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GOD'S OATHS TO ABRAHAM, TO DAVID, AND TO THE CHRIST

God framed His promise to Abraham in the form of an oath. The reason He took the oath was to make the “the unchangeable nature of His purpose very clear” (Hebrews 6:17). God's oath to Abraham went like this:

“I swear by myself, declares the Lord,
that because you [Abraham] have done this
and have not withheld your son [Isaac],
your only son,
I will surely bless you
and make your descendants as numerous
as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the
seashore. Your descendants will take possession
of the cities of their enemies,
and through your offspring
all nations on earth will be blessed,
because you have obeyed me.”

Genesis 22:16-18 NIV

Here is what God swore to do:

1. He promised to bless Abraham.
2. He promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.
3. He promised to give Abraham's descendants the cities of their enemies.
4. He promised that all nations on earth would be blessed because of Abraham's obedience.

GOD'S OATH TO KING DAVID

As one reads through the Old Testament, one sees how implications of the promises to Abraham expand. Many considerations awaken the thought that God intended to do much more for Abraham and his descendants than to give them land. One thing that expands our concept of the implications of God's promises to Abraham, is the oath that He made to King David.

David was not worried about whether or not his people would be able to occupy the Land of Canaan, as were the original recipients of the promises; for in David's day, they were already in possession of most of the Land of Canaan. David was concerned about whether or not his own descendants would be able to stay on the throne after he was gone.

To relieve David's fears, God sent Nathan the prophet with wonderful news for David. Nathan said to him,

“Your house and your kingdom
will endure forever before me;
your throne will be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:16 NIV

This was a fantastic promise! It was almost as fantastic as the original promise that God made to Abraham. Imagine someone's dynasty lasting forever! It was an unheard of thing, yet God did make this promise to David, and He strengthened it with an oath. That this promise was made in the form of an oath can be learned from the 132nd Psalm, which says,

“The Lord swore an oath to David,
a sure oath that he will not revoke:
‘One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne.’”

Psalm 132:11 NIV

(See also Psalm 89:34-37, where a similar passage is found.)

So we have before us not one oath but two. One of the oaths was made to Abraham and the other to David. Although these two oaths were separated by centuries, they are connected. The oath to David explains through whom God intended to bring about the fulfillment of the oath He made to Abraham. He would fulfill it through one of David's descendants, one who would sit on David's throne.

A significant feature of the second oath is that David's line was to continue forever. From history we learn, however, that from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) until Jesus came, no one occupied David's throne. So what happened?

DID GOD ABANDON HIS OATHS?

The apparent discrepancy between God's promises and what actually took place can be accounted for by the fact that every covenant contains conditions that must be kept by both parties to the covenant. There could be no question but that God would do what He said, but the children of Israel were not always able to keep their part of the covenant.

Similarly, the descendants of David were not always able to rule in a way that would cause God to permit them to continue to occupy David's throne in Jerusalem.

EXPULSION FROM THE LAND OF CANAAN

As Moses forewarned, long before David's time, the children of Israel would be cast out of the Land of Canaan if they did not keep the conditions of their covenant with God (Deuteronomy 28:62-64). As a matter of historical record, since they did not keep the conditions of the covenant, they lost their land. In losing their land, they also lost their kingdom and its throne, and many of their leaders were taken as captives to Babylon (2 Kings 25:11).

When God brought some of the people of Judah back to the Land of Canaan from Babylon, He had something better in mind for them than merely restoring the kingdom as it was in the days of Kings David and Solomon. He made preparations for sending the Messiah to them.

When we elevate our concept of what God intended to do, the discrepancy between God's oath to David and what actually happened disappears.

GOD'S OATH TO DAVID AS SEEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Many of Jesus' contemporaries gave God's oaths the lowest possible interpretation. This is shown by the way some of them reacted when Jesus said that He would be lifted up from the earth and that He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32a). His contemporaries reasoned that if Jesus would be lifted up from the earth, He could not possibly be the Messiah. So they said to Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ [Messiah] will remain forever" (John 12:34). Their words indicate that they were expecting an earthly Messiah, one that would establish an earthly reign in Jerusalem, one that they expected would last forever. They forgot that God had made another oath. God made oaths not only to Abraham and to David, but also to the Messiah.

GOD'S OATH TO THE MESSIAH (CHRIST)

God's oath to the Messiah is in line with the two previous oaths that we have considered. His oath to the Messiah expands upon the other two and lifts them to a higher level. King David made reference to this oath when he said,

“The Lord says to my Lord:
‘Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.’
The Lord will extend
your mighty scepter from Zion;
you will rule in the midst of your enemies.
Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.
Arrayed in holy majesty,
from the womb of the dawn
you will receive the dew of your youth.
The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:
‘You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.’”

Psalm 110:1-4 NIV

Almost everyone agrees that this passage is “messianic.” “Messianic” means it speaks about the Messiah (Christ). God promised to make the person (whom David called “my Lord”) to be a king and to set Him at His own (God’s) right hand. Who is this person? Jesus put that very question to some of the Pharisees of His day. He asked them,

“What do you think about the Christ [Messiah]?
Whose son is he?”

Matthew 22:42 NIV

They replied,

“The son of David.”

Their reply showed that they were thinking of an earthly king and an earthly kingdom. They were thinking of a political Messiah that would set up the kingdom just as of old. They wanted a Messiah who would chase the Roman occupiers away and free the

children of Israel from the Roman yoke. Whereupon Jesus asked them,

“How is it then that David,
speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’?
For he says,
‘The Lord said to my Lord:
‘Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies under your feet.’”
If then David calls him ‘Lord,’
how can he be his son?’”

Matthew 22:43-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-46 NIV

So Jesus asked the Pharisees to explain how, if the Messiah were only David's son, David could call Him “my Lord.” They could not explain this, for they were not willing to admit that the Messiah might be something more than a mere man and that His kingdom might be something more than an earthy reign. The proper answer to Jesus' question is that the Messiah is both David's son and David's Lord.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OATH TO ABRAHAM

The apostle Peter explained that God made Jesus the fulfillment of all three oaths. God fulfilled His promise to bless Abraham by sending Jesus to turn as many as possible of the children of Israel from their wicked ways. They, in turn, bless the Gentiles by turning as many of them as possible from their wicked ways. Peter said to people in Jerusalem,

“And you are heirs of the prophets
and of the covenant God made with your fathers.
He said to Abraham,
‘Through your offspring
all peoples on earth will be blessed.’

When God raised up his servant,
he sent him first to you
to bless you
by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”
Acts 3:25-26 NIV

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OATH TO DAVID

God fulfilled His oath to David by raising Jesus, who was one of David's descendants, from the grave and enthroning Him at His own (God's) right hand, so that there would be a descendant of his on the throne as long as the earth should stand. The apostle Peter said,

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently
that the patriarch David died and was buried,
and his tomb is here to this day.
But he was a prophet
and knew that God had promised him on oath
that he would place one of his descendants on his
throne. Seeing what was ahead,
he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ,
that he was not abandoned to the grave,
nor did his body see decay.
God has raised this Jesus to life,
and we are all witnesses of the fact.
Exalted to the right hand of God,
he has received from the Father the promised
Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see
and hear.”

Acts 2:29-33 NIV

GOD FULFILLED HIS OATH TO THE MESSIAH

God fulfilled His oath to the Messiah by making Him (Jesus) both “Lord and Christ.” The apostle Peter said,

“For David did not ascend to heaven,
and yet he said,
‘The Lord said to my Lord:
‘Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.’
Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,
both Lord and Christ.”

Acts 2:34-36 NIV

Thus, the New Testament shows that the oaths to Abraham, to David, and to the Messiah all converge on Jesus of Nazareth.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. Why did God allow the children of Israel to conquer and possess the Land of Canaan in the early days? What do you think?
2. Is God more interested in blessing people materially or in blessing them spiritually? What do you think?
3. Would you say that all the nations of the earth have been blessed through Abraham? If you say ‘yes,’ do you think these blessings would have been possible without Jesus? Please explain.
4. How does God’s oath to David (Psalm 89:34-36), namely, that there would be a descendant of David on his throne forever, affect us today? See Ephesians 1:18-23.

5. How does your having a Lord in heaven affect your daily life?
6. How does God's oath (Psalm 110:4) that the Messiah would be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, affect you today? See Hebrews 4:14-16. How does the Messiah's being high priest help you?
7. Have all of the Messiah's enemies already been conquered, or is Christ still reigning in the midst of His enemies (Psalm 110:3)? What do you think? See 1 Corinthians 15:25-28. Please, name some of His enemies that remain?