

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XXVII

by Andy Woods

We began scrutinizing New Testament texts that "kingdom now" theologians employ in their attempt to argue that the kingdom is a present reality. The purpose of this examination is to show that none of these passages, when rightly understood, teach a present, spiritual form of the kingdom. In last month's article, we began to scrutinize the typical texts from the Book of Acts used 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. As we shall see, "kingdom now" theologians build much of their case from Acts 2. However, in general, 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, in the last article, we noted that the Old Testament consistently depicts the Davidic Throne in terrestrial rather than celestial terms. *Second*, because of this scriptural portrayal of the Davidic Throne, we observed that 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. In the last article, we noted how both

Amillennialists and Historic Premillennialists, by embracing a present, celestial interpretation of the Davidic Throne and Kingdom, depart from a normal understanding of progressive revelation. However, they are not the only ones.

Progressive Dispensationalists are those who maintain that the Davidic Kingdom is present in spiritual form. While still holding to a future or "not yet" earthly reign of Christ following Christ's Second Advent, Progressive Dispensationalists still argue that the Davidic Kingdom is "already" here in spiritual form. Thus, they also contend that Jesus now reigns from David's Throne in heaven over the church. They argue that "The Davidic throne and the heavenly throne of Jesus at the right hand of the Father are one and the same."¹ However, it is only possible to transfer David's Throne from earth to heaven in the Progressive Dispensational system if one *a priori* embraces a new hermeneutical methodology known as "complementary hermeneutics." This novel interpretive approach allows mere "crucial linking allusions," or "pictorial descriptions" of Jesus as the heir to David's Throne to expand the original terrestrial promise of the Davidic Throne so that it now encompasses a current spiritual form of the Davidic Kingdom with Jesus presently ruling from a celestial Davidic Throne.² Here is how Progressive Dispensationalists define "complementary hermeneutics": "the New Testament does introduce change and advance; it does not merely repeat Old Testament revelation. In making complementary additions, however, it does not jettison Old Testament promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise."³

Lightner explains why complementary hermeneutics is not the same thing as progressive revelation. "Complementary hermeneutics' must not be confused with the historic orthodox doctrine of progressive revelation. The latter truth means that God revealed His truth gradually, sometimes over a long period of time. What was revealed later never changed the original

revelation, however. The meaning and the recipients of the original promise always remain the same.”⁴ In other words, because Progressive Dispensationalists believe that the New Testament actually thrusts new meaning into an Old Testament passage rather than simply amplify or clarify what was originally there, complementary hermeneutics cannot be properly categorized as progressive revelation. Only by buying into the presupposition of "complementary hermeneutics" (that the New Testament based on mere allusions to Jesus as the Davidic heir in His present session adds meaning to or changes the original promise), and in the process rejecting a proper view of progressive revelation, is such a "Davidic kingdom now" theology even remotely possible.

Furthermore, one wonders what havoc could be wreaked upon other biblical doctrines if complementary hermeneutics were consistently applied. Ryrie asks whether the hermeneutic of Progressive Dispensationalism when consistently applied, might be one day be used to argue for post-tribulationism. After all, if the Davidic allusions of Acts 2 can be used to extend the Davidic Covenant into the Church Age, then why cannot the temple allusion of Revelation 11 be similarly used to extend the church, which the New Testament consistently portrays as a temple, into the Tribulation period?⁵

The authenticity of New Testament interpretations must be judged by their harmony and congruence with prior revelation. Determining what is true by its conformity to prior revelation is a principle that is taught throughout Scripture (Deut. 13:1-5; Acts 17:11; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2). Because standard Progressive Dispensational interpretive methodology changes the original promise by placing Jesus on David's Throne in heaven in the present, based upon mere allusions to Him as Davidic heir despite the terrestrial nature of the original promise, the Progressive Dispensational system and theology are suspect.

Hence, only through a departure from progressive revelation can any theological system involving a present celestial reign of Christ from David's Throne be sustained.

Third, no New Testament verse or passage clearly puts Christ on David's Throne in the present age. There is no single, irrefutable New Testament passage substantiating the doctrine that Jesus is currently reigning on David's Throne. The New Testament merely depicts Christ's present position as a return to the preincarnate glory that He experienced with the Father from eternity past (John 13:3; 17:5; Acts 3:13). The fact that Christ is presently experiencing this glory as the ultimate heir to David's Throne does not necessarily mean that His Davidic Kingdom has been inaugurated.

An interesting parallel is found in the career of David. An interim period transpired between David's anointing as king (1 Sam. 16) and his actual enthronement (2 Sam. 2; 5). During this interim period Saul was still reigning as king. People were forced to choose to either walk by sight and follow Saul or walk by faith and follow David. They did the latter by trusting God's promise that the anointed David would one day reign after Saul had been deposed. A similar interim period exists between Christ's anointing as the Davidic heir and His enjoyment of glory at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33-35) and when He will actually rule on the Throne of David during the Millennium (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 20:1-10).⁶ During this present interim period a Saul-like entity, Satan, is reigning as king (Luke 4:5-8; John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19). Thus, people today are being similarly forced to choose to either walk by sight and follow Satan or walk by faith and follow a David-like individual, Christ. They do the latter by trusting God's promise that the anointed Christ would one day reign after Satan has been deposed.

Moreover, rather than describing Christ's present position as reigning on David's Throne, the New Testament simply describes Christ's present position as being at the right hand

of the Father (Acts 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22). Other passages indicate that Christ was caught up to God's throne following His ascension (Rev. 12:5) but the New Testament never calls God's celestial throne David's Throne. In fact, 60 years after His Ascension Christ, in Revelation 3:21, drew a sharp distinction between His present position on His Father's celestial throne and His future, terrestrial Davidic Throne. In Revelation 3:21, Jesus says, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne." Regarding this verse, Couch makes the following observation: "Christ is here saying that, those who are spiritually victorious, will be rewarded (future tense of *didomi*) by joining Him in His earthly Messianic reign, just as He overcame (aorist or past tense) and sat down (aorist or past tense) with His Father on His throne."⁷ Putting all of the pieces together, we can safely surmise that in Revelation 3:21 Christ's throne refers to His future Davidic terrestrial throne while the Father's throne refers to the celestial throne of God (Ps. 110, Dan. 7).

The early chapters of Acts are frequently appealed to in order to demonstrate the present, celestial Davidic enthronement of Christ. Yet in Acts 1:6-7, the disciples asked the Lord if He was now going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Such a restoration is a reference to the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. In verse 7, Christ responded, "It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Of this response, Pentecost observes, "This passage makes it clear that while the covenanted form of the Theocracy has not been cancelled and has only been postponed, this present age is definitely *not* a development of the Davidic form of the kingdom."⁸

(To Be Continued...)

¹ Darrell Bock, "Evidence from Acts," in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom*, ed. Donald Campbell and Jeffrey Townsend (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 194.

² Darrell Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 49, 51.

³ Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 392-93.

⁴ Robert Lightner, *Last Days Handbook* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 210.

⁵ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 175.

⁶ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 440.

⁷ Mal Couch, "Progressive Dispensationalism: Is Christ Now on the Throne of David? (Part I)," *Conservative Theological Journal* 2 (March 1998): 43.

⁸ Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 269.