

## 16. The Promise of Recovery – A New Davidic Kingdom

All of Israel's writing prophets were consistent in their proclamation that David's kingdom was appointed for destruction. The passing of the centuries saw the development of this message of desolation and the divided nation's progress toward that destiny. But along with their warning of unavoidable destruction the prophets also proclaimed Yahweh's enduring promise of restoration. He would indeed make desolate David's house and kingdom and yet His covenant with David would one day be fulfilled.

With the recovery of a Judean remnant from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple, the indication was that David's kingdom was beginning to be restored. All physical signs pointed toward that conclusion, but there remained the troubling fact of the severing of David's dynasty: How could his kingdom be authentically restored if there were no royal Davidic seed to sit upon his throne in Jerusalem?

The post-exile prophets took note of this dilemma and used the absence of a Davidic king to substantiate their contention that the recovery then being experienced by the restored remnant didn't in any way constitute the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to David. Not only was there no son of David on the throne at that time, it appeared there could be no such king in the future because of the Lord's curse on Jehoiachin's line.

But beyond the empty throne, the restored remnant should have known that their present circumstance didn't indicate the recovery of the theocratic kingdom because of the way the prophets had spoken of the promised Davidic kingdom. The Lord would establish David's house and throne and set his son over his kingdom just as the covenant promised, *but that kingdom was to be of an entirely different sort than the Israelite theocracy.*

- a. First of all, the prophets proclaimed it to be an **everlasting** kingdom, just as Yahweh Himself had indicated in His covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). It would be unending precisely because it wouldn't depend in any way on its subjects for either its institution or its continuance. Like its predecessor, this kingdom would be governed by a covenant defining the relationship between Yahweh and His people, but this time the conformity of the sons of the kingdom would be absolute since the demands of sonship would be met *in* them rather than *by* them. This kingdom would endure forever because of the unfailing righteousness of its citizens – the righteousness of the Lord Himself given to them (cf. Isaiah 32:1-18, 54:1-56:8, 59:1-60:22; Jeremiah 31:31-40, 32:36-41; Ezekiel 37:15-28, 43:1-9; Daniel 2:1-45, 7:9-28; Joel 3:1-21; Micah 4:1-8; etc.).
- b. So also the revelation of the **coming Davidic king** showed the promised kingdom to be distinct from the Israelite theocracy. The cursing of David's dynasty pointed to this truth, but the prophets made it explicit by revealing that this Seed would rule over Yahweh's kingdom as a *king-priest*. The structure of the theocracy had established an unbridgeable separation between Israel's kings and priests, so that the conjoining of those offices in one man indicated a new covenant and therefore a new kind of kingdom (cf. Psalm 110; Zechariah 6:9-15; Hebrews 5:1-9:15).

The promise was bound up in the person of David, but set out the hope of a *new* David: a son, king, and shepherd who would succeed where David had failed. This latter “David” – the son pledged in the covenant – was to be the antitypical fulfillment of the first David, and therefore the Scripture unapologetically refers to Him under that name (cf. Jeremiah 30-33; Ezekiel 34, 37 and Hosea 3).

- c. The issue of **divine/human relationship** provides another proof of the uniqueness of the promised kingdom. That this kingdom would be everlasting points to the perpetually perfect righteousness of its citizens, even as Israel’s unrighteousness brought the end of the Israelite kingdom. But righteousness is a *relational* concept, evident from man’s nature as image-*son* and the fact that *covenant* – as the formal criterion of human righteousness – is itself preeminently relational.

God first revealed the relational nature of His kingdom by the creation episode itself. The very essence of the concept of the “kingdom of God” is divine rule being exercised over the created order through man, the image-son. The Creator-Father rules in the context of intimate communion with His human son. This same kingdom dynamic was later portrayed in a more thorough way in the Israelite theocracy. In that manifestation of the kingdom, Israel as the collective “son of God” was appointed to manifest and administer Yahweh’s rule in the earth, thereby leading all the nations to know Him and enter into His blessing. So the true kingdom Yahweh promised to Abraham and later reaffirmed to David was to be one in which the intimacy He had initiated in Eden and portrayed symbolically in the Israelite theocracy would be realized authentically, fully and everlastingly.

The curse of estrangement that came upon the creation because of human unbelief and disobedience had only been symbolically removed in the Israelite kingdom: As He promised, Yahweh brought His covenant son to dwell with Him in His sanctuary-land (Exodus 15:17-18, 25:1-8), but no true intimacy was achieved. Though the Lord was a Father to His “son” throughout the life of the theocracy, the son had persisted in the unbelief and rebellion that characterize estrangement.

And so, though spoken of in the language and forms of the Israelite kingdom, the true kingdom proclaimed by Yahweh’s prophets was not to be a glorified reincarnation of David’s former kingdom. Rather than a new iteration (however exalted) of the Israelite kingdom, it would be a *new creational kingdom* – a kingdom characterized by the renewal of all things, including man. So also this renewal wouldn’t be merely the recovery of the pre-Fall Edenic order, but the ushering in of the consummate perfection that Eden portrayed and predicted.

*When considered within the broader Old Testament revelation, the house and throne promised to David are explicitly shown to transcend Israelite categories and substance and assume cosmic proportions.* For the son in whom David’s house, throne and kingdom were to be established is the same individual through whom Yahweh would bring about the comprehensive cataclysm of a new creation (cf. Isaiah 11:1-9 with 65:1-66:23; also Hosea 2:1-3:5 and Amos 9:11-15).

This new “David” wouldn’t emerge to revive His father’s kingdom – even in the most gloriously conceivable fashion; rather, He would usher in the kingdom of the everlasting new creation; *the kingdom that would fulfill the Edenic mandate of the dominion of the image-son in the intimate communion of shalom and shabbat.*

The relational nature of the promised kingdom is further emphasized in the prophets by their associating it with a restored and perfected priesthood. This association is eminently appropriate in that, within the Israelite kingdom, the priestly ministration was the appointed means for mediating the relationship between Yahweh and His covenant son. The Sinai Covenant itself was the relational *instrument* of the theocratic kingdom, but its *administration* depended upon a mediating priesthood. Thus the Hebrews writer’s assertion that the Law was founded upon the priesthood (7:11).

No Israelite could think of his relationship with God apart from the mediating ministry of the Levitical priests, and so the sons of Israel would readily understand the significance of the prophets presenting the future kingdom in terms of a perfected priestly system: *A perfected priesthood signified a perfected relationship between Yahweh and His people.* Among Israel’s prophets, this association is nowhere more pronounced than in Ezekiel’s prophecy.

The reasons for this are found in Ezekiel’s status and place in salvation history. Ezekiel was a priest who was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. along with thousands of others of Judah’s nobility and prominent figures (2 Kings 24:8-14). He was Yahweh’s prophet to the exiles in Babylon during the eleven years leading up to the final destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 586 B.C. Being a priest, it was fitting that the Lord’s various revelations to Ezekiel were largely constructed around temple/sanctuary motifs:

- The Lord’s self-revelation to Ezekiel came in the form of sanctuary scenes in which He presented Himself as enthroned in the midst of His attending angels (ref. 1:1-28, 10:1-22).
- So also the reasons God gave for Judah’s destruction and desolation all converged on the nation’s gross, unashamed and unrelenting violation of His sanctuary and His worship (ref. 5:1-11, 6:1-14, 7:20, 8:1-18, 13:1-14:8, 16:1-59, 20:1-31, 23:1-49, etc.).
- Given the relational nature of Judah’s offense, it was appropriate that Yahweh’s punishing wrath was directed at *Jerusalem* – the place where He had put His name in order to meet with His people – and the *temple* itself as His symbolic dwelling place. At the ordained time the city of the great God and its sacred house were burned and torn down, but not before Yahweh had removed His presence from them. The covenant son’s punishment was not physical desolation as such, but the Father’s rejection and departure (ref. 7:21-22, 8:5-6, 9:1-11, 10:1-22, 11:14-25, 24:1-27).

The revelatory significance of this sanctuary/worship emphasis is that the Israelite nation had violated its covenant responsibility of filial devotion. Judah's offense (as Israel's in the north) wasn't disobedience to a sterile set of laws; prophet, priest, king and people alike had despised and denounced their covenant Father, hurting Him by their adulterous hearts and eyes (6:9) and insulting and degrading Him by pursuing their false deities and foreign paramours (16:1-29, 23:1-49).

As Ezekiel addressed Israel's offense and punishment in relational terms, he did the same with respect to its forgiveness and restoration. A constant refrain in his prophecy – and one that is nearly unique to him – is the declaration: “*Then you will know that I am Yahweh.*” This statement occurs fifty-five times in some form in Ezekiel's prophecy, and it serves to powerfully highlight two key truths.

The first is that the seed of Abraham and house of David had brought destruction and exile upon themselves because, for all their privilege, *they had not known their covenant Father*. Their entire existence as Yahweh's “son” had been defined and determined by estrangement, and now He had openly attested that estrangement by departing from them and casting them out of His sanctuary-land.

And yet, *estrangement wasn't to be the last word*. Yahweh's punishing wrath had its goal in purgation and restoration: His retribution would culminate in His imparting true, inward knowledge of Himself to a new global people. This was the heart of His promise of a *new covenant* (Jeremiah 31:31-34) to be enacted in connection with the *new David* (Isaiah 11:1-10; cf. Jeremiah 30-33).

The thrust of Ezekiel's prophecy is that violated relationship – expressive of man's continuing estrangement from God – had brought judgment and desolation, but the goal of punishment was the destruction of estrangement itself (ref. 48:35), **not in the restoration of the Israelite theocracy, but in the recovery of sacred space as first pledged in Eden**. This is especially evident in two particulars:

- 1) The first is the extensive temple imagery – centered in the return of Yahweh's glory (43:1-5) – that closes out the prophecy. Viewed from the Israelite perspective, it graphically conveyed the promise of future reconciliation between covenant Father and son (even as Israel's exile from Canaan recalled the first son's expulsion from the garden-sanctuary).
- 2) This reconciliation motif is also emphasized by Ezekiel's promise of the coming of the Spirit in order to create a new humanity defined by the indwelling Spirit (36:1-38, esp. vv. 25-27). *Here reconciliation finds its most profound expression in the personal, ontological union of God and His image-son*. While Ezekiel doesn't directly associate this re-creational work with the coming “David,” the surrounding contexts strongly suggest it (chaps. 34 and 37). So also the temple vision at the end of the prophecy highlights a *prince* as a key figure in the people's worship of Yahweh (cf. 44:3, 45:7-22, 46:1-18, 48:20-22 with 21:18-27 and 34:23-24, 37:24-25).