

SCENE-SETTING FOR THE PSALMIST'S PERPLEXITY (PSALMS 1-89)

I. NEW-COVENANT AGENDA FOR THE PSALTER SET BY PSALM 2

2 Sam. 7:14a	I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; (NASB)
Ps. 2:7	I will declare the LORD's decree: He said to Me, "You are My Son; today I have become Your Father. (HCSB)

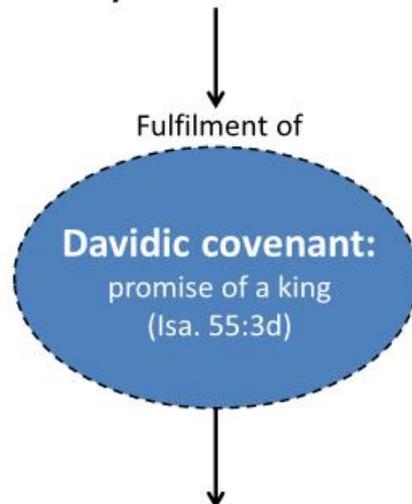
Davidic-covenant outlook?

YET

- (1) Referent in historical context difficult to determine
- (2) Davidic-covenant promises surpassed
- (3) YHWH's role and rank equalled
- (4) Ambiguity as between YHWH and his son in evidence
- (5) Holiness of the king underscored
- (6) New covenant implied by the democratisation of blessing and the Isaiah 55 background
- (7) New covenant implied by the blessing for the nations
- (8) New David of Micah 5 suggested
- (9) Davidic king contrasted with David of Psalm 3

Interim conclusion: Davidic covenant encompassed and transcended by the new covenant?

Covenant (Isa. 55:3c) with 'all who thirst' (Isa. 55:1):



Complete, free satisfaction and abundant pardon (Isa. 55:1-2,7)

II. NEW-COVENANT TYPOLOGY INCORPORATED IN THE DAVIDIC COVENANT (PSALMS 18; 20-21)

The covenantal perspective set forth by Psalm 18 is enigmatic. There are many data that recall Psalm 2 and thus suggest a new-covenant outlook. (1) Here is a messiah (H v. 51/ E v. 50) whose deliverance in the face of enemies is total (H v. 1/E heading). (2) His supremacy is absolute (H vv. 41-45, 48-49/ E vv. 40-44, 47-48). (3) He is righteous (H vv. 21-25/ E vv. 20-24) in such a way as to parallel YHWH: he has kept YHWH's 'ways' (H v. 22/ E v. 21) and has been 'perfect' (H v. 24/ E v. 23); 'as for God, his way is perfect' (H v. 31/ E v. 30). (4) The transcendent YHWH is angry (H vv. 8-16/ E vv. 7-15; cf. Ps 2:4-5). (5) YHWH dwells simultaneously in the heavens and in an earthly structure (the tabernacle, H v. 7/ E v. 6; cf. Ps 2:5-6; 1 Kgs 8). (6) As becomes much clearer in the light of Paul's quoting¹ of verse 50 (H)/ verse 49 (E), non-Jews are beneficiaries of God's mercy (cf. Ps 2:10-12).

On the other hand, a Psalm 2 perspective is belied by the following considerations. (1) In contrast to Psalm 2:12, there is no ambiguity in Psalm 18 as to whether YHWH or the messiah is the place of refuge: only YHWH fulfils this function.² (2) Whereas in Psalm 2:7 David's son speaks to YHWH, here in Psalm 18 David himself is the speaker (H v. 1). (3) Whereas Psalm 2 is strongly reminiscent of the new-covenant theology of Isaiah 55, the climactic, final verse of Psalm 18 provides a summarising commentary on the whole and anchors the psalm firmly in the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 (compare Psalm 18:51 H/ 18:50 E with 2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Similar remarks are called for in relation to Psalm 21. On the one hand, the king on view recalls the supreme son of Psalm 2. (1) He makes 'all his enemies' (H v. 9/ E v. 8) 'like a fiery furnace' (H v. 10/ E v. 9). (2) He acts in tandem with YHWH (H v. 3/ E v. 2) who is angry (H v. 10/ E v. 9). (4) The life he receives consists of 'length of days for ever and ever' (H v. 5/ E v. 4) – a striking relative indeed! (5) YHWH has made the king 'a blessing for ever' (H v. 7/ E v. 6) – a source of blessing to others, the people as a whole being saved (H v. 14/ E v. 13; cf. Ps. 20:10 H/ 20:9 E).³ There is a possible allusion in H v. 7/ E v. 6 to the promises made to Abram in Genesis 12:2c ('you will be a blessing').⁴

On the other hand, the king in question is David. Although the connection between the 'David' of Psalm 21's title and the king whom the psalm showcases is not made explicit, this interpretation – if it does not already suggest itself by default – is strongly favoured by psalter context. Here editorial criticism plays a legitimate and useful part. One of the most widely accepted results of scholarly enquiry into psalter shape, that can be traced back to Auffret's 1982 study,⁵ is that Psalms 15-24 form a concentric structure within which Psalm 18 has as counterpart the twin Psalms 20-21. In Psalm 20, intercession for the salvation (the root *y-š-* occurring four times in ten verses) of the 'messiah' ([H v. 7/ E v. 6])/ 'king' [H v. 10/ E v. 9]) recalls the key final verse of Psalm 18: 'Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed [= 'messiah'], to David and his offspring forever' (Ps. 18:50 ESV; v. 51 H). Further, as already noted in relation to Psalm 18, YHWH dwells simultaneously in the Zion sanctuary (according to H verse 3/ E verse 2) and in heaven (according to H verse 7/ E verse 6). In Psalm 21, the answer to prayer for the 'salvation' (root *y-š-* in H verses 2 and 6/ E verses 1 and 5) of the 'king' (in H verses 2 and 8/ E verses 1 and 7) is cause for

¹ In Rom. 15:9.

² Compare the formula of Psalm 18:31 H/ 30 E with that of Psalm 2:12.

³ Via first person plural, Psalm 21:14 H/13 E echoing 20:10 H/9 E (first person plural occurring from 20:6 H/7 E).

⁴ Here (in the psalm) the form is a poetic plural of intensity (cf. GKC §124e, 397-398).

⁵ P. Auffret, *La Sagesse a bâti sa maison: Etudes de structures littéraires dans l'Ancien Testament et spécialement dans les Psaumes* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 49; Fribourg/Göttingen: Editions Universitaires/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 409-438. For some idea of the influence of Auffret's analysis of these psalms, see P. Sumpter (2013), 'The Coherence of Psalms 15-24', *Biblica* 94: 186.

rejoicing. In short, there would need to be some weighty arguments to counter the idea that the identity of the king of Psalm 18 – David (Ps 18:1 H/ heading E and 18:51 H/ 50 E) – were different in Psalms 20-21.

We have seen that the *historical David* enjoys some considerable measure of the fulfilment of promises that apply to his *son* and that ultimately go hand-in-hand with the realisation of the *new covenant*. This may require that we make some adjustment to our understanding of how the Davidic and new covenants relate, but the perspective of Psalms 18 and 21 chimes in with that of 2 Samuel 7:

2 Sam. 7:12-16 (a. t.)	...I will raise up your seed after you... and I will establish his kingdom... I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever... my covenant faithfulness will not depart from him ... Your house and your kingdom will be before you for ever ; your throne will be established for ever .
Ps. 18:51 H/ 50 E (a. t.)	Granting great deliverances to his king, showing covenant faithfulness to his messiah, to David and his seed for ever .
Ps. 21:5,7-8 H/ 4, 6-7 E (a. t.)	...[Y]ou gave him length of days for ever and ever ... For you have made him a blessing for ever ... For the king is trusting in YHWH, and in the covenant faithfulness of the Most High he is not moved.

The syntax of Ps 18:51 H/50 E highlights the intimate connection between ‘David and his seed’ as beneficiaries of YHWH’s covenant faithfulness. This idea may feel foreign to us. In the light of 2 Samuel 7, we are not wrong to understand that the promise concerns David’s seed and son. But there is a sense in which it concerns David himself too; and verse 16 of the original promise in 2 Samuel 7 does speak of *David’s* ‘house’, ‘kingdom’ and ‘throne’ being established ‘before [him]’⁶ – during his lifetime. And so those glimpses of what seemed like *new-covenant* fulfilment in *David* were not mistaken! Appeal to psalter context allows us to articulate this in terms of typology. Psalm 19, the central psalm of the concentric structure that juxtaposes the psalms that we have been considering, presents David as a model patterned after the righteous man of Psalm 1. Other parts of Book 1 (and Book 2) show him to be a reverse type. But this part of Book 1 elucidates an aspect of the Davidic covenant that we can now summarise as follows: David is not the Psalm 2, new-covenant king, but it is a feature of the Davidic covenant that he should serve as a *type* of this king.⁷

III. FULFILMENT OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT ENTAILED BY FULFILMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT (PSALMS 45 AND 72)

Cf. Ps. 2...

New-covenant outlook:

- king’s absolute, universal supremacy;
- his justice centre-stage;
- prospect of peace and prosperity which, when considered against the background of parallels in the Latter Prophets, point to a future – beyond the exile – associated with the coming of the messiah and the fulfilment of the new covenant;
- king to enjoy the same status as YHWH himself;

⁶ Our emphasis.

⁷ There are some parallels here with the portraits of David and Solomon we find in Chronicles. That there is no mention of the Uriah/Bathsheba incident (in David’s case), nor the 700 wives and 300 concubines (in Solomon’s case), seems to serve a purpose in painting a typological picture of the messiah to come.

- honour and fame conferred on the king likened to the duration of the sun and moon, alluding to passages in Jeremiah that fall within the lengthy exposition of the new covenant of chapters 30-33⁸

Yet Davidic-covenant outlook also entailed: king as Solomonic; also:

Ps. 45:3 H/2 E	You are the most handsome of men; grace flows from your lips. Therefore God has blessed you forever (HCSB)
Ps. 45:7 H/6 E	Your throne, God, is forever and ever ; the scepter ⁹ of Your kingdom is a scepter of justice. (HCSB)
Ps 45:18 H/17 E	I will cause your name to be remembered for all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever . (HCSB)
2 Sam. 7:12-16	...I will establish his kingdom ... I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever ... my covenant faithfulness will not depart from him ... Your house and your kingdom will be before you for ever ; your throne will be established for ever . (a.t.)

IV. FULFILMENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT ENTAILED BY FULFILMENT OF THE NEW COVENANT (PSALM 72:17B)

Cf. Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14

Fulfilment of the new covenant:



⁸ Jer. 31:35-37; 33:20-26.

⁹ Term used with a different sense in 2 Sam. 7.

V. NEED FOR REPENTANCE AND MERCY HIGHLIGHTED BY THE CONDITIONALITY OF THE SINAITIC COVENANT (PSALMS 50-51)

VI. AN UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT BROKEN BY GOD HIMSELF (PSALM 89)?

‘Cliff hanger’: gloom and perplexity

YHWH’s apparent failure to honour his commitments to his messiah (H vv. 39-52/ E vv. 38-51)

Babylonian exile (Ps. 89:40 H/39 E, 46 H/45 E [cf. 2 Kgs 24:8ff])

Stress on unconditionality

Ps. 89:31-32 H (a.t.)	If his sons forsake my law and do not walk in my judgments , if they profane my statutes and do not keep my commandments ,
1 Kgs 2:4 (a.t.)	If your sons keep their way, to walk before me in truth, with all their heart and all their soul,
1 Kgs 6:12 (a.t.)	...if you walk in my statutes and perform my judgments and keep all my commandments to walk in them,
1 Kgs 8:25 (a.t.)	...if only your sons keep their way to walk before me as you walked before me.
1 Kgs 9:4 (a.t.)	...if you walk before me as David, your father, walked , ... to perform according to all that I commanded you, if you keep my statutes and my judgments ,

Appropriate to let the tension stand

‘What bothers the psalmist in Psalm 89 is that the promises made to David seem to be withdrawn...’¹⁰

VII. THE MESSIAH OF THE NEW COVENANT SET FORTH WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT (PSALM 89)

Cf. Pss 18 and 20-21

Partner of the *Davidic* covenant – that is, David, son of Jesse – bears close resemblance to the *new-covenant* figure who is his seed and son

¹⁰ T. R. Schreiner (2017), *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, SSBT, Wheaton [Illinois]: Crossway, 77.

→ Rhetorical impact

→ Theological impact

VIII. SINAITIC CONDITIONALITY FLAGGED ELSEWHERE IN BOOK 3

Pss 78; 81

IX. NEW-COVENANT FULFILMENT AS FRAMEWORK FOR FULFILMENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Glimpse of Abrahamic-Davidic solution (Pss 84-87)