

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID

"And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David." Acts xiii. 34.

PAUL as we are told in this chapter was speaking in the synagogue of the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia. The burden of his discourse is that the promise of God has been fulfilled. Its fulfilment is to be seen in the coming, the work, the death and the resurrection of our Lord.

When our Lord or His Apostles in the Scriptures of the New Testament quote passages from the Old Testament books, we have in the use that they make of these passages the key to Old Testament teaching. In some cases we find that these quotations are of a strictly literal character. They do not vary from the Old Testament text. In other cases there is a variation from the letter of the earlier Scriptures. When we find this to be the case we ought to look upon it as significant. For it is not without some purpose that a variation has been made. It is meant to catch our attention and make us think.

In the passage before us the words that Paul quotes are taken from the 55th chapter of the Book of Isaiah. The Prophet is there speaking of the making of an everlasting covenant, and his words are, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David". This expression of his is compressed into a short compass when Paul, as he does in our text, says, "I will give you the sure mercies of David". The words of the Apostle indicate the view that he took of the covenant of which the Prophet spoke. It is a covenant of promise and it is as such that Paul looked upon it. The Lord spake in the words of Isaiah, and the covenant that He said that He would make was one of promise and gift on His own side. What He promised was the sure mercies of David.

The sure mercies promised to David the Apostle regarded as given in the rising again of our Lord from the dead. He who rose is David's Son and at the same time David's Lord.

Now that He is alive from the dead to live for ever, death has no more dominion over Him. He has been raised from the dead to sit on the throne of the Lord over Israel. There shall He sit enthroned for ever. As His risen life shall not see death, the kingdom over which He reigns shares in the glory and the immortality of its King. Our Lord's resurrection is the first step in His exaltation. With His resurrection and ascension the Kingdom of God came.

There are some questions that emerge in connection with the words before us that call for some notice. We might ask for one thing what the sure mercies of David are. We might then go on to enquire as to when they were given. And still further we might put the question, What do they imply?

I

WHAT ARE THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID?

It was God's purpose that there should be a king set over His people Israel. He made provision for this long before one arose at all. For by the hand of Moses He gave instructions for the kings that were yet to be. At length He raised up to them one after His own heart. Such a king was a contrast to the first that sat on the throne of Israel, for Saul was a king only after the heart of the people. He was the man of their choice and was given them as their king in God's wrath. But he was to give place to one who should be a king after God's own heart and who should sit on the throne of the Lord over Israel. The one was a king after the people's heart; the other a king after God's own heart. This chosen king was David. It was in his days and under his hand that Israel came to enjoy the full extent of the land which had been promised to their fathers. Success attended his arms and by him the foes of the Lord and of Israel were subdued. Thus the kingdom of Israel was established as it had not been before. Those were the imperial days of Israel's enlargement.

When David had come to the height of his power he thought of building a house for the Lord and a house for his kingdom. In his days and before his time, indeed ever since the death of Eli, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was out of its place. The sacred service of Israel was disjointed. For in the absence

of the Ark from its shrine, the Holy of Holies, the full round of the solemn worship of the God of Israel could not have its yearly crown put upon it. The full service of the day of annual atonement could be carried through only when the High Priest went into the Holiest of all and sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat and before the Mercy Seat the sacrificial blood. Now the Mercy Seat rested upon the Ark so that when there was no Ark in the most Holy Place the special service of the day which completed the circle of Israel's sacred ritual could not be accomplished. It was the wish of David's heart that the Ark should have a place of lasting abode, and on this thing he opened his mind to Nathan the prophet who, when he heard what the thoughts of the king's heart were, commended them. Nathan, however, got a message from God which put a stop to the project. It was acknowledged that David did well that it was in his heart to build a house for the Lord. Yet it was not he that was to build it. It was to be built and his son was to be the builder. Thus while he was kept back from carrying out his design, a design for which he was not blamed but praised, the house of which he thought and dreamed was to be set up in its own time. God promised that the house should be built and His promise spoke of David's own house for many days to come. The things of which it told were such as to lead David to say, "Is this the manner of men, O Lord God?"

David to whom the word of promise was given was more than a figure in history, and so too was Solomon his son who sat on the throne as his successor. In those olden days there were men raised up who were types or pictures of One greater and more glorious than themselves, of One who was promised and who was yet to be raised up. Such a man was David the king after God's own heart who was raised up to sit on the throne of the Lord over Israel. Such a man, too, was his son who became king in his stead. They both of them foreshadowed the King who was to come in the fullness of the times. Each of them was a picture of the coming King, yet each of them was a foreshadowing of only his own side of the truth in regard to that King. It was by David's sufferings and privations and conflicts and wars that he came in due course to hold the place that he won. This place of wealth and power and royal dignity that he got as the outcome of his strenuous life of struggle his son inherited. Solomon came into the peaceful enjoyment

of the fruit of his father's sore travail. The one was a man of war; the other was, in contrast to him, a man of peace. The one was a foreshadowing of our Lord in His humiliation and conflict and suffering. The other is a type of the Christ who is David's Son and Lord in His exaltation and reign.

It was not the suffering Saviour who was to build the true house of God but the exalted and victorious King. In His suffering He laid the foundation. In His exalted glory He wields the sceptre that He won, and so doing He builds the House. Even so was it with David and his son, Solomon. The latter used for the building of the house of God the wealth that the former had acquired. Thus when they are taken together they furnish us with a type in history of the Messiah as King, the one being the type of His ministry of abasement and struggle; the other of His continued ministry as the Exalted and Regnant Lord.

The great promise was given to David. It spoke in prophetic terms of what was yet to be; and what this promise spoke of as it bore on the people of God and His Kingdom, tells of the holy things which belonged to David. The kingdom of His promised Son was to be an everlasting kingdom; and Israel whose King His Son was to be are the people of God. The Lord was their true King and the kingship which David held was of such a kind that he sat on the throne of the Lord for whom he reigned over Israel. Our Lord whom the typical kings foreshadowed is the King who as Mediator and Saviour is seated on the Throne of the Lord. Hence it comes about that His Kingdom may be spoken of as either the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of the Son of His love.

The promises given to David were sure for they were the word of God who cannot lie. They unfolded the destinies of Israel as these were to be worked out. That people were in Old Testament times the Church or the congregation of the Lord, and when God's gracious purpose in regard to His people shall be wrought out the sure mercies of David shall have their exhaustive fulfilment. All that has been promised shall be made good. The shadow shall find its body; the figure shall find its reality; the counsel of God's grace shall be thoroughly accomplished.

II

WHEN ARE THE SURE MERCIES GIVEN?

The promise was given to David himself, and in one sense it soon began to find its fulfilment. In respect of the promise we might ask if it had a body as well as a soul or a soul as well as a body. To what extent was it to be literally understood? This is the body. To what extent has that body a real and higher accomplishment in the sphere of the spiritual? This is the soul. There is such a thing as that it should have a springing and a germinant fulfilment.

David's Son who was to sit for ever on his throne was foreshadowed in his son Solomon. A greater than Solomon is the body of this shadow. Solomon sat on his father's throne and his reign was a long one. It certainly did not last for ever; but it was a long reign as reigns go among men. His reign was not only long; it was peaceful. In this respect there was marked difference between it and the reign of David. For the days of David were stormy. Not only were the days of Solomon peaceful; the time was one of prosperity. The kingdom of Israel reached then the height of its greatness and its wealth. The king who sat on David's throne was his son, a man eminent for the wisdom which God gave to him like the sand of the sea. This was what was needed that the people of God might be well governed; and for having such a king they had reason to be thankful and to bless God. It was the token of His good will toward them that He had given them such a wise king. In his days too the design that David had cherished was to take effect. In them the house of God was to be built. In all these things we see in Solomon what we have already spoken of—the picture or likeness of a greater than himself, of One who is not only David's son, but also at the same time who is David's Lord.

In what held good of the son of David who succeeded him upon the throne there was so far a literal fulfilment of the promise that was given him. What was literal was, as it were, the body; and, as the soul in true value outstrips the body, so does the spiritual reality outstrip this literal body; and since we find that reality in the reign of David's Son as the Exalted Messiah, we have in this the anti-type that is over against the type. That He is King tells of the love of God to His people.

It is He that builds the Temple of the Lord, and it is He that shall bear the glory. The germinant fulfilment in Solomon comes to full fruition in One greater than Solomon whose reign shall last for ever, whose wealth and whose wisdom are beyond reckoning, and the prosperity of whose happy reign shall stretch with the days of eternity. Wonderful as the reign of Solomon was it was by no means an exhaustive fulfilment of the rich promise that was given to his father. We are not then to look upon him or his reign as more than a very partial and imperfect, yet significant, fulfilment of what the promise contained. It was an instalment of the full tale and an earnest of what was to be made good.

If the reign of Solomon was not the fulfilment of the promise much less was that of Rehoboam or his successors. The dynasty of David sat on the throne of Judah until the captivity. Yet this long tenure of kingship by his house was no fulfilment of the promise that had been given to him.

The evident breakdown of the House of David as an exponent of royalty in Israel gave exercise to the godly as to the faithfulness of God to His Word. This we find uttered in the 89th Psalm. There the writer complained of a covenant that had been made void. Yet the facts that were before him were not the final facts. They were not the last word on the matter. The earthly glory of the House of David was to sink as low that his line should be no more than the stump of a tree left in the ground after the tree itself was cut down. This abasement of his house was in view when the prophet Isaiah told of a shoot that should spring up from the root of Jesse. This Shoot was known to later prophets as "The Branch" which was to grow up in its place. This was the Branch that was to build the house of the Lord and that was to bear the glory. The Branch was to sit upon the throne and reign there as a Priest upon His throne. The fulfilment of this waited for the fullness of time. When the fullness of time came it was fulfilled. The word of gracious promise and encouragement was made good.

The fulfilment of the promise made to David was granted in the coming of Him who as touching the flesh came to be of the seed of David and who is marked out with power according to the Spirit of holiness to be the Son of God. Him God sent in the fullness of time made of a woman made under the law

that He might redeem them that were under the law and under its curse. He came, and in His work in a state of humiliation, He fulfilled the type of David the king, and when He had done so He arose in triumph from the grave. David's Son is marked out to be David's Lord. He rose to fulfil the foreshadowing of His exalted glory which was afforded in King Solomon. The Risen Lord who has spoiled death of its sting and the grave of its victory has brought in the Kingdom. He took possession of the Throne when He ascended on high and that oracle was made good; "The LORD hath said unto my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy footstool."

Nay, as Victor our Lord has overcome and is set down with the Father on His Throne. There as the Exalted Servant He is seated on the Throne of His Heavenly Father and on the throne of His father David. It is as David's throne was the throne of the Lord over Israel that his Exalted Son sits upon it now. Having died death outright He lives with a life over which the shadow of death shall never fall. He dieth no more for He has borne and exhausted the curse. So as Lord of life and death He is the Resurrection and the Life. His rising from the dead was the step that went before His Ascension; and it was a step that brought with it in full detail every succeeding step of His glory as the Lord's Exalted Servant.

With our Lord's Resurrection and Ascension the Kingdom of God has come. Until He arose and went up it was a kingdom or order of things that was yet to come. This is the case no more. The fullness of the glory of the kingdom is in the course of being unveiled. The fullness itself reaches unto the eternal ages.

But with our Lord's Ascension and the bestowal of the gift of the Pentecostal Spirit began the final dispensation of grace, and it is of pregnant significance in regard to the Kingdom that there is such a difference between the place given to it in the Gospels which set forth our Lord's ministry when it was at hand and that given to it in the Acts and the Epistles. The Gospels tell of its nearness. We now live under it. Our Lord is enthroned; and as the New Testament Solomon He sits on the throne of His father David. As the New Testament Joseph He has the keys of delegated and Mediatorial power hanging at His girdle. All authority has been given to Him

in heaven and on earth. And He sways the sceptre of a more than world-wide kingdom that He may give effect to God's gracious purpose. Here on earth there are rebels who will not own His sway. But however high they may raise their head or their hand they and their confederacy shall be broken. For He must reign until He has put all things under His feet. The promise is given; the purpose shall stand; He will make them good.

As the Lord of life and of death Jesus Christ will call the dead from their graves, give to His ransomed ones the likeness of the body of His glory, own them in the great Assize of the universe, and welcome them into the final and everlasting form that His Kingdom shall take in the land where their sun shall no more go down and their God shall be their glory. Of that land, the land of Israel was but a feeble likeness. On the throne of Jerusalem above He shall sit King for ever. And in this final reign of glory He shall share with His brethren whom He has made Kings and Priests; and they shall share with Him. Such is the blessed destiny that is in store for the true Israel who are interested in the sure mercies of David.

There is left for us still to consider:

III

WHAT THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID IMPLY

His people whom our Lord has bought and calls and keeps are the Israel who are Israelites indeed. And they shall get the good of the promises given so long ago to David. Like their fellows of a fallen race they are by nature children of wrath under the doom of death, and children of disobedience in the grip of spiritual death. But the thoughts of God in regard to them as the God of all grace shall be fulfilled. They are not left to be the prey of death. The Risen Lord who has power to quicken will as a quickening Spirit give them newness of life. To Him authority has been given over all flesh that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given to Him. In the exercise of this authority He calls to the dead in sin. They hear His voice and live. He came wearing their nature that He might win life for His Israel. They were dead in law for the doom was out against them, and they were dead in sin as they were estranged from the life and love of God.

He came to die their death that they might never have it to die. And His saving work embraces more than that He saves them from death. It has its positive as truly as it has its negative side. If He came to save from death He came to bring to light and to bestow life. His own life He gave that He might win life. And it is the life that He won that He now bestows. He calls to union with Himself, and in the communion which follows on this union His people live. Or rather it is not so much they that live as He that lives in them. He has the right to give freely what cost Himself so dear. When He gives it He wins the will of rebels. He renews them in the spirit of their mind so that they never more freely and willingly did anything than they now give themselves up and over to Him. They are willing to take Him as their own and to take on them His yoke that He may be their Lord and King.

When Christ thus unites His people to Himself so that the life which they now live in the flesh is a life of faith in Himself as the Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them they have in Him as the Lord their Righteousness the title to life everlasting. And the title and the life are both alike in Him. So David's Son who is David's Lord is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. To secure their bliss He wields the sceptre of universal dominion and so controls the events and incidents and connections of life that He brings them to His feet. And He so overrules all things on their behalf that they are called according to His purpose; that everything works together with everything else for good to them. So they delight in the law of God after the inward man. The children of the new birth thus yield the obedience of faith. And their Lord will see to it that they shall have nothing less than His full salvation.

Belonging as believers do in virtue of their calling and their faith to the Kingdom of Christ they wear the yoke of their King in the everyday tenor of their life, and it is their aim to do His will. This will His Kingdom as a whole is called upon to do and its loyal subjects seek to honour it as He has made it known. Their Lord is entitled to the homage of their heart and of their life; and such is the range of His rightful claims that kings and kingdoms, earth's mightiest potentates, are summoned to bow their neck to His yoke. When they honour Him as the Prince of the kings of the earth they but

accord to Him the glory that is already rightfully His own; for the Lord who is David's Son is to be honoured even as the Father should be honoured. As He wields His more than imperial sceptre He carries out the purpose of the Father whose Servant He came to be. He has asked, and the heathen are His heritage and the ends of the earth are His dominion. He calls His ransomed ones to His footstool and in their coming He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. So the North gives up and the South keeps not back. As He unrolls the volume of the book the counsel of peace takes effect and in due course the glory of the latter days shall be ushered in. All that has been promised will be fulfilled.

Israel shall return to the Lord their God and to David their King. When the set time comes the David of the New Testament will subdue them and bring them in. Then the natural branches shall come to their place in the old olive tree and it will be as it were life from the dead. Not only will it be life from the dead: to them it will be such life from the dead as a pining Church and perishing world need. It is for our Lord Himself to bring about this glorious return. He will then make Jerusalem a praise in the earth; for He will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem His own Spirit, the token of His good will, as the Spirit of prayer, and they shall call on Him. They shall look on Him whom they pierced, and the world shall know the mourning of the brethren of the New Testament Joseph when He makes Himself known to them and gives them the kiss of peace. This thing will not be done in a corner. All the world shall hear of it.

But what takes effect in time and on the platform of the world is but the vestibule of glory. When in the Judgment Christ shall welcome His own and pronounce sentence on the rebels He will bring in an unending kingdom of glory. The just shall inherit the land for ever and dwell in it. In the house of God their home shall be for ever and ever. They shall have the full good of all that the promise of life everlasting embraces. Those that love His Name shall have their abode in His holy city and they shall go no more out. Thus will the Anointed King who is the Son of God and the Son of David put the crown of flawless perfection on His redeeming work and God shall be all and in all. Not one of the crown-jewels shall be wanting

in the day when the Lord makes them up. Strong is His hand and high is His right hand. He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall establish judgment and vindicate righteousness. His people shall be all righteous. For He who is the King of peace is the King of righteousness too. His loyal ones shall inherit the land for ever. They truly are a blessed people. Now the Saviour who can and will do all this is the Saviour whom the Gospel holds forth to sinners. He is an all-sufficient and an almighty Saviour. For Him there is nothing too hard. No case of ours is beyond the reach of His saving might. Let none of us be content with less than this—that He should be our Beloved and our Friend, that He should be our Prophet, Priest and King so that He will undertake our cause and perfect what concerneth us. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. To Him be all the glory.

JOHN MACLEOD.

*Free Church College,
Edinburgh.*