

The Promise of a Restored Kingdom

I. Introduction

1. The return of the Judean exiles and their labors in rebuilding the temple and restoring Jerusalem were astonishing feats of divine providence, and they were achieved in fulfillment of Yahweh's word through His prophets. They were significant and crucially important in the Lord's purposes, *but they didn't fulfill His covenant promises to Abraham and David.*
2. These circumstances provided a remedy to Israel's *physical* exile, but didn't address the underlying and essential *relational* exile that was the cause of physical exile. That "exodus" and restoration would not occur until Yahweh was reconciled to His people, and that depended on actual satisfaction for their covenant infidelity and guilt.
3. Thus the post-exile prophets proclaimed Yahweh's intent to return to Zion to deal fully and finally with all that had alienated Him from His covenant children. He would return as Redeemer and Healer, *specifically in connection with the coming of His messianic servant.*
4. And because that servant would be the son covenanted to David (the Branch), his redeeming and reconciling work would see David's house, throne and kingdom restored and Yahweh's own everlasting "house" constructed.
5. Most importantly, the prophets were clear that this new kingdom would transcend its former Davidic form; *Yahweh wasn't going to revive the kingdom David presided over, but usher in the ultimate, consummate kingdom the Davidic predecessor only portrayed and prefigured.*

II. The Promise of a New Davidic Kingdom

A. An Everlasting Kingdom – The Realization of Righteousness

1. Unlike the Israelite theocracy, this renewed kingdom would endure forever (2 Sam. 7). It would correspond to its predecessor as being *Yahweh's* kingdom defined and governed by His covenant with His subjects, and it's precisely in that respect that the Israelite kingdom could (and did) fail. *The kingdom's continuance depended on Israel's faithfulness to the covenant, so that it was Israel's covenant violation that brought the kingdom to its end.*
2. The implication, then, for the future kingdom is that its human subjects would prove perpetually faithful to the covenant relationship once Yahweh had restored it. Moses promised this cleansing and renewal of human hearts, and the prophets carried forward this theme. * cf. Deut. 30:1-6 with Isa. 54; Jer. 32:36-41; Ezek. 36:16-27; Hos. 1-2
3. Thus the renewal of the covenant relationship would see the renewal of the covenant *people*; they would become in truth the *image-children* that the covenant specified. And this is the sense in which the renewed covenant would be "new": *It would be the realization in truth and perfection of all that God's covenant with Abraham and his descendents had purposed, embodied and prescribed.* * Jer. 31:31-34
4. This, then, explains how this new covenant and its administration would be defined by *righteousness*. Righteousness is *rightness*: a thing's conformity to its created nature and function. Israel's covenant with God prescribed their sonship on behalf of the creation, and so covenant renewal would see realized the "righteousness" of authentic human sonship.

5. Most importantly, the prophets situated the *messianic figure* at the very center of all of this. And, though they were unclear about his exact role in this covenant and kingdom renewal, they associated him particularly with two key dynamics of it: *The return of Yahweh as Israel's Redeemer*, and *the priestly remediation of Israel's guilt and uncleanness*. These themes are especially prominent in Isaiah's prophecy and find their focal point in Isaiah's servant theology and "servant songs" developed in chaps. 40-55.
 - a. Somehow, this individual would address both aspects of the exile. That is, he would effect Yahweh's return to Zion as Redeemer, but in order to liberate His captive people.
 - b. He would bring together both covenant parties, but in the true and ultimate sense. He wouldn't simply see them both *return* to dwell together in Zion as formerly, but would fully *reconcile* them by fully resolving the alienation between them through his own priestly mediation. * cf. Isa. 49:1-13, 53:1-54:17, 59:1-61:11

B. A New Kingship – The Davidic Priest-King

1. A new *kingdom* requires a new *king*, and the Scriptures (reflecting the Davidic Covenant) identify this person as the covenant son of David. * Isa. 9, 11; Jer. 23, 30-33; Ezek. 34, 37
2. David was the great prototype of this son, and this includes his priestly quality as Yahweh's chosen king. This was noted above in relation to resolving the problem of exile and bringing reconciliation, *but Zechariah added to this depiction in two crucial ways, one directly and the other by implication:*
 - a. First, he associated this person's regal and priestly ministration with the construction of Yahweh's sanctuary. The Lord's Spirit was to be the power behind this work (4:1-9), but David's *branch* would carry it out as Yahweh's enthroned priest (6:9-15).
 - b. But Zechariah's action in crowning the high priest and his prophetic interpretation of it also carried a startling implication: *Yahweh intended to formally merge the kingship and priesthood in this Davidic "branch."*
3. Considered in itself, a merging of the kingship and priesthood signaled the end of the Israelite covenant structure, which held the two roles inseparably apart. There could be no king-priest under the Sinai Covenant, for it granted the priesthood to Levi, whereas the Lord had already assigned the kingship to Judah (Gen. 49:10).
 - a. Yahweh had pledged to David that a son from his line would build His house, and that He would establish David's house, throne and kingdom forever through that son. But Zechariah later revealed that this son would build the Lord's house as a king-priest, *which indicated that his kingdom and rule would fall outside of the Israelite covenant.*
 - b. All of this implied that renewal of the covenant *relationship* would involve a fundamental change to the covenant *itself*, a fact underscored by the Hebrews writer (7:11-12). But the Scriptures also insist that this alteration would be a matter of *transformation in fulfillment*, not *abrogation* (cf. Mat. 5:17-20). David's branch would fulfill the regal and priestly vocation of human sonship that the covenant prescribed, but such that his faithfulness would secure the renewal of the entire covenant household; *in this son of Abraham, Israel would be liberated and restored to become Israel in truth.* * Isa. 49-53

C. A New Creational Kingdom – The Restoration of Sacred Space

1. Yahweh had pledged to raise up David's fallen house (Amos 9:11) and establish his throne and kingdom in a future covenant son, who would then build His sanctuary as His enthroned king-priest in the power of His Spirit. *But this "house" was to be Yahweh's ultimate dwelling place, and the prophets spoke of it in terms suggesting that it would transcend the second temple the exiles constructed in Jerusalem.* * cf. Zec. 2:1-13, 8:1-8; Isa. 2:1-4, 60:1-14, 62:1-12; Jer. 3:11-18, 30:17-22; Ezek. 37:1-28, 43:1-12; Joel 3; Zeph. 3:14-20; Hag. 2:1-9
2. And as the Jerusalem temple (which represented the seat of Yahweh's throne) was the focal point of the kingdom David established, so the sanctuary to be built by David's "branch" would be the focal point of his kingdom. *If, then, the latter sanctuary represented the perfecting of Yahweh's relationship with His people through complete and abiding reconciliation, the kingdom associated with it must share the same characteristics.*
 - a. Indeed, the Scriptures present it as a kingdom defined by perfect intimacy between Yahweh and His restored household ("I will be your God and you will be My people"), which corresponds to it being a kingdom defined by the *righteousness* of a human community conformed to its created nature and function in God's design. * Isa. 59-62
 - b. And if the sons of the kingdom are righteous in this way (fully conformed to their created nature and role), this kingdom must extend to *embrace the entire created order*. For man was created image-bearer to be image-son – a regal and priestly being created to administer the Creator's relationship with the rest of His creation (Gen 1-2). *When the divine-human relationship is rightly ordered, so is the Creator-creation relationship.*
3. The kingdom that has Yahweh and His human subjects living in perfect intimacy is the kingdom that finds the whole creation experiencing this intimacy. Thus the prophets spoke of the coming messianic kingdom in the language of *new creation*. * Isa. 11:1-10, 51:1-16, 65:17-19, 66:22-2; Hos. 2:14-23; Amos 9:11-15; Mic. 4:1-4
4. And so the kingdom promised to David would be defined by the full resolution of *exile*:
 - a. It would see Yahweh end His own exile and return to Zion as Israel's Redeemer, thereby ending the exile of His covenant household and regathering it to Himself.
 - b. But Israel's exile was only a narrow expression of mankind's exile – the exile that originated in Eden. Yahweh would return as Israel's Redeemer, but with an eye to the entire human race, whom Israel's election and restoration were to serve. *He was going to liberate and recover His covenant people, but in order that they should proclaim His liberation to all the world's captives, thus fulfilling their covenant vocation.*
 - c. And when the Creator-Father and His image-children were fully reconciled, the creation's exile would also come to an end. The creation's agonized groaning in its bondage to the curse would turn to exultation and celebration when at last the sons of God were revealed in the glory they share with the unique Son. * Romans 8:18-23

Thus the kingdom promised to David and proclaimed by the prophets is the creation's realized perfection, the destiny for which God brought it into existence. It is the kingdom in which all creation is summed up in David's son and David's God is at last and forever "all in all."