

Sermon: God's promises are beyond imagination
2 Sam 7:1-11, 16; Ps 89.1-4, 19-26; Luke 1.26-38; Rom 16.25-27
Rev Dr Jos M Strengholt

With Christmas, next week, we celebrate that all the promises of God have been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ. That is why the feast is so important for us.

Today we look at the heart of all the promises of God that He made to Israel, and that have been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ.

King David received these promises from the prophet Nathan, when David decided that he wanted to build a house for God.

1 Promise to David and Israel

Does God need a house, a temple? When King David decided that it was time for him to make God a mansion to live in, God told him: 'No!' And the prophet Nathan had to explain to David why the idea was so preposterous. Nathan wants to stop David from building a permanent temple and he uses a few arguments for this.

The first argument against building a house for God, is that God had taken Israel from Egypt, and he moved with Israel, guiding them through the desert. (2 Sam 7:5-7). So why should God now want a house? Israel was saved by God when He did not have a house – so why should he have one now?

The second argument is that David himself did not need such a house for God – as God had blessed David in all his ways, and made him victorious over his enemies – at a time when God did not have a permanent residence on earth.

God was the one who changed David from a poor shepherd into a mighty king. And God does not need David to now give God a hand and build him a house. We can add nothing to God – he has all He needs!

Very interesting is that God then tells David, that *God will give a house to Israel, and to David.* God is not in need of a permanent structure that we make for him; but we, people, are in need of His help! That he builds our house. And God then reminds David of the great promises he had made to Abraham. 'Your name will be great, and I will give you this land....' (Cf Gen 12).

God then says to David that He will actually build David a house. He starts to speak of his posterity, of Solomon, and God promises David that his house – that is, his family, and his kingdom, and his throne, will endure forever. **2 Sam 7:16:** "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

What a great statement by God to King David. He places him in the line of Abraham and his

promises, and he promises an eternal kingdom to David's family.

In one of the commentaries I read on 2 Samuel 7:16, this promise was called 'the matrix of biblical messianism.'

The promise is the heart of the promises of God to Israel. Important to underline: it was unconditional. God's favour is not made conditional upon the fulfilment of certain obligations by David or his successors. This unconditional aspect gave rise to the 'Davidic Hope' among the Jews, that even when their state and their temple were destroyed, a new King of David would one God-given day arrive.

Now there are Christians who think that when we come across prophetic promises in the Old Testament, we have to read those in the most literalistic manner. What is written must exactly happen as written, because God has said so.

Now we do believe that God's words are absolutely trustworthy. What He says is true. But if we would take this promise to David literally, as if God was from then on obliged to make sure that Israel had a king, and that he would always be from David's family, then we run into deep problems of course.

Because for over 2000 years, Israel has not had a royal house with a throne in the land of Israel. And that nation even lost its land for many centuries. David's family lost the throne, and Israel's kingdom disappeared. Those who presently rule Israel, have nothing to do with the family of King David. And that land is also not paradise yet.

So is God not trustworthy? Or is the manner of reading these prophecies as if they are exact predication like the schedule of the flights of Egypt Air, maybe wrong?

2 Jesus is King and Lord

About 1000 years after God made these wonderful promises to King David, when Israel had been without a king of the royal family of David for many centuries, and when Romans occupied the land, our King and Lord Jesus Christ was born. An angel said to the Virgin Mary:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:32-33)

This is how God fulfils his promises to Israel. Through Jesus Christ. The promise of the prophet

Nathan to King David is repeated by the angel, and applied to Jesus Christ.

So is the prophecy that David heard, fulfilled in a literal manner after all? Maybe God just skipped a 1000 years? Not really. To begin with, Jesus was obviously not a normal son of David. He was also Son of God. He was much more than a human king.

And if Israel expected the messianic King to sit on a physical throne in Jerusalem, as you could imagine based on the promises made to David, that certainly did not happen when Jesus came. Maybe David had taken those words literally, and maybe even the Virgin Mary understood them literally, when the angel spoke to her.

It also took long for the disciples of Jesus to understand that Jesus was not going to accept a role of national leadership over Israel.

When asked whether Jesus would become the King of Israel, he even explicitly said that His Kingdom was not of this world.

The Messianic Jew David Stern in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, 1992), p. 16, says that the eternal kingdom the angel speaks about, is the Kingdom of God:

It refers neither to a place nor a time, but to a condition in which the rulership of God is acknowledged by humankind, a condition in which God's promises of a restored universe free from sin and death are, or begin to be, fulfilled.

Even after his resurrection, the disciples were still confused about this matter. 'Lord, will you now restore the Kingdom for Israel?' they asked Jesus. What did Jesus do? He said to them: do not focus on Jerusalem, but go into the world! Win the hearts of people for the Jesus Christ! Make people into my disciples and make them serve God.

This focus on hearty obedience and on the whole world as the scope for God's promises already echoed in God's promises to David; Prophet Nathan's words referred to Abraham.

And Abraham was called to be a light for all nations. That was from the beginning God's plan with his chosen people. Not to be a kingdom with borders and border guards, and walls. But a kingdom that was a priesthood for the world.

'Be a blessing for the world', is what God commanded Abraham. That is why Israel was called, that is why King David and his house were called and blessed. That is why Jesus came.

And without exaggeration, I think we can say: Abraham, and David, and Israel, they *have certainly* given their blessing to the world. The biggest blessing of all. From them came the Messiah, the Son of God. That is why we must be eternally grateful to the children of Israel, even today. They have given to the world what the world needed. Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

3 Eternal kingdom

And when He came, suddenly, all concrete, tangible, prophecies of old times could not be taken so literal anymore!

Because beyond anyone's imagination, God gave much more than any prophet could imagine. God gave himself. He became Immanuel in Jesus Christ. Jesus was not a normal child, not a normal man.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:34-35)

Jesus was fully human – but he was the Son of God at the same time. So everything that God ever promised came to be fulfilled in a manner that was above and beyond any human imagination.

The King of Israel came for Israel, but beyond that, for the whole world, so that all people could be saved by faith. And all believers were now part of his covenantal people. St Peter says in his letter to the Christian believers – both Jews *and people from other nations* – that *together* they are a kingdom, a royal priesthood. What was once the prerogative of the nation of Israel, was now the blessing for each person trusting in the Davidic King, the Son of God.

And he is indeed enthroned on the throne of David – a throne that is actually in heaven, where Jesus rules the universe. In this way all the promises to Abraham were fulfilled – who according to the book of Hebrews did not look forward to the earthly city of Jerusalem, but to a heavenly city, more glorious, more universal.

Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world, but eternal; of a quality that was beyond expectation and imagination. And whereas the beautiful promises for the kingdom of God in the Old Testament spoke of people who would only die when 120 years old, Jesus inaugurated a Kingdom where there will be no more death or pain or sorrow at all.

Whereas in the Old Testament people were made to look forward to a kingdom of Israel in the Middle East, Jesus revealed the full extent of God's dreams with this world: this world and the realms of God's heaven will be fully united. Heaven and earth will be one!

Whereas in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel looked forward to the restoration of the Temple, Jesus made clear that He alone is the perfect House in whom God abides. And if we are in Christ through faith, we are also the house for God. Our vision for the future is a Kingdom where no Temple is needed anymore, because God himself is with us. Immanuel.

I promised my daughter of three years old a beautiful bicycle. 'When you are 18 you get the finest bicycle from me... Do you think my daughter considers me dishonest, or a liar, if I give her a

beautiful car instead, when she turns 18? If I do so, will she ever blame me for not sticking to my promises? Of course not...

This is just an example. I do not give cars to my daughters. Just for the record.

Conclusion

Does God not stick to his promises? Surely he does. He gives us beyond imagination, more than what he ever promised in literal terms in the Old Testament. His generosity is beyond all measure. We can not blame him for being much more generous than we could ever conceive!

And all this became a reality when Jesus Christ was born; what a feast we celebrate next week! And it will culminate in his return to earth, when he will not come for a Temple in Jerusalem. When he comes back, the glory of God will fill the earth, from East to West and from North to South. And He himself will be all in all – our Lord God. Whose goodness and presence are so bountiful, that we can already experience that today!

+In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen