The Coming Kingdom - Part 26

We began scrutinizing a series of texts from the earthly ministry of Christ that "kingdom now" theologians routinely employ in order to argue that the kingdom is a present reality in order to show that none of these passages, when rightly understood, teach a present, spiritual form of the kingdom. We will now turn our attention to the typical texts from the Book of Acts employed by "kingdom now" theologians.

JESUS CURRENTLY REIGNING ON DAVID'S THRONE?

Perhaps the primary reason advanced by kingdom now theologians in their attempt to equate God's present work in the church with the present, spiritual manifestation of the Messianic kingdom is that following His Ascension Christ supposedly took His seat on David's Throne in heaven. From this regal position He now orchestrates the spiritual Messianic kingdom through the church. However, it is far better to reject the notion that the Davidic Kingdom is present in any sense today and instead to maintain that the Davidic Kingdom will not be inaugurated until the millennial age. At least *six* reasons exist in support of this conclusion.

First, the Old Testament consistently depicts the Davidic Throne in terrestrial rather than celestial terms. In other words, the Old Testament routinely portrays the concept of the Davidic Throne as something that takes place in time and space upon the earth rather than something that transpires in heaven.[1] For example, when God first announced the Davidic reign that was to eclipse Saul's reign, God purposed "to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba" (2 Sam. 3:10). After David succeeded Saul as king, he ruled upon a terrestrial throne. First Kings 2:11 says, "And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years he reigned in Hebron, and thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem." David's successor Solomon also reigned from a terrestrial Davidic Throne. First Kings 2:12 says, "And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established." The terrestrial character of the Davidic Throne is also evident in the Book of Jeremiah where the prophet speaks of the kings of his day as those "…that sit for David on his throne…" (Jer. 13:13). In addition, Jeremiah told King Zedekiah that he "…sits on David's throne…" (Jer. 22:2). Jeremiah also predicted that future "…kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne…" (Jer. 22:4).

Moreover, the Old Testament predicts that the Messiah will reign on a literal, earthly, physical Davidic throne in the city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Thus, the common Jewish understanding of the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant involved a literal, earthly throne (Matt. 19:28; 20:20-21; Luke 22:28-30). The

messianic expectation was for Christ to rule upon an earthly throne. Of the linkage between the Messiah and the Throne of David in Luke 1:32-33, McClain observes,

> The 'throne of David' here is not God's throne in heaven, nor is the 'house of Jacob' a reference to the Christian church. As Godet rightly observed: 'These expressions in the mouth of the angel keep their natural and literal sense. It is, indeed, the theocratic royalty and the Israelitish people, neither more nor less, that are in question here; Mary could have understood these expressions in no other way.'[2]

Second, because of this consistent scriptural portrayal of the Davidic Throne in terrestrial rather than celestial terms, to argue that the Davidic Throne is now manifesting itself in this age from heaven is to place under unnatural duress the notions of progress of revelation and literal or normal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics. Progressive revelation is the idea that, although latter Scripture can clarify, explain, or specify what earlier Scripture has said, latter Scripture can never change the original promise. Theologian Robert Lightner explains why an understanding of a celestial Davidic Throne as is prominently taught in kingdom now theology cannot be harmonized with the concept of progressive revelation. He notes:

> So, they have not only changed the people to include the Church, but they have also changed the place where the covenant is to be fulfilled. Now it's not only on earth, but it's also in heaven…The people have changed and the place has changed."[3]

Lightner's comments succinctly summarize why the celestial interpretation of the Davidic Throne cannot be properly categorized as progressive revelation. Abrupt changes in the place and people do not constitute further clarifications of an original promise but rather significant and abrupt alterations of it.

To Lightner's enumeration of changes of place and people brought about by the celestial, Davidic interpretation, we might also add a change of Israel's spiritual condition. The New Testament teaches that Christ will be seated upon His Davidic Throne only after Israel's repentance. This becomes clear in Matthew 23–25. In Matthew 23:37-39, Christ expresses His desire to gather (*episynago*) His chosen people but clarifies that such a gathering will only transpire subsequent to Israel's acknowledgement of Him as their Messiah (Matt. 23:39). Such an acknowledgment of Christ's rightful place over the nation will take place during the Tribulation Period (Zech. 12:10) thus allowing the regathering (*episynago*) of the nation to transpire at the end of this period as depicted in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:31). Only after this regathering does Matthew then portray the inauguration of Christ's reign on David's throne (Matt 25:31). Thus, Matthew's chronology mandates a conversion of national Israel as a condition to Christ reigning on David's Throne. Because of Israel's current state of unbelief (Rom. 10:21; 11:25), a current

Davidic reign of Christ violates this chronology. In sum, one can hardly classify the present, celestial interpretation of the Davidic Throne as mere progressive revelation because such an interpretation not only entails a change of place and people but also a change in the spiritual condition of Israel necessary for the promise to occur.

Historic Premillennialist George Ladd believes that Jesus is currently reigning on David's Throne in heaven. However, note how his theology must abruptly change and alter what the Old Testament reveals concerning the earthly Davidic throne. Ladd argues:

> .. the new redemptive events in the course of *Heilsgeschichte* have compelled Peter to reinterpret the Old Testament. Because of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter transfers the messianic Davidic throne from Jerusalem to God's right hand in heaven. Jesus has now been enthroned as the Davidic Messiah on the throne of David, and is awaiting the final consummation of his messianic reign...This involves a rather radical reinterpretation of Old Testament prophecies, but no more so than the entire reinterpretation of God's redemptive plan by the early church. In fact, it is an essential part of this reinterpretation demanded by the events of redemptive history...Jesus is enthroned as the Messiah...He must reign until all his enemies are made a stool for his feet.[4]

In other words, in order to sustain his theology, Ladd must allow the New Testament, or specifically Peter's sermon in Acts 2, to "reinterpret the Old Testament" which "transfers the messianic Davidic throne from Jerusalem to God's right hand in heaven." Notice how Ladd concedes that "This involves a rather radical reinterpretation of Old Testament prophecies." By no stretch of the imagination can such a hermeneutical approach involving so radical a change in the original promise be properly classified as progress of revelation.

Not only does the present, celestial interpretation of the Davidic Throne strain the notion of progressive revelation, but it also places under duress the notion of literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics. Amillennialist George Murray observes:

> The Davidic Covenant, of which much has been said, was to the effect that his seed would sit upon his throne and had its natural fulfillment in the reign of King Solomon. Its eternal aspects include the Lord Jesus Christ of the seed of David; and in the book of Acts, Peter insists that Christ's resurrection and Ascension fulfilled God's promise to David that his seed would sit upon his throne (Acts 2:30). Why insist, then, on a literal fulfillment of a promise which the Scriptures certify to have had a spiritual fulfillment?[5]

The response of J. Dwight Pentecost to this Amillennial interpretation of the Davidic Covenant demonstrates how far

Amillennialism (kingdom now theology) has strayed from literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics. According to Pentecost:

> The amillennialist is bound to argue for a conditional covenant and a spiritualized fulfillment, so that the throne on which Christ is now seated at the right hand of the father becomes the "throne" of the covenant, the household of faith becomes the "house" of the covenant, and the church becomes the "kingdom" of the covenant…This makes the church the "seed" and the "kingdom" promised in the covenant. The kingdom becomes heavenly, not earthly…Only by extensive allegorization can such a view be held.[6]

This much is certain. Arguing that Jesus' present position at the Father's right hand represents the Davidic Covenant's fulfillment of any kind is to depart from normal definitions of progress of revelation and consistent, literal or normal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics. Chafer summarizes:

> Similarly, the earthly kingdom that according to the Scriptures had its origin in the covenant made to David, which is mundane and literal in its original form and equally as mundane and literal in uncounted references to it in all subsequent Scriptures which trace it on to its consummation, is by theological legerdemain metamorphosed into a spiritual monstrosity in which an absent King seated on His Father's throne in heaven is accepted in lieu of the theocratic monarch of David's line seated on David's throne in Jerusalem.[7]

(To Be Continued...)

Source: SpiritAndTruth.org

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[1] Mal Couch, "Progressive Dispensationalism: Is Christ Now on the Throne of David? (Part I)," *Conservative Theological Journal* 2, (March 1998): 35-36.

[2] Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 282.

[3] Robert Lightner, "Progressive Dispensationalism," *Conservative Theological Journal* 4, no. 11 (March 2000): 53-54.

[4] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 336-37.

[5] George Murray, *Millennial Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948), 44.

[6] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1964), 103.

[7] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 5:315.

