5; et al). In the Book of Revelation, John addresses Him as the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev 19:16).

Walter Kaiser suggests at least four great moments in biblical history that supply both the impetus for progressive revelation and the glue for its organic and continuous nature: (1) the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17; (2) the promise declared to David in 2 Samuel 7; (3) the promise outlined in the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31, and (4) the day when many of these promises found initial realization in the death and resurrection of Christ.¹

Ronald Youngblood’s understand is that 2 Samuel 7 is “the center and

¹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity,” *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 298.

focus of . . . the Deuteronomic history itself.”² Walter Brueggemann regards it as the “dramatic and theological center of the entire Samuel corpus” and as “the most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament.”³ Robert Gordon called this chapter the “ideological summit . . . in the Old Testament as a whole.”⁴ John Levenson contended that God’s covenant with David “receives more attention in the Hebrew Bible than any covenant except the Sinaitic.”⁵

After setting the background for the Davidic Covenant, the bulk of this essay considers the OT articulation of that covenant. Attention then focuses on the coherence of the various OT covenants, i.e., how they relate to each other and what they represent as a whole.

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND TO THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Different Kinds of Biblical Covenants

The Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants are often called “covenants of promise”⁶ or “grant” covenants,⁷ whereas the Mosaic Covenant is likened to a “suzerain-vassal” treaty.⁸ The following chart (**Figure #1**) delineates some of the fundamental differences between the two types of covenants.

²Ronald F. Youngblood, “1,2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3:880.

³Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990) 253, 259.

⁴Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 235.

⁵Jon D. Levenson, “The Davidic Covenant and Its Modern Interpreters,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979):205-6.

⁶Darrell L. Bock, “The Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism,” *Three Central Issues for Today's Dispensationalist*, ed. Herb W. Bateman, IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, forthcoming), 159.

⁷Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants,” *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. A. Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 124.

⁸Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *JAOS* 90 (1970):185; Waltke, “Phenomenon of Conditionality” 124.

Figure #1: Basic Differences between a Grant and a Treaty	
Grant	Treaty
1. The giver of the covenant makes a commitment to the vassal	1. The giver of the covenant imposes an obligation on the vassal
2. Represents an obligation of the master to his vassal	2. Represents an obligation of the vassal to his master
3. Primarily protects the rights of the vassal	3. Primarily protects the rights of the master
4. No demands made by the superior party	4. The master promises to reward or punish the vassal for obeying or disobeying the imposed obligations

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is a personal and family covenant that forms the historical foundation for God’s dealings with mankind.⁹ Through this covenant God promises Abraham and his descendants land, seed, and blessing. The Abrahamic Covenant delineates the unique role that Abraham’s seed will have in God’s plan for the world and paves the way for Israel’s prominent role in that plan.¹⁰

The Mosaic Covenant

This covenant follows the format of a suzerain-vassal treaty and represents the constitution for the nation of Israel that grew out of Abraham’s descendants, a development envisioned by the Abrahamic Covenant. In this covenant, God offered cursing for disobedience and blessing for obedience. God’s basic demand was that Israel would love Him exclusively (Deut 6:4-5).

⁹Richard E. Averbeck, “God’s Covenants and God’s Church in God’s World,” (unpublished class notes, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1989) 13.

¹⁰Bock, “Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism” 160. Bock (159) comments, “[T]he program begun with Abraham gives Israel a central role in God’s plan and represents part of God’s activity to restore a relationship lost with man at the fall.”

**THE OLD TESTAMENT ARTICULATION
OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT**
2 Sam 7:8-16 (cf. 1 Chr 17:7-14)

Background Issues

Historical Preparation. David's transportation of the ark to the city of Jerusalem made that city the center of Israelite worship (2 Sam 6:1-23). With the entire nation under his control, with the government centralized in Jerusalem, and with no external foes at that time (7:1),¹¹ David expressed his desire to build a structure to house the ark of the covenant (7:2).¹² Nathan initially encouraged David to proceed with his plans to build the Temple (7:4-7). However, that night Yahweh told Nathan to inform David that a descendant of David would build this Temple.¹³ The Lord had other plans for David. As the God who orchestrated David's meteoric rise to power and prominence, Yahweh related His plan to establish David's lineage as the ruling line over God's chosen people (7:8-16).

The term "covenant" (בְּרִית, bĕrît). Although the Hebrew term for "covenant," בְּרִית (bĕrît), does not occur in 2 Samuel 7, the biblical expositions of the passage (cf. 2 Sam 23:5; Pss 89:35; 132:12) make clear that it provides the initial delineation of the Davidic Covenant. In his covenant with David, Yahweh presents David with two categories of promises:¹⁴ those that find realization during David's lifetime (2 Sam 7:8-11a)¹⁵ and those that find fulfillment after his death (2 Sam

¹¹Various historians contend that David did not move the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem until the latter part of his reign (e.g., Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 243, 245-46; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998] 246-48). Chapters 6 and 7 are located at this place in 2 Samuel for thematic rather than chronological reasons. It appears that the event of 2 Samuel 6-7 did not take place until after David completed his building projects in Jerusalem (with Hiram's assistance, 1 Chr 15:1) and after his many military campaigns (2 Sam 7:1).

¹²Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998) 241.

¹³The Lord softens the impact of this announcement on David by using the title "servant" to demonstrate that although David's plan is rejected, David himself is not. Also, rather than using a blunt negative statement, the Lord addresses David in the form of a question (cf. Gordon, *I & II Samuel* 237).

¹⁴Cf. R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1964) 114-28.

¹⁵Although some scholars contend that the provisions in 7:8-11a were not fulfilled in David's lifetime (e.g., Robert D. Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996] 339), at the very least they found initial fulfillment during David's lifetime. David's reputation was established, Israel occupied the land of promise, and Israel had no major contenders for power in their part of the Near East. This initial fulfillment does not mean that the prophets could not look forward to the presence of these same provisions in future settings (cf. Isa 9:7; 16:5; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15-16).

7:11b-16).¹⁶

Promises that find realization during David's lifetime (7:9-11a)

A Great Name (v. 9; cf. 8:13). As He had promised Abraham (Gen 12:2), the Lord promises to make David's name great (2 Sam 7:9).¹⁷ In Abraham's day, God's making Abraham's name great stood in clear contrast to the self-glorifying boasts of the builders of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:4). The same is true in David's day. Although David's accomplishments as king cause his reputation to grow (2 Sam 8:13), Yahweh was the driving force in making David's name great. He is the One who orchestrated David's transition from being a common shepherd to serving as the king over Israel (2 Sam 7:8).

A Place for the People (v. 10). The establishment of the Davidic Empire relieved a major concern involved in God's providing a "place" for Israel (7:9). The land controlled by Israel during David's reign approached the ideal boundaries of the promised land initially mentioned in conjunction with God's covenant with Abram (Gen 15:18).¹⁸ Consequently, during David's reign the two provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant that deal with people and land find initial fulfillment. In addition to this and more closely tied to the immediate context,¹⁹ the "place" that Yahweh will appoint for Israel probably highlights the idea of permanence and

¹⁶This break in the passage is indicated by at least two structural elements. The third person affirmation in 7:11b, "Yahweh declares to you," interrupts the first-person address in 7:8-11a and 7:12-16. The timing of the anticipated fulfillment of the promises made in 7:12-16 is found in the phrase, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers" (7:12a).

¹⁷The standard translations evidence a debate among scholars over the perspective of this issue of making David's name great. The KJV and NKJV render it as a past reality ("have made your name great") while a number of translations (NASB, NIV, NRSV) translate it as a future promise ("will make your name great"). Although certain scholars contend that the form (וַיִּשְׁמַע) represents a copulative or connective vav on the perfect verb and carries a past nuance (A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* [Dallas: Word, 1989] 110, 112, 120; O. Loretz, "The *Perfectum Copulativum* in 2 Sm 7,9-11," *CBQ* 23 [1961]:294-96), most scholars posit that the form entails a vav consecutive (also called correlative) on the perfect verb and should be translated with a future sense in this case (A. Gelston, "A Note on II Samuel, 7:10," *ZAW* 84 [1972]:93; R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 74-75; P. K. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel* [New York: Doubleday, 1984] 202-3). Although the shift from past to future that occurs at the midpoint of verse nine is not clearly demarcated, the fact that three other perfect verbs prefixed with a conjunction and then two imperfects (preceded by the negative particle) suggest that a future nuance fits all these verbs. The verb in question (וַיִּשְׁמַע) occurs after a break in verse nine (after the *athnach*) and probably looks back to the imperfect verb that begins this section ("thus you will say," v. 8). The intervening material provides the foundation for the promise that Nathan introduces in verse 9b.

¹⁸Deuteronomy 11:24 affirms that "every place" where the Israelites set their feet will be theirs. Cf. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* 116.

¹⁹In this appointed place Israel will not move any more and will not be oppressed by the sons of wickedness (2 Sam 7:10). This place will be Israel's own place as well. The "plant" imagery also suggests permanence (cf. Exod 15:17; Pss 44:2; 80:8; Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21; Amos 9:15).

security.²⁰

Rest (v. 11). David's "rest" from his enemies mentioned in 7:1 sets the historical and conceptual stage for the promise of rest in verse eleven. Though the absence of ongoing hostilities provided the window of opportunity for David to move the ark to Jerusalem and consider building a Temple for Yahweh, that "rest" only foreshadowed the "rest" to which Yahweh refers.²¹ Even after all of David's accomplishments, level of security and prosperity was yet unattained by the kingdom, a rest that is still future.²² The noun "rest" (מנוחה, *mēnuḥâ*) "is intimately associated with the land"²³ and accompanies the expulsion of those who lived in the land (i.e., the Canaanites). The Lord also contrasts this enduring rest He promises David with the temporary rest provided by the various judges (who periodically delivered Israel from oppression at the hands of the "sons of wickedness"; 7:10b-11a).

Promises that find realization after David's death (7:11b-16)

A House (v. 11). Dumbrell²⁴ suggests that 2 Samuel 6 provides the theological preparation for chapter seven. The divinely approved movement of the ark to the city of Jerusalem represents God's choice of Jerusalem as the future site for the Temple, i.e., a "house" for the ark of the covenant. The presence of God, which rests on the ark of the covenant, will serve as a tangible reminder of Yahweh's kingship over Israel. Next, chapter seven focuses attention on the erection of another "house," i.e., the dynasty of David and, consequently, the perpetuation of his line. This juxtaposition of these chapters suggests that the king had to provide for the kingship of Yahweh before the question of Israel's kingship is taken up.²⁵ It also implies that the Davidic kingship was ultimately to reflect the kingship of God.²⁶

In 2 Samuel 7 Yahweh had to first establish the "house" of David before

²⁰D. F. Murray, "MQWM and the Future of Israel in 2 Samuel VII 10," *Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1990):318-19; cf. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* 339 n. 67. Murray ("MQWM and the Future of Israel" 319) argues that the locative aspect of מנוחה is subsidiary to the qualitative aspect. He concludes, "2 Sam vii 10, then, acknowledges that Israel's occupation of the land, long since a physical reality, has been beset by many hazards. It affirms, however, that through David (and his dynasty) Yahweh will transform that place of hazard into a place of safety, into a permanent haven of security for his people" ("MQWM and the Future of Israel" 319).

²¹The same debate over whether the verb here signifies a past occurrence or a future promise seen in verse 9b also occurs here. For the reasons detailed above, the future sense is accepted.

²²R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* 74.

²³Carlson, *David, the Chosen King* 102.

²⁴W. J. Dumbrell, "The Davidic Covenant," *Reformed Theological Review* 39 (1980):40.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, 45.

He would permit the building of a “house” of worship by David’s son, Solomon. In verse five, Yahweh asks, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?”²⁷ In verses twelve and thirteen Yahweh introduces the “descendant” of David and affirms that “he will build a house [i.e., the Temple] for My name,” placing the personal pronoun in the emphatic position. After describing the rest He would give David during his reign (v. 11), Yahweh affirms His intention to build David’s “house.” Not only does Yahweh seek to have the ark of the covenant moved to Jerusalem to demonstrate tangibly the presence of His dominion in Jerusalem, but He also attends to the eternal “house” of David before He speaks of the erection of a structure to house Israel’s worship of Himself. The building of the “house”/Temple by mankind could only occur after Yahweh “built” the “house” of David.²⁸

Although the Hebrew term *בַּיִת* (*bayit*) refers to a fixed house built of any material in most instances, its meaning can shift to the contents of the house and particularly to the household living in the house.²⁹ In this usage it can refer to a family or clan of related individuals (e.g., Noah’s family, Gen 7:1), lineage or descendants (e.g., the house/line of Levi, Exod 2:1), or, in reference to kings, a royal court or dynasty (the house/dynasty of David, 2 Sam 7:11; Isa 7:2, 13). The term occurs seven times as part of Yahweh’s promise to David (7:11, 16, 19, 25, 26, 27, 29). At least two contextual indicators demonstrate that *bayit* refers to David’s dynasty rather than his immediate family or even his lineage. The juxtaposition of “house” with “kingdom” suggests that it deals with a royal dynastic line (7:16) and the presence of “forever” with reference to this “house” in three verses (7:16, 25, 29) and mention of “distant future” in another verse (7:19) suggests a duration that exceeds most family lineages.

A Seed (v. 12). Although this term *זֶרַע* (*zera’*), “seed” can signify a collective meaning of posterity (Gen 3:15; 12:7; 13:15), it occurs only once in 2 Samuel 7 and refers to Solomon, to all the royal descendants of David, and ultimately to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Solomon would be the guarantee for the rest of David’s descendants and would erect the Temple (7:13). Yahweh also guarantees that Davidic descendant would always be available to sit on the royal throne.³⁰ Yahweh states that He will set up or raise up (*קָם*, *qûm*) this seed.

A Kingdom (v. 13). Various passages in the Pentateuch anticipated that

²⁷After the introductory expression, “thus says the Lord,” the question is introduced by an interrogative *he* prefixed to the second person pronoun: “You, will you build for me a house to dwell in?”

²⁸Kaiser’s delineation of the Davidic Covenant (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978] 150) occasioned this observation.

²⁹*TLOT*, s.v. “בַּיִת,” by E. Jenni, 1:235; cf. *TDOT*, s.v. “בַּיִת,” by Harry A. Hoffner, 2 (1975):114.

³⁰Athaliah had sought to exterminate the “whole seed of kingship,” i.e., David’s dynasty (2 Chr 22:10).

Israel would one day have a king (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11; Deut 17:14-20) and constitute a kingdom (Num 24:7, 19). However, this kingdom which God promises to establish through David does not replace the theocracy. It is regarded as God's throne/kingdom (1 Chr 28:5; 2 Chr 9:8; 13:8). In fact, the Davidic ruler is called "the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam 24:6; 2 Sam 19:21).

In verse 12 the Lord spoke of raising up the descendant or seed of David and in verse 13 declared that this descendant would erect His "house" or Temple. The reader immediately thinks of Solomon, David's son and heir to the throne who constructed the first glorious Temple in Jerusalem. Yahweh then affirms that David's dynasty ("house") and throne/kingdom would be eternal (7:13-16). This statement in verses 13 and 16 vaults this portion of God's oath beyond the time frame of Solomon's reign (which ceased to exist immediately after his death). This incongruity between divine prophecy and human history invited the NT writers to await a different son of David who would rule eternally.³¹

Conditionality/Unconditionality

Grants vs. Treaties

As with the other biblical covenants treated in this issue, the concepts of conditionality and unconditionality are not mutually exclusive. An unconditional covenant is not necessarily without conditions just as a conditional covenant can have unconditional elements. Weinfeld's proposal of the terms grant and treaty clarifies the differences between the biblical covenants.³² In a grant the giver/maker of the covenant offers the promise or commitment. The grant constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant and protects the rights of the servant primarily.³³ The grant may be called unconditional "in the sense that no demands are made on the superior party."³⁴ In a treaty the giver/maker of the covenant imposes an obligation upon someone else. A treaty represents the obligation of the vassal or servant to the master and primarily protects the rights of the master.³⁵ A treaty is conditional in the sense that the master promises to reward or punish the vassal for obeying or disobeying the covenant stipulations.³⁶

As with other "grant"-style covenants, in establishing this covenant with David Yahweh places no obligations on David as it relates to the enactment or

³¹Bergen, *I, 2 Samuel* 340. Notice how this reality appears in the NT writers' application of 2 Sam 7:13 to Jesus (see below).

³²Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant" 185.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Waltke, "Phenomenon of Conditionality" 124.

³⁵Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament" 185.

³⁶Waltke, "Phenomenon of Conditionality" 124

perpetuation of the covenant.³⁷ In that sense the Davidic Covenant is unilateral and, consequently, unconditional. Any conditions attached to this covenant concern only the question of which king or kings will enjoy certain provisions laid out by the covenant.

Contextual Indicators of Conditionality and Unconditionality

The writer of 2 Samuel brings together the irrevocable and conditional elements of Yahweh's grant to David by means of the imagery of sonship³⁸ in 7:14-16:

I will be his father and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (NIV).

The clause "I will be His father and he will be My son" serves as an adoption formula and represents the judicial basis for this divine grant of an eternal dynasty (cf. Pss 2:7-8; 89:20-29).³⁹ The background for the sonship imagery (and the form of the Davidic Covenant, see above) is the ancient Near Eastern covenant of grant, "whereby a king would reward a faithful servant by elevating him to the position of 'sonship'⁴⁰ and granting him special gifts, usually related to land and dynasty."⁴¹ Unlike the suzerain-vassal treaty (e.g., the Mosaic Covenant), a covenant of grant was a unilateral grant that could not be taken away from the recipient.⁴²

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., 131.

³⁹Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament" 190; cf. Avraham Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate Protection," *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. A. Gileadi [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 158. In the second millennium, adoption served as the only way to legitimize the bestowal of land and rulership.

⁴⁰Weinfeld ("Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament" 191) refers to a treaty between Šupilluliumaš and Mattiwaza which illustrates this practice of adoption/sonship: "(The great king) grasped me with his hand . . . and said: 'When I will conquer the land of Mittanni I shall not reject you, I shall make you my son [using an Akkadian expression for adopting a son], I will stand by (to help in war) and will make you sit on the throne of your father.'"

⁴¹Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., "A Theology of the Psalms," *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991) 267.

⁴²Weinfeld ("Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament" 189) cites a treaty between the Hittite king Hattušiliš III and Ulmi-Tešup of Dattaša to illustrate this point: "After you, your son and grandson will possess it, nobody will take it away from them. If one of your descendants sins the king will prosecute him at his court. Then when he is found guilty . . . if he deserves death he will die. But nobody will take away from the descendant of Ulmi-Tešup *either his house or his land* in order to give it to a descendant of somebody else" [emphasis in the original].

It is as Yahweh's son that David and his descendants will enjoy the provisions of this covenant. These verses also introduce the possibility that disloyal sons could forfeit the opportunity to enjoy the provisions of this covenant (cf. 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 6:12-13; 9:4, 6-7; Pss 89:29-32; 132:12). As with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Yahweh promised David an eternal progeny and possession of land. Loyal sons, i.e., those who lived in accordance with the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, would fully enjoy the provisions offered them. However, disloyal sons, i.e., Davidic descendants who practice covenant treachery, will forfeit the promised divine protection and will eventually lose their enjoyment of rulership and land. Even though Yahweh promises to cause disloyal sons to forfeit their opportunity to enjoy the provisions of this covenant, He affirms that the Davidic house and throne will endure forever, giving the hope that Yahweh would one day raise up a loyal son who would satisfy Yahweh's demands for covenant conformity.⁴³ Although the line of David may be chastised, the terms of this covenant, the *hesed* (חֶסֶד) of God, will never be withdrawn.

David himself had no doubts concerning the ultimate fulfillment of this divine grant. Although 2 Samuel 7 and the related passages do not refer to any external sign or token, David regards these promises as certain when he declares, "For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant" (2 Sam 7:21).⁴⁴ In 2 Sam 7:13b, the Lord stresses that "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."⁴⁵ In his last words, David affirms, "Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, will He not indeed make it grow?" (2 Sam 23:5).

In addition to various references in the historical books to the everlasting nature of this covenant, the prophet Jeremiah records how the Lord vividly affirmed His unwavering intention to bring the Davidic Covenant to fulfillment. The Lord compares the certainty of the Davidic Covenant to the fixed cycle of day and night (Jer 33:19-21). He hypothetically proposes that if God's covenant with day and night would lapse, i.e., if one could somehow alter the established pattern of day and

⁴³Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant" 159. Cf. Waltke, "Phenomenon of Conditionality" 131.

⁴⁴Although Gileadi ("The Davidic Covenant" 160) suggests Yahweh's presence in Zion constitutes the sign or token of the Davidic Covenant, Waltke ("Phenomenon of Conditionality" 131) suggests that the absence of a sign might be intentional since anything in addition to the promised son or sons would be superfluous.

⁴⁵A number of scholars argue that the term "forever" in 2 Samuel 7 and "everlasting" in the expression "everlasting covenant" in other passages only refers to the span of a human life (e.g., Matitiahu Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel (Chapter III)," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 [1963]:76-77) and does not signify the idea of "non-breakability" (Marten Woudstra, "The Everlasting Covenant in Ezekiel 16:59-63," *Calvin Theological Journal* 6 [1971]:32-34). Tsevat ("Studies in the Book of Samuel" 77-80) and others (e.g., Woudstra, "Everlasting Covenant" 31-32) also contend that the unconditional elements in 2 Samuel 7 were glosses added to the passage (which was originally exclusively conditional) at a later time.

night (Gen 1:5; 8:22), then God's covenants with David (2 Sam 7) and the Levites (Exod 32:27-29; Num 25:10-13) could also be broken. As Huey points out, "The hypothetical (but impossible) termination of day and night is an emphatic way of stating that those covenants cannot be broken."⁴⁶

Like the other unilateral biblical covenants or grants (Abrahamic, New), the Davidic Covenant demonstrates a balance between the potential historical contingencies and the ultimate theological certainty.⁴⁷ On one hand, the conditional elements or historical contingencies could affect whether or not the nation and its Davidic leader enjoy the provisions offered by the covenant made with David. On the other hand, the unconditional elements leave open "the possibility of YHWH's appointment of a loyal Davidic monarch in the event of a disloyal monarch's default. YHWH's protection of his people, by virtue of the Davidic Covenant, could thus be restored at any time."⁴⁸ As Kaiser points out, The "breaking" or conditionality of the Abrahamic/Davidic Covenant "can only refer to *personal and individual* invalidation of the benefits of the covenant, but it cannot affect the transmission of the promise to the lineal descendants."⁴⁹

That David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12) closely follows the presentation of the Davidic Covenant is contextually significant in showing the unconditionality of the covenant.⁵⁰ Also, King Solomon's covenant treachery that led to the dissolution of the Davidic empire did not represent the failure of the Davidic Covenant. As Waltke points out, this arrangement of the biblical text demonstrates that "the beneficiaries' darkest crimes do not annul the covenants of divine commitment."⁵¹

Royal Psalms

Scholars have categorized a number of psalms under the heading of "royal psalms" because they share a common motif—the king. These psalms (Psalms 2,

⁴⁶F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993) 302.

⁴⁷David Noel Freedman, "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," *Interpretation* 18 (1964):426. In addition to this account in 2 Samuel, Psalms 89 (vv. 4-5, 29-30, 35, et al.) and 132 (vv. 11-12) present these two sides of the issue.

⁴⁸Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant" 159.

⁴⁹Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* 157. Various Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaties also protected the unconditional provision of a given covenant against any subsequent sins committed by the original recipient's descendants (cf. Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament" 189-96). Concerning the conditional element in Exod 19:5, Weinfeld affirms that this "condition" is "in fact a promise and not a threat. . . . The observance of loyalty in this passage is not a condition for the fulfillment of God's grace . . . but a prerequisite for high and extraordinary status" (ibid., 195).

⁵⁰The same juxtaposition of covenant and immoral activity occurs in Genesis 9 with regard to the Noahic covenant and Noah's drunkenness.

⁵¹Waltke, "Phenomenon of Conditionality" 131.

18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144) draw heavily on the idea of a Davidic dynasty and presuppose the covenant God established with David. They focus on a Davidic figure who, as Yahweh's son, lived in Zion, ruled over God's people, and was heir to the divine promise.⁵² As examples of this psalmic genre, two of the royal psalms receive consideration (Pss 72, 89).

Psalm 72

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 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).⁵³ 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. Only during the millennial reign of Christ will the peace and prosperity depicted by this psalm find fulfillment.

Psalm 89⁵⁴

In concert with the initial expression of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, 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 ruler 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 lovingkindness to David, i.e., the Davidic Covenant, 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/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).

This psalm depicts the psalmist seeking to resolve his belief in God's oath to David and the reality of his day, divine judgment for covenant treachery. After reminding God of his promise to David's house (vv. 1-37), he lamented the fate experienced by the Davidic dynasty in his lifetime (vv. 38-51). Yahweh had "cast off and abhorred" his anointed ruler (v. 38) and had "profaned his crown" (v. 39). The Lord had given victory to the king's enemies (vv. 40-44) and had covered him with shame (v. 45). The psalmist cries out, "How long . . . will your wrath burn like

⁵²Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* 159.

⁵³Chisholm, "A Theology of the Psalms" 268.

⁵⁴Kaiser, "The Blessing of David" 301-3, provides a helpful treatment of the differences between presentations of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89.

fire,” and “Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, which you swore to David?” (vv. 46, 49).

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.

THE COHERENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

Every student of the Bible must realize that the various biblical covenants revealed in the OT are interconnected. One must not keep the promises they contain separate from each other as mutually exclusive sets of covenant provisions (like distinct post office boxes). Rather, throughout the OT God is weaving a beautiful covenant tapestry, weaving each new covenant into the fabric of the former covenants.⁵⁵ Although the Davidic Covenant does introduce something new to the covenantal package, Kaiser is correct when he affirms, “What God promised to David was not a brand new, unrelated theme.”⁵⁶

The recognition of continuity or sameness and discontinuity or differences in God’s revelation of the biblical covenants must accompany belief in progressive revelation. As God reveals His will for mankind and Israel in particular, He repeats certain features already presented and introduces other brand-new elements. Students of God’s Word must take great care not to ignore either side of that coin. The following section emphasizes the points of connection between the biblical covenants to help visualize the forest as well as the trees. The coherence of these covenants does not signify sameness. Although each covenant addresses distinct issues in God’s plan for His creation, they do not operate in a mutually exclusive fashion.

Thematic Connections with the Preceding Covenants

Several themes in 2 Samuel 7 mirror similar statements in the various articulations of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants (see **Figure #2**).⁵⁷

⁵⁵Kaiser (“The Blessing of David” 307) calls the complex of OT covenants “the Abrahamic-Davidic-New Covenant.”

⁵⁶Ibid., 308.

⁵⁷Besides a few changes and additions, most of the following information comes from Kaiser, “The Blessing of David” 309.

Figure #2: Thematic Parallels between the Davidic Covenant and Preceding Scripture Passages			
Theme Statement	Specific Phrase	2 Sam 7 Passage	Similar Statements in Preceding Scriptures
<i>International Reputation</i>	“I will make you a great name”	7:9b	Gen 12:2
<i>Land Inheritance</i>	“I will also appoint a place for my people”	7:10a	Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; Deut 11:24-25; Josh 1:4-5
<i>Descendants</i>	“I will raise up your descendants after you”	7:12b	Gen 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 17:7-10, 19
<i>Sonship</i>	“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me”	7:14a	Exod 4:22-23
<i>Intimate Relationship</i>	“My people”	7:7-8, 10-11	Gen 17:7-8; 28:21; Exod 7:7; 29:45; Lev 11:45; 22:33; 5:38; 26:12, 44-45; Num 15:41; Deut 4:20; 29:12-13

David’s prayer of thanksgiving to God after the Lord established His covenant with David offers another connection with the Abrahamic Covenant. In six verses (7:18, 19 [2x], 20, 22, 28, 29) David uses the compound divine title “*’Adōi YHWH*” (אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) to address the Lord. This title does not occur elsewhere in 1 and 2 Samuel and occurs only twice in 1 Kings (2:26; 8:53).⁵⁸ The passage in 1 Chronicles 17 that parallels 2 Samuel 7 uses “*YHWH ’ēlōhîm*” (יהוה אֱלֹהִים, 17:16, 17), “*’ēlōhîm*” (אֱלֹהִים, 17:17), and “*YHWH*” (יהוה, 17:19, 20, 26, 27) instead of the title originally used by David (see **Figure #3**). The special significance of David’s use of this title derives from the fact that Abraham used the same title when

⁵⁸The title *’ādōnāy YHWH* (אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) only occurs five other times in biblical books that cover biblical history between Genesis 15 and 2 Samuel 7 (Deut 3:24; 9:26; Josh 7:7; Judg 6:22; 16:28). The non-compound title “*’ādōnāy*” (אֲדֹנָי, “Lord”), exclusive of the occurrences of *’ādōnî* (אֲדֹנָי), “my lord,” and *’ādōnê* (אֲדֹנֵי), the lord of,” occurs only seven other times in historical literature (Josh 7:8; Judg 6:15; 1 Kgs 3:10, 15; 22:6; 2 Kgs 7:6; 19:23).

addressing the Lord in Genesis 15 (vv. 2, 8) as the Lord was reaffirming His intention to make Abraham’s seed abundantly numerous. Based on this correlation, Kaiser argues that David’s use of this compound name for God indicated that he “was fully cognizant of the fact that he was participating in both the progress and organic unity of revelation. The ‘blessing’ of Abraham is continued in this ‘blessing’ of David.”⁵⁹

Figure #3: Parallel Titles in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17	
2 Samuel 7	1 Chronicles 17
7:18–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:16–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ēlōhîm YHWH)
7:19–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:17–אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ēlōhîm)
7:19–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:17–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ēlōhîm YHWH)
7:20–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:19–יהוה (YHWH)
7:22–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:20–יהוה (YHWH)
7:28–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:26–יהוה (YHWH)
7:29–יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (’ădōnāy YHWH)	17:26–יהוה (YHWH)

Connections between the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants

As seen in the above thematic parallels, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants share the motifs of international reputation, land inheritance, and descendants. McClain suggests that the Davidic Covenant “consisted of a reaffirmation of the regal terms of the original Abrahamic Covenant; with the further provision that these covenanted rights will now attach permanently to the historic house and succession of David; and also that by God’s grace these rights, even if historically interrupted for a season, will at last in a future kingdom be restored to the nation in perpetuity with no further possibility of interruption.”⁶⁰ Merrill points out that the Davidic Covenant is theologically rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant rather than the Mosaic Covenant. He contends that

there are important connections and correspondences between the Abrahamic and

⁵⁹Kaiser, “The Blessing of David” 310.

⁶⁰Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1974) 156. McClain refers to the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant as “regal terms” because of their connection with the Mediatorial Kingdom.

Davidic covenants. This is most apparent in Ruth itself. The narrator is writing, among other reasons, to clarify that the Davidic dynasty did not spring out of the conditional Mosaic covenant, but rather finds its historical and theological roots in the promises to the patriarchs. Israel as the servant people of Yahweh might rise and fall, be blessed or cursed, but the Davidic dynasty would remain intact forever because God had pledged to produce through Abraham a line of kings that would find its historical locus in Israel, but would have ramifications extending far beyond Israel.⁶¹

The writer of the first gospel, Matthew, introduces his genealogy of Jesus Christ by pointing out that the Messiah is both the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1).

Connections between the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants

Most comparisons of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants focus on the conditional/unconditional issue.⁶² The Mosaic Covenant is obligatory, bilateral, and conditional. The Davidic Covenant is promissory, unilateral, and ultimately unconditional. The Mosaic Covenant is like a treaty while the Davidic Covenant is comparable to a grant. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the failure by the Israelites to live in conformity to the covenant stipulations can occasion covenant curse and the loss of covenant favor, including tenure in the land of promise. However, according to the Davidic Covenant, the treacherous conduct of any one or series of Davidic rulers does not hazard the ultimate realization of its provisions.

The Psalms, however, suggest a point of connection between these two covenants. The royal psalms depict the king as conducting his rule in accordance with the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. Dumbrell concludes, "Davidic kingship is thus to reflect in the person of the occupant of the throne of Israel and as representative of the nation as a whole, the values which the Sinai covenant had required of the nation."⁶³

The reigns of Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah (2 Kgs 18-23) provide a

⁶¹Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* 185.

⁶²David M. Howard, Jr., "The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets," *WTJ* 52 (1990):114. Levenson ("The Davidic Covenant" 207-15) delineates two common ways that scholars have explained the relationship between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The "integrationists" view the Davidic Covenant as an outgrowth of the Sinaitic Covenant, overlooking the differences with regard to conditionality and unconditionality (*ibid.*, 207-9). The "segregationists" identify some kind of tension or even antimony between these two covenants, often suggesting points of tension without scriptural support (*ibid.*, 210-15). Although Levenson's overview is helpful, his solution is not compelling. He suggests that scholars can only understand the relationship between these two covenants by recognizing the plurality of theological stances that co-existed in Israel (*ibid.*, 219).

⁶³Dumbrell, "The Davidic Covenant" 46

vivid demonstration of the relationship of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants.⁶⁴ The stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant provide the “measuring stick” for the reign of each of these kings (2 Kgs 18:6; 21:7-9; 23:24-25). The function of the God-fearing king was to lead Israel in keeping covenant and in relying on God for deliverance.⁶⁵ As Gerbrandt points out, the king “was to lead Israel by being the covenant administrator; then he could trust Yahweh to deliver. At the heart of this covenant was Israel’s obligation to be totally loyal to Yahweh.”⁶⁶ The proper role of the Davidic king was to lead his people in keeping Torah. Herein lies an important convergence between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The Davidic ruler should epitomize the standards of the Mosaic Covenant, even though his conformity or lack of conformity to those standards does not determine whether or not Yahweh will one day bring to realization the provisions of the Davidic Covenant.

Connections between the Davidic and New Covenants

The connections between these two covenants are limited in scope since the Davidic Covenant focuses on regal issues and the New Covenant concerns redemptive issues. An important touchstone is the fact that the perfect descendant of David also functions as the mediator of the New Covenant. More broadly, the New Covenant appears to be the covenant that brings to fruition all the preceding covenants.⁶⁷ In addition to the *locus classicus* for the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34), other statements or allusions to the New Covenant include more tangible blessings (possession of the promised land, regathering of Jews, one kingdom ruled by one king centered in Jerusalem, etc.)⁶⁸ along with the intangible spiritual blessings conveyed by the New Covenant.

Summary

The provisions of the Davidic Covenant represent part of the plan God has

⁶⁴Gerald Gerbrandt (*Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1986] 45-102) provides a helpful study of 2 Kings 18–23 regarding the relationship of the king’s function to the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant.

⁶⁵Howard, “Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy” 102.

⁶⁶Gerbrandt, *Kingship according to the Deuteronomistic History* 102.

⁶⁷Erich Sauer (*The Triumph of the Crucified* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951] 92) states, “In its essence this new covenant is the fulfilment of two Old Testament covenants, that with Abraham and that with David.”

⁶⁸Here is a listing of some of those material blessings with relevant Scripture references: regathering of Israelites (Jer 32:37-40; Ezek 36:24, 28, 33; 37:21), repossession of the land of promise (Jer 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; Amos 9:15), taming of the animal kingdom (Ezek 34:25-27; cf. Isa 11:6-9), agricultural prosperity (Ezek 34:25-27; 36:30, 34-36; Amos 9:13), cessation of war and the reign of peace (Jer 30:10; Ezek 34:28; 36:6, 15; 39:26), reuniting of Israel in one kingdom (Jer 50:4; Ezek 34:23; 37:22), Israel ruled by one king (Ezek 34:23; 37:22, 24), a sanctuary rebuilt in Jerusalem (Ezek 37:26-27a).

for His creation. As God set forth the various biblical covenants, each one represented a step forward in the revelation of God's intentions for the world. Rather than operating in distinct orbits or realms, each covenant builds on the preceding covenant or covenants. Each covenant introduces new elements to God's revelation of His plan and those elements become part of the multi-faceted tapestry of biblical covenants.

CONCLUSION

As part of God's revelation of His plan for His chosen people, the Davidic Covenant has both immediate and far-reaching implications. In addition to establishing David's dynasty, this covenant looks forward to a descendant of David who would bring peace and justice to God's people through his reign. The conditions that accompany this covenant only determine who will function in this capacity, not whether or not a Davidite will rule in this way.