

# DOES CHRIST OCCUPY DAVID'S THRONE NOW?

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus told the church of the Laodiceans, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame *and sat down with my Father on His throne* (Rev 3:21, italics added). Clearly Jesus is currently seated on a throne.

A controversy exists among Dispensationalists today concerning the throne on which Jesus is seated. Classic Dispensationalists say this is the Father’s throne, and that Jesus’ seating on His own throne (“My throne,” Rev 3:21) is yet future. The Davidic rule of the Son of God is not yet.

Progressive Dispensationalists (PDs), however, suggest that Jesus is already seated on the Davidic throne. In fact, PDs say that Jesus is currently ruling as the Davidic King.

In this paper we will consider the claims of both positions.

## II. A FUTURE-ONLY REALIZATION

The reality of the biblical promise of 2 Sam 7:14-16 is confirmed in the announcement by the angel Gabriel to Mary, recorded in Luke 1:31-33. In that affirmation, the angel assured Mary that Jesus would receive the throne of David, and that He would rule. As the incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ unfolded, the nearness of the kingdom was demonstrated, and yet sadly so too was its rejection by Israel. Matthew 19:28 is a focal passage, for it states: “And Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The implication of this text seems obvious; it will be in the regeneration (*palingenesis*, new world) that Christ *will sit* on His glorious throne, and this does not refer *in any sense*

to a present occupancy by the Lord Jesus Christ of the Davidic throne.<sup>1</sup> Possibly one of the most concise defenses of this “future only” realization is found in H. C. Thiessen’s book *Lectures in Systematic Theology*:

Under the figure of the nobleman, Christ is represented as going “to a distant country to receive a kingdom for Himself” (Luke 19:12). Just as Archelaus, on the death of his father Herod, had to go to Rome to have the kingdom confirmed to him before he could actually rule as king, so Christ had to return to heaven to receive the kingdom from the Father (Dan. 7:13f.). The kingdom was pledged to him by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:32f.), but it must not be overlooked that the Word says, “The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” For this purpose he went back to heaven. But as with Archelaus, Christ did not establish his throne in the far country, but he will return to the scene from which he departed, and there set up his kingdom. Jesus is now seated, not upon David’s throne, but upon his Father’s throne (Rev. 3:21). The time will come when he shall sit upon his own throne (Matt. 19:28; 25:31). After he has thus come in glory, he will say to those on his right hand, “Come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).<sup>2</sup>

This analogy seems viable and realistic to this writer. Adherents of the “future only” realization of the Davidic promise do not deny the Lordship of Christ, and the fact that He is “the same, yesterday, today and forever.” As Charles Ryrie succinctly states:

Though He never ceases to be King and, of course, is King today as always, Christ is never designated as King of the church (Acts 17:7 and 1 Timothy 1:17 are no exceptions, and Revelation 15:3, “King of saints,” KJV, is “King of nations” in the critical texts). Though Christ is a King today, He does not rule as King. This awaits His second coming. Then the Davidic kingdom will be realized (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 19:15,

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: Another implication is that when Jesus rules, so will the apostles. If Jesus is ruling today from the throne of David, then the apostles are sitting on twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 363-64.

20). Then the Priest will sit on His throne, bringing to this earth the long-awaited Golden Age (Ps. 110).<sup>3</sup>

### III. PRESENT AND FUTURE REALIZATIONS: PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISTS

In recent years, some PDs have articulated exactly the opposite conclusion. PDs suggest that the Davidic covenant promise of rulership has already been fulfilled, and that Christ's present session in heaven involves His occupancy of the Davidic throne. There will also be a future reign on the earth in the millennial kingdom when the political aspects of the Davidic covenant will be fulfilled. Darrell Bock presented specific reasons why this position is advocated. A concise summary of this position is found as follows:

We need to note that the New Testament does indicate that the political aspects of Jesus' Davidic kingship will be fulfilled in the future. But earlier dispensationalists tended to miss the fact that in biblical theology, *the Davidic nature of Christ's present activity guarantees the fulfillment of all of the Davidic promise in the future, including the national and political dimensions of that promise.*<sup>4</sup>

A key to this position is the thought that Christ's present session in heaven is seen in the specific light of the promise to David. These basic reasons are offered as to the Davidic nature of Christ's present activity.

First, Acts 1:3 is cited. Bock reasons that the disciples were expecting the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6), and that kingdom was the Davidic kingdom. Jesus did not deny the validity of their inquiry, but affirmed that His rule is within the Father's control.

Second, several passages are cited in support of the concept that Christ's present activity in heaven is within the sphere of the Davidic covenant. These are Matthew 24; Acts 3:21; Rom 11:26; Heb 2:5; and 2 Tim 4:1.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 259.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 180.

Third, it is affirmed that Christ's present session in heaven is a Davidic blessing. And this is what the NT declares to have been granted to Jesus, Son of David.<sup>5</sup>

A line of evidence is given also for this position from Matt 28:18. Bock explains that those who object to the Davidic rule in heaven now as fulfillment of the Davidic covenant fail

...to understand the divine human unity of Christ's person, as well as how that unity fulfills the converging prophecies of divine messianic rule in the eschatological kingdom of God...Added to this is the fact that *His humanity is not generic*; He is a descendant of David who has been anointed, enthroned, and given "all authority in heaven and *on earth*" (Matt. 28:18). When he acts, He acts as the divine *and Davidic King*.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. EVALUATION OF BOTH VIEWS

In the opinion of this writer, the biblical evidence points clearly in the direction of the first view, namely, that the Davidic throne promises will be fulfilled in the future, and that Christ's present session in heaven does not represent rulership on the Davidic throne. A central passage that can be of help in this evaluation is found in Rom 1:3-4. The text states: "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Notice closely that in the contrast between the two realms, the human nature of the Theanthropic person of the Lord Jesus Christ is from the line or seed of David. However, His human nature is a true human nature, and indeed *it is generic as well as Davidic* (in contradistinction from Bock's statement that Christ's humanity is not generic). The term "generic" simply means or describes an entity that relates to a whole group or class. The Lukan genealogy demonstrates our Lord's descent all the way back to Adam, the generic head of the human race. Historic orthodox Christology has articulated the miracle and mystery of the God-man, and orthodox theologians have defended the truth that Christ's

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 185-86.

human nature is genuine, an essential human nature, inherited from Adam, yet without sin in view of the miraculous conception and virgin birth.

The point of bringing this matter up at this juncture is immediately seen in the contrast between “the seed of David according to the flesh,” and “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness.” If ever there was a place to insert or to assume the concept that Christ was granted the throne of David at the ascension, it surely could have been here. Yet, the text itself shows that He is not declared Son of David, but Son of God with power. To be sure, this is an argument from silence. However, in this writer's opinion, it is highly significant that as seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, the term “Son of God” is the central and key term. John Murray captured the importance of this text as follows:

Thus, when we come back to the expression “according to the Spirit of holiness,” our inference is that it refers to that stage of pneumatic endowment upon which Jesus entered through his resurrection. The text, furthermore, expressly relates “Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness” with “the resurrection from the dead” and the appointment can be none other than that which came to be by the resurrection. The thought of verse 4 would then be that the lordship in which he was instated by the resurrection is one all-pervasively conditioned by pneumatic powers. The relative weakness of his pre-resurrection state, reflected on in verse 3, is contrasted with the triumphant power exhibited in his post-resurrection lordship. What is contrasted is not a phase in which Jesus is not the Son of God and another in which he is. He is the incarnate Son of God in both states, humiliation and exaltation, and to regard him as the Son of God in both states belongs to the essence of Paul's gospel as the gospel of god. But the pre-resurrection and post-resurrection states are compared and contrasted, and the contrast hinges on the investiture with power by which the latter is characterized.<sup>7</sup>

The present session of the Lord Jesus Christ is seen in the dignity of His presence at the right hand of the Father, waiting for the culmination of events in time-space history leading to His enthronement in fulfillment

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<sup>7</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959-65), 1:12.

of the Davidic Covenant in the Father's designated time. This does not in the least take away from Christ's authority, power, and sovereignty now.

The future fulfillment of the Davidic promise of kingly rule comes to full fruition in the Millennium. This is vividly described in Jer 23:5: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth."

## V. CONCLUSION

The Lord Jesus is currently seated at the right hand of the Father on a throne. In this writer's opinion, He is seated *as the Son of God ascended and glorified*. He now awaits the triumph of His being seated on David's throne in the millennial kingdom. The Lord is in no sense sitting on the throne of David today. He is not currently ruling as the promised Davidic King.

It is profitable to ponder the significance of 2 Pet 3:13-14 in the light of future events. After stating truth about the coming day of God accompanied by events which are believed to be even following the Millennium (the destruction of the present earth), Peter urges believers with these words: "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." This strong appeal to believers right now in the present church age is made, even in the light of events that, prophetically speaking, are in the distant future, even past the Millennium. The entire eschatological sweep forms a fitting basis for a holy life even at the present time. This vantage point puts discussions about the kingdom into a balanced and proper framework. It makes an urgent appeal to participants in discussions about these issues to keep balance, and to engage in the discussions with Christian courtesy and mutual respect, even amongst the differing viewpoint holders' concepts, thus fulfilling Rom 12:10: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."