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HE MUST REIGN

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Tips for Learning

Read each lesson as well as the Bible passages and other resources the instructor recommends. Taking notes will help you remember what you read. Then answer the Discussion Questions.

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Be sure you begin and end each study session with prayer.

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Introduction

About the Study

The drama in the Gospels turns on a single question: Is Jesus the long-awaited Messiah, the son of David come to restore the everlasting monarchy promised to David? Underlying this drama are centuries of rival interpretations of the Jewish Scriptures and competing expectations of who the Messiah was to be, the signs that would accompany His coming, and the shape of the kingdom He would establish.

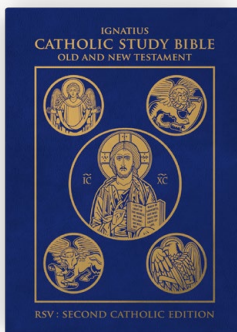
We will explore all these issues in this thematic survey course, which goes to the heart of what the New Testament has to say about the identity of Christ and the Church.

We will start with a detailed look at the importance of David in the Old Testament, the shape of the Davidic monarchy, and its historic rise and fall. We examine next the messianic hopes of Israel and the patterns of exile and restoration found in the Old Testament and in Jewish literature written between the Old and New Testaments.

We will then make a detailed study of how Jesus is portrayed as the Davidic Messiah in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, as well as in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. We will round out our study by exploring the Davidic-kingdom imagery in the remaining New Testament texts, and how the biblical understanding of the Church as the kingdom is reflected in the Catholic Church.

Objectives

- I. To understand in a detailed way the Old Testament background of the New Testament — especially God's covenant with King David and Israel's hopes for a Messiah who would restore the fallen kingdom of David.
- II. To understand how the New Testament depicts Jesus as the royal Son of David and the Church He establishes as the restored kingdom of David.
- III. To begin to understand the biblical origin of some of the structures of the Catholic Church as reflecting the biblical understanding of the Church as the kingdom of God.



Materials

The primary text will be the Bible. And each lesson will provide links to biblical passages cited. In addition, the instructors recommend the following, which covers much of the material to be studied in this course:

The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Luke

Acts of the Apostles

LESSON ONE

A THRONE ESTABLISHED FOREVER

Lesson Outline

1. David's Covenant in Context
 - I. David and Moses
 - II. For the Sake of Abraham
2. The Rise of David
 - I. Israel in the Era Before Kings
 - II. Restoring the Ark
 - III. The Oracle of Nathan
3. The Shape of the Davidic Monarchy
 - I. Eight Elements of the Kingdom
 - II. Unconditional Promises, Divided Kingdom
4. Discussion Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To begin to appreciate the significance of God's covenant with David for understanding the content and meaning of the New Testament.
- II. To understand the biblical idea of the monarchy and the Old Testament background for the Davidic covenant.
- III. To understand the basic outlines of the promises made to David and the shape of the Davidic kingdom under both David and Solomon.

David's Covenant in Context

David and Moses

The drama in the Gospels turns on a single question: Is Jesus the long-awaited Messiah, the son of David come to restore the everlasting monarchy promised by God to David?

Underlying this drama — which continues through the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles and even into the final chapters of Revelation — are centuries of rival interpretations of the Scriptures.

In the Bible, and in religious writing outside the Bible, we can see that there were sharply competing expectations about who the Messiah was to be, the “signs” that would accompany his coming, and the shape of the kingdom he would establish.

Through a close reading of the New Testament and key Old Testament passages, we will look at this clash of expectations. We will explore the biblical testimony in context, comparing it with the extra-biblical literature of the period, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and various intertestamental writings. We will see how the proclamation and work of Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament, reflects and reacts to the messianic hopes of his contemporaries.

This study has implications for questions that modern scholars have long debated — How did Jesus understand His mission and work? What were the historical reasons for his condemnation and death on the Cross?

This study also addresses an imbalance in the scholarly and pastoral study of the New Testament. Researchers have tended to focus on the importance and influence of Moses and the covenant at Sinai on the shape of the New Testament. By contrast there has been a relative scholarly neglect of the Davidic covenant.

However, it could be argued that the figure of David and his kingdom is more central not only to the New Testament, but to the direction and meaning of the Old Testament.

David is generally acknowledged as a defining figure in the Psalms, with more than 70 psalms attributed to him. What is not widely recognized is his prominence throughout the Old Testament.

Indeed, while the name Moses occurs a little over 720 times, David is mentioned almost 1,020 times. David's career is the subject of 42 chapters, or nearly 30 percent of what scholars call the “Deuteronomistic History” (Joshua-2 Kings).

In 1 and 2 Chronicles — a review of Israel's history from a “Priestly” perspective — the percentage is the same.



David is mentioned 37 times in the prophets, Moses only seven times. And the eschatological hopes of the prophets are frequently concerned with the return of a Davidic king and the restoration of his capital, Zion. (This will be the focus of our next lesson.) The prophets say nothing about the return of Moses and a restoration of Sinai.

David's imprint will be especially felt when we consider key Old Testament concepts and institutions that become central in the New Testament — the Temple, Zion, the “Son of God,” and the “Anointed One” (Messiah).

For the Sake of Abraham

We will see, however, that the Law of Moses and the sacrificial system are critical to the understanding and legitimacy of David's kingdom. But before we can consider the specific character of David's kingdom, we need to begin with some background.

God's covenant with David comes as the last in a sequence of covenants found in the Old Testament. These covenants — with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David — form the narrative structure of the Old Testament.

(For a thorough review of these covenants and their significance, see our Emmaus Academy course *Mountains & Mediators* with Dr. John Bergsma.)

The background to the covenant with David, and indeed the entire story of Israel, is God's three-part promise to Abraham — to give him and his descendants their own land, to make them a great and blessed nation, and to make the children of Abraham the source of divine blessing for all the families of the earth (see Genesis 12:1-4).

Each of these promises was “upgraded” to a covenant by God (see Genesis 15; Genesis 17:4-8; 22:15-18).

It was for the sake of this covenant with Abraham that the Israelites were brought out of Egypt (see Exodus

2:24; 6:5). And it was for the sake of this covenant with Abraham that David's kingdom was established.

In Nathan's oracle, God repeats three times that He is making this covenant with David “for My people Israel” (see 2 Samuel 7:8,10,11). This recalls the language God used to explain His actions in liberating Abraham's children from Egypt (see Exodus 3:7,10; Leviticus 26:12).

Later, in the psalmist's reflections, the Davidic monarch is seen fulfilling God's promise to Abraham: “In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed, all the nations” (see Psalm 72:17; compare Genesis 12:3; 22:18).



The Rise of David

Israel in the Era Before Kings

The idea of the monarchy is sown throughout the Old Testament. In one of His promises to Abraham, God tells him: “Kings shall stem from you” (see Genesis 17:6).

In his deathbed blessing upon his sons, Israel says that nations will pay homage to Judah and that “the scepter shall never depart from” him (see Genesis 49:9-12). The line of Judah becomes the royal line from which David and Solomon stem (see 2 Samuel 8:1-14; 1 Kings 4:20-21).

Nevertheless, when the Bible is read canonically — that is, as a single book with a certain unity of content, edited for use in the worship and reflection of the Christian community — we see tension and ambivalence about the idea of a monarchy for God’s people.

We see this ambivalence already in Deuteronomy. There, Moses reluctantly predicts the people will desire a king. He even writes legislation to govern the king’s conduct and policies (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

On the one hand, the moral and political chaos of the pre-monarchical period is attributed to Israel’s lack of a king — “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (see Judges 17:6; 18:1; 21:25).

But there is also a strong sense in the Old Testament that an earthly monarch contradicts God’s sovereignty over Israel (see Deuteronomy 33:5; Judges 8:22-23).

These tensions come to a head in the people’s request for a king in the time of Samuel.

In seeking a king “as the other nations have,” the people are seen as rejecting God’s kingship (see 1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12,17,19-20).

Though their ends are earthly — the people want a king to fight battles and conquer territories for them — God consents to their request and “uses” it to fulfill His own covenant plan for Israel and the world.

He gives Israel a king “for the sake of His own great name” because He has made Israel “His people” (see 1 Samuel 12:19).

Restoring the Ark

The ideal of Israel’s monarchy was articulated at that point in the Scripture. The king is to be an earthly manifestation of God’s rule over the world. He is to obey God’s commands and worship Him alone in remembrance of His covenant and the great things He has done in making Israel His special possession.

David, especially as portrayed in the early days of his reign, is presented as the ideal king.

His capital at Jerusalem is both the “the city of David” (see 2 Samuel 5:7,9) and at the same time seat of the “kingdom of the Lord” (see 2 Chronicles 13:8) and “the throne of the Lord” (see 1 Chronicles 28:5).

David’s first act as king is to restore the Ark of the Covenant, the defining symbol of God’s election of Israel and the site of His real and living presence among the people during the wilderness period (see Exodus 25:8-22; Joshua 3:8-11).

The Ark contained signs of God’s covenant with Moses (see Hebrews 9:4) — the tablets of the 10 Commandments (see Exodus 40:22), Aaron’s priestly staff (see Numbers 17:25), and some of the manna upon which the Israelites fed in the desert (see Exodus 16:32-33).

The Ark became crucial to the identity and character of David’s new priestly kingdom. David’s great concern for the Ark is central to the early drama of his reign, and the installation of the Ark in the Temple

built by David's son, Solomon, marks the high point of the history told in the books of Chronicles.

The Ark's restoration to Jerusalem is depicted as a noble and grand religious pilgrimage. It is preceded by David's mandate for the ritual purification of the Levites (see 1 Chronicles 15:11), who alone are permitted to touch the Ark under the Mosaic law that David reinstitutes (see Deuteronomy 10:8; 1 Chronicles 15:2).

The procession to the tent pitched by David is a joyous religious feast, complete with liturgical dancing and songs of exultation and much rejoicing, led by David and the priests (see 1 Chronicles 15:1-16:3; 2 Sam. 6:11-19).

David is garbed in priestly robes of fine linen and wears a priest's ephod (see Judges 8:28; 1 Samuel 14:3; 21:9; 22:18; 23:9). As the Ark is installed, David leads the priests in offering holocausts and peace offerings. Then he blesses the people in the name of the Lord and shares bread, meat and cake with every Israelite.

What we witness here is Israel's king performing high priestly acts — leading worship, offering sacrifices, imparting the Lord's blessings.



David's actions reestablish the presence of God among the people (see 1 Chronicles 23:25). To ensure the purity of Israel's worship in God's presence, he restores the Mosaic liturgical code, making the descendants of Aaron to be "officers of the holy place and officers of the divine presence" (see 1 Chronicles 24:3,5,19).

He also, reestablishes the Levitical priests "to minister before the Ark of the Lord — to celebrate, thank and praise the Lord, the God of Israel" every morning and evening, and also on feast days (see 1 Chronicles 16:4; 23:25-32).

At the culmination of his monarchy, David, like Moses, is given a divine "pattern" or "plan" for the Temple that will house the Ark of His covenant permanently (see 1 Chronicles 28:19; Exodus 25:9).

The Temple is built as a replica of the Lord's heavenly throne and temple (see Psalm 11:4). As Jerusalem is not only a political capital, but also a spiritual and moral one, the Temple is both a religious sanctuary and the palace of the divine dominion — the seat from which Israel's king rules as the son of God over all the nations (see Psalm 2).

The Oracle of Nathan

Only after the Ark is established does God renew His covenant with Israel through an oracle delivered by the prophet, Nathan (see 2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Chronicles 17:7-14).

Nathan's original oracle does not include the word "covenant." But David describes it as an "eternal covenant" (see 2 Samuel 23:5), and this "covenant" is celebrated in the Psalms (see Psalm 89:4-29; 132:12).

God's promises in Nathan's oracle — the themes of divine sonship, temple building, and everlasting dynasty — will resound throughout the remainder of the Old Testament and, as we will see, converge in the Gospel of Jesus.

Let us look in detail at the divine promises that Nathan delivers:

First, he tells David that “the Lord will establish a house for you.” In biblical terms, “house” means royal dynasty. This means that David’s kingdom will be a dynasty, one that endures for generations.

Next God promises that David’s son will assume his throne: “I will raise up your heir ... and make his kingdom firm.” The “firmness” of his kingdom is another indicator that the kingdom will remain.

David’s son will also, according to the promise, “build a house for My name.” In other words, David’s son will build a temple as a permanent home for God’s presence in the Ark of the Covenant.

Of this royal son of David, God further promises: “I will be a Father to him and he shall be a son to Me.” This is the language of “covenant-adoption.”

The son of David will be adopted as God’s own son. This marks the first time in Scripture that the idea of divine sonship is applied to one individual. While God had referred to Israel as His first-born son, no one as yet in the Bible has been called, in effect, a “son of God.”

God’s promise is unconditional, according to Nathan. The royal son is expected to keep God’s Law and will be punished for transgressions against the Law. But God will never disown David’s heir or dissolve his kingdom. Nathan conveys this message: “If he does wrong, I will correct him ... with human chastisements, but I will not withdraw my favor from him.”

Finally, God states the conclusion that all of these promises point to: “Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever.” This means that David’s dynasty will never end; there will always be an heir of David seated upon his throne.



Section II. End

The Shape of the Davidic Monarchy



Eight Elements of the Kingdom

God's covenant with David is initially and partially fulfilled with the birth of Solomon. Solomon is the "son" who builds the Lord a house or temple.

And while we see the outlines of the godly kingdom begin under David — especially with the organization of the Levites and the worship before the Ark — it is only under Solomon that the kingdom reaches full bloom.

Based on the promises of Nathan, the reflections on the Davidic covenant found in the Psalms and the prophets, and the organization of the kingdom under Solomon, we see can eight characteristics of the Davidic monarchy:

1. First, the Davidic monarchy was founded upon a divine covenant. No other human kingdom in the Old Testament can boast of such a privilege.
2. Second, the Davidic monarch was the Son of God. Solomon's is a monarchy ruled over by God's son (see Psalm 2:7), who is both a priest and a king (see Psalm 110:1, 4). The identity of the monarch as God's son implies this priestly prerogative. The king is to be a priestly mediator between the human and divine. At the right hand of the king is his mother, the Queen, who intercedes for the people with the king and is a trusted adviser to the king (see 1 Kings 3:19-20; Proverbs 31).
3. Third, the Davidic monarch was the "Christ," i.e. the "Messiah" or "Anointed One." The anointed status of the Davidic king was so integral to his identity that he is frequently referred to simply as "the anointed one" or "the Lord's anointed."
4. Fourth, the Davidic monarchy was inextricably bound to Jerusalem, particularly Mt. Zion, which was the personal possession of David and his heirs (see 2 Samuel 5:9), and would have had no significant role in Israelite history had not David made it his capital (see Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21; 19:10-12; 2 Samuel 5:6-12).
5. Fifth, the Davidic monarchy was inextricably bound to the Temple. The building of the Temple was central to the terms of the Davidic covenant from the very beginning, as can be seen from the wordplay on "house" ("temple" or "dynasty") in 2 Samuel 7:11-13. Even after its destruction, the prophets remained firm in their conviction that God would restore His Temple to its former glory as an international place of worship.
6. Sixth, the Davidic monarch ruled over all twelve tribes. It was only under David and Solomon

that both Judah and all the northern tribes were united as one kingdom and freed from foreign oppression (see 2 Samuel 5:1–5; 1 Kings 4:1–19). For this reason, the prophets associate the reunification of the northern tribes of Israel (“Ephraim”) and the southern tribes of Judah with the restoration of the Davidic monarchy.

7. Seventh, the Davidic monarch ruled over an international empire. David and Solomon ruled not only over Israel but also the surrounding nations. The psalms theologically justify and celebrate this state of affairs, and the prophets envision its restoration. The kingdom, with its capital in Zion, Jerusalem, will become the mother of all nations, “one and all born in her” (see Psalm 87:5), all made sons and daughters of God in a worldwide family.
8. Eighth, the Davidic monarchy was to be everlasting. One of the most prevalent emphases in the Psalms and Deuteronomic history is that the Davidic dynasty will be eternal (see 2 Samuel 7:16; 23:5; Psalm 89:35–36). Not only the dynasty but the lifespan of the reigning monarch himself was described as everlasting (see Psalm 21:4; 72:5, 110:4).

Unconditional Promises, Divided Kingdom

In the lessons ahead, we will see how these elements of the Davidic kingdom and the promises to David will be decisive for understanding the debates in the Gospels.

But these debates take place against a historical backdrop — that the Davidic kingdom was divided shortly after Solomon’s reign, and later destroyed.

As presented in Scripture, Solomon’s sin led to the destruction of the kingdom. He overtaxed the Israelite tribes to finance great building projects and to build up a huge army (see 1 Kings 9; 12:3); he took many foreign wives and concubines and “his wives turned his heart ... to strange gods” (see 1 Kings 11:1–3).

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam refused to re-negotiate Solomon’s tax policies, and the tribes rebelled. Ten of the twelve tribes, led by Jeroboam, split-off and established a Northern Kingdom, leaving Rehoboam to reign over two tiny tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the South.

Eventually, both houses of the divided kingdom were captured and led into exile. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722 B.C., overrun by the Assyrians (see 2 Kings 17:7–18). In 597, Babylon overran Jerusalem, shattering the Southern Kingdom (see 2 Kings 24:3–4).

Even when the people were restored from exile, centuries continued to pass without any sign of the great Davidic king that God had promised. At the time when Jesus was born, there was no kingdom to speak of, no Davidic heir in the wings.

But the intervening centuries had produced a body of prophecy and reflection on the meaning and fulfillment of God’s covenant with David. That literature — both biblical and extra-biblical — will be the subject of our next lesson.



LESSON TWO

LOOKING *for* THE “NEW DAVID”

Lesson Outline

1. The Kingdom That Did Not Come
 - I. Promise and Division
 - II. An Everlasting Throne Unseen
2. According to the Prophets The Genesis of Jesus
 - I. A New Exodus
 - II. From Zebulun and Naphtali
 - III. David in Exile
3. Between the Testaments
 - I. Raising the Son of David
 - II. From the Caves of Qumran
4. Discussion Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand the basic outline of Israel’s history in the centuries between the collapse of the Davidic kingdom and the beginning of the New Testament era.
- II. To appreciate how the collapse and disappearance of the Davidic kingdom shaped Israel’s hopes and beliefs in the five centuries before Christ.
- III. To understand how God’s covenant promises were interpreted by Israel’s prophets and how those prophecies were understood in the last centuries before Christ.

The Kingdom That Did Not Come

Promise and Division

In our first lesson we looked at the origins of the Davidic covenant.

We saw how God's promise to David, first delivered by an oracle of the prophet Nathan and later celebrated and meditated upon by the psalmists and prophets, marks the culmination of the salvation history told in the Old Testament.

The Davidic monarchy was the ultimate expression of Israel's election as God's chosen people. This election originated in the form of God's covenant with the patriarch Abraham, father of the Israelite people. By this covenant God swore to make Abraham's descendants a great nation, from whom kings would stem and through whom all nations would be blessed.

It was to fulfill His covenant promise to Abraham that God raised up Moses to lead Israel, the people born of Abraham's seed, from captivity in Egypt. And it was to fulfill that covenant with Abraham that, centuries later, Israel's King David was promised a divine dynasty — in which one of his heirs would reign over Israel for all time in a kingdom that would have dominion over all the nations and peoples of the world.

But historical events quickly overtook and called into question the meaning of God's covenant with David. Within a generation after David's death, the "everlasting kingdom" he was promised had vanished.

God's promise seemed to have been clear — He would punish David's sons should they prove unfaithful, but He would never withdraw His favor from David's line (see 2 Samuel 7:5-15; 1 Kings 2:2-4: 8:25; 9:4-5; Psalm 132:12).

However, the abuses of David's son, Solomon — who had been the immediate focus of Nathan's promises — led to rebellion shortly after Solomon's death in 930 B.C.



Ten of Israel's twelve tribes, led by Jeroboam, split-off and established a Northern Kingdom, leaving Solomon's son, Rehoboam, to reign over a Southern Kingdom consisting of the two tribes remaining in and around Jerusalem.

As depicted in Scripture, Jeroboam's rebellion was God's punishment for Solomon's sin (see 1 Kings 11:31-39). The Northern tribes almost immediately went into apostasy, building altars and worshipping false gods (see 1 Kings 12:28-29). In 722 B.C., the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom and hauled tens of thousands of Israelites into captivity. The Bible presents this as a punishment for their idolatry and sins against God's covenant (see 2 Kings 17:7-18).

The Southern Kingdom, too, fell into corruption. In 586, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon crushed Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and sent thousands off into exile (see 2 Kings 24-25; Jeremiah 52).

An Everlasting Throne Unseen

Thus, by the sixth century B.C., there was no Davidic kingdom in sight.

This remained true even when Persia defeated Babylon in 538 B.C., paving the way for some Israelites to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the Temple.

Throughout this “Second Temple” period and on into the last period recorded in the Old Testament — the period of the Maccabean revolt and the Hasmonean dynasty, circa 100-200 B.C. — we see little evidence that Israel hoped for any imminent return of the Davidic kingdom.

The Maccabean revolt was about covenant faithfulness — not the restoration of the Davidic kingdom (see 1 Maccabees 1:15; 2:20, 49-68; 4:8-11).

Mattathias, one of the early heroes of the movement, affirmed his belief that “David, for his piety, received as a heritage a throne of everlasting royalty” (see 1 Maccabees 2:57).

But the revolt and the later Hasmonean dynasty did not invoke David.

The Hasmonians were led by priests — not descendants of David. Yet the Israelites agreed to live under this form of priestly, theocratic rule “until a true prophet arises” (see 1 Maccabees 14:41). This was a reference to Moses’ ancient prophecy that God would raise up a prophet like him (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The Book of Sirach, written during this period, also affirms God’s promise to David, saying that God “exalted his strength forever. ... established his throne in Israel” (see Sirach 47:11). Sirach also affirmed that “God does not withdraw His mercy, nor permit even one of His promises to fail” (see Sirach 47:22).

Though we find no Davidic expectations in the latest Old Testament texts, such as Sirach and Maccabees, we know from the writings of the rabbis and others in the “intertestamental” period — the years between the writings of the Old and New Testaments — that there emerged a lively messianic hope based on God’s covenant with David and the promises of the prophets.



Section I. End

According to the Prophets

A New Exodus

In the eighth century, amid the confusion of a shattered monarchy, foreign invasion, and forced exile, Israel's major and minor prophets first began to envision the restoration of the Davidic kingdom.

Though these prophecies were delivered over the course of many centuries, their "format" is often very similar. In fact, often the prophecies seem deliberately patterned to evoke and recall Israel's Exodus from Egypt.

In the "new Exodus" foretold by the prophets, God, out of compassion for His suffering people, will raise up a new David-like king to lead the people out of exile and restore them once again in the land under a reunified Northern and Southern Kingdom.

Hosea, writing from the Northern Kingdom in the 8th century B.C., said that the people would return to God under the banner of "David, their king" (see Hosea 3).

The people of "Israel" (the Northern Kingdom) shall be gathered together with the people of "Judah" (the Southern Kingdom). Whereas once they were called *Lo-ammi* (Hebrew for "no people"), when the Davidic King restores, then they will be called "children of the living God," Hosea promised.

This echoes God's actions in the Exodus, where He called Israel his "first-born son" and consecrated them as "My special possession, dearer to Me than all other people" (see Exodus 4:22; 19:5-6).

In Hosea's prophecy we also hear an echo of the divine oath sworn to Abraham. Like the descendants of Abraham, the restored Kingdom of Israel will be

more numerous than the sands of the sea (compare Hosea 3; Genesis 22:17).

Prophesying during this same period in the Southern Kingdom, Micah did not mention David by name, but spoke of a new ruler to be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah; this ruler would "shepherd" Israel and lead "the rest of his brethren" to "return to the children of Israel" (see Micah 5:1-4).

David, as all who heard Micah's prophecy would know, was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah and was a "shepherd" (see Ruth 4:11,17; 1 Samuel 16:1,11). The promise of a reunion with the "children of Israel" is likewise the promise of a reunified kingdom.

From Zebulun and Naphtali

Amos, who ministered in Judah circa 750 B.C., also foresaw the "restoration" of God's people and the raising up of "the fallen tent [kingdom] of David" (see Amos 9:11,14).

During the chaos of the eighth century, the prophet Isaiah likewise evoked the image of a new David. He recalled the beginning of the end of the Davidic kingdom in an obscure prophecy that, as we will see in our next lesson, becomes important in Matthew's Gospel.

"First He degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the end He has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles" (see Isaiah 8:23; Matthew 4:15).

As the initial hearers of his prophecy would have known, that part of the kingdom where the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali lived was first attacked by the

Assyrians, and the tribes were hauled off into captivity (see 2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chronicles 5:26).

This area, then, marked the beginning of the kingdom's end. The final end of the kingdom, as we saw above, came in the sixth century B.C., when Jerusalem was seized by Babylon and the remaining tribes were driven into exile (see 2 Kings 24:14).

Isaiah prophesied that Zebulun and Naphtali, the lands first to fall into the darkness of degradation, would be the first to see the light of God's salvation.

That salvation would come, he said, with the birth of an heir to David's throne. The new king's dominion would be vast and would endure "both now and forever," Isaiah said (see Isaiah 9:5-6).

Elsewhere, Isaiah prophesies the sprouting of a new shoot from the root of Jesse (see Isaiah 11:1-16; see also Isaiah 55:3-5). Jesse, of course, was the father of David (see Ruth 4:11,17; 1 Samuel 16:1,11). Isaiah, then, is prophesying the coming of a new son of David.

As the Spirit rushed upon David when he was consecrated by Samuel (see 1 Samuel 16:13), "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon" this new shoot of Jesse (see Isaiah 11:2).

This new David will lead a new Exodus, Isaiah foretells — drying up the Sea of Egypt and making in its midst a "highway" for the scattered and exiled tribes to come back to Israel.

This new Exodus is envisioned not only as a restoration, but a reunification of the Davidic kingdom. The prophet speaks of a gathering of "the outcasts of Israel" from all the nations — "from the four corners of the earth." In this new gathering of "the remnant of His people," God will heal the rivalry between Ephraim (symbol of the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (symbol of the Southern Kingdom).

Jeremiah, who prophesied amid the corruption of Jerusalem in the early seventh century B.C., also spoke of God raising up "a righteous shoot to David." His prophecy, too, alludes to a new Exodus that will restore and reunify the house of Israel (see Jeremiah 23:5-7; 30:8-9; 33:15).

David in Exile

The prophet of the exile, Ezekiel, also promised a new David.

Ezekiel sees this new David as a "shepherd" who would gather the scattered sheep of the flock of Israel. He, too, sees this David figure delivering Israel from bondage and exile and restoring them to their homeland.

He also sees that this restoration to the land will announce a permanent reunification of the kingdom. "I will take the Israelites from among the nations to which they have come and gather them from all sides to bring them back to their land. ... Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms" (see Ezekiel 34:24-30; 37:12, 21-28; 16:59-63).

Ezekiel said that God would, in those days, make a new covenant with the people, an everlasting covenant of peace, and would dwell forever among them in the sanctuary. Isaiah, too, had looked forward to the day when God would "renew the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David" (see Isaiah 55:3-5; 42:6; Jeremiah 31:31-34).



Between the Testaments



Raising the Son of David

As with all of these prophecies, Isaiah here recalls the original Davidic promise and covenant (see 2 Samuel 7:11-16; 23:5; Psalm 89).

And these promises, mediated by the writings of the prophets and the psalmists, animate a number of the texts written during the “intertestamental period.”

For instance, the Psalms of Solomon, composed in the late first century B.C., express anger at the corruption of those who set up a “worldly monarchy” and “laid waste the throne of David in tumultuous arrogance” (see Psalms of Solomon, 17:5-9, 19-22).

The sins of this worldly monarchy are blamed for a foreign invasion of Jerusalem. Scholars believe that the psalmist is criticizing the rise of the Hasmoneans and blaming their corruption for the conquests of the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C.

In light of these developments, the psalmist petitions the Lord to “raise up unto them their king, the son of David ... that he may reign over Israel Thy servant.”

All the Davidic promises are present in the psalmists’ appeal — most prominently the expectation of Israel’s restoration and Israel’s dominion over all the world.

It is hoped that the new Davidic king will purge foreign invaders from Jerusalem and “gather together a holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness ... the tribes of the people that has been sanctified by the Lord his God. ... For all shall be holy and their king the anointed of the Lord” (see Psalms of Solomon, 17:21-37).

Here, and throughout this collection of psalms, we find echoes of and allusions to the Davidic promises (compare Psalms 2, 18, 104, 101; Isaiah 42).

This is the first time the word “Hebrew” appears in the Bible and it’s linked to the name of Eber, another son of Shem (see Genesis 10:21). This is why we refer to the chosen people as the Hebrews. The descendants of Abraham are also known as “Shemites” or “Semites,” which is where we get our expression “anti-Semitic” to describe hatred of Jews and the descendants of the righteous line of Shem.

From the Caves of Qumran

Similar hopes for a Davidic Messiah are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls, too, reflect the views of Jewish believers opposed to both the Roman occupiers and the Hasmonean priests.

The scrolls use Davidic titles for the Messiah drawn from Scripture (for example, Isaiah 11:1-5; 2 Samuel 7:11-14; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-17; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25).

They also reflect a faith in the promises of the Davidic

covenant, notably the hope for a seed who reigns forever as an adopted son of God.

A fragment from Cave IV at Qumran (known as 4QFlorilegium or 4Q174) describes the awaited Messiah in these terms:

“The Lord declares to you that He will build you a House. I will raise up your seed after you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ‘I will be his father and he shall be my son.’ He is the Branch of David who shall arise ... in Zion at the end of time. As it is written, ‘I will raise up the tent of David that is fallen.’ That is to say, the fallen tent of David is he who shall arise to save Israel.”

As in the Psalms of Solomon, in this passage we have numerous quotations from the Davidic promise tradition (compare 2 Samuel 7:11-14; Amos 9:11).

We also have evidence of some Davidic expectation in the apocalyptic literature of the period — works like 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch and 1 Enoch, which date between the late second century B.C. to the first century A.D.

In these texts we find a composite picture of the Messiah — drawn from the royal Davidic promise tradition and the prophet Daniel’s visions of an everlasting

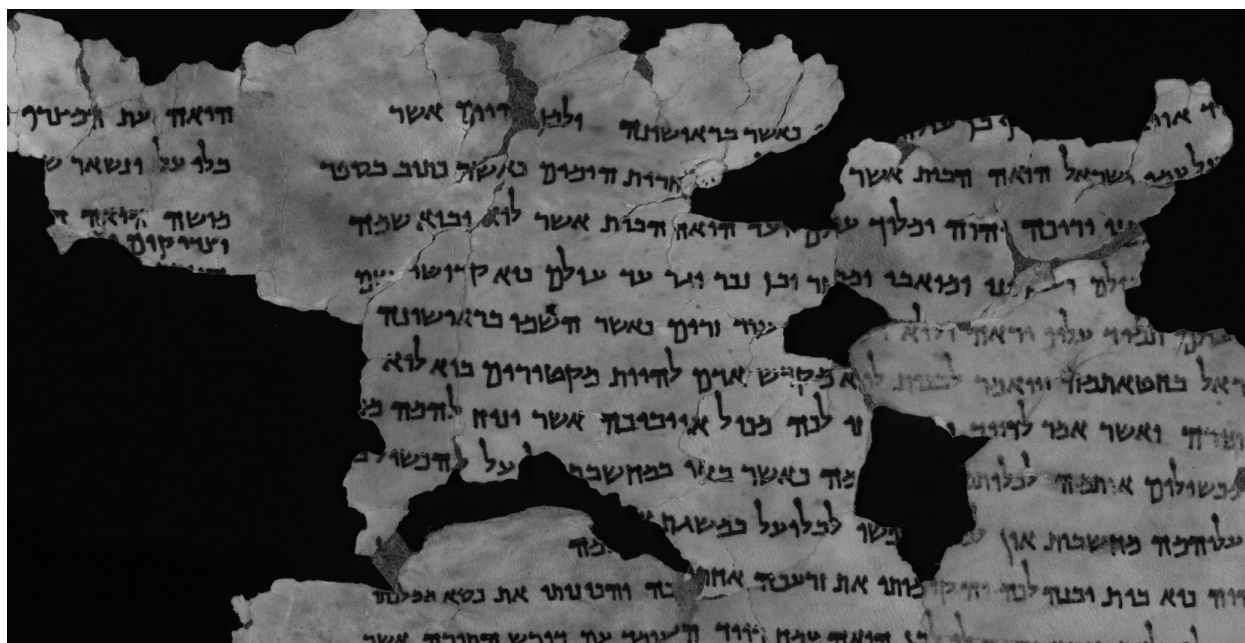
kingship being given to “one like a son of man” (see Daniel 7:13-14).

These texts indicate that, by Jesus’ time, the Messiah was expected in terms that merged the Davidic promises and the prophecies of a quasi-divine son of man.

What we see then, in this overview of Jewish thinking in the years before Jesus, is that the contours and characteristics of the Davidic kingdom promises were not abandoned.

It is true that between 500 B.C. and 100 B.C. there is not to be found a consistent or predominant strain of Davidic hope. But what we learn is that even without the witness of the New Testament, it would be possible to establish that among Jews of the first century A.D. there was a general expectation of a future restoration of the kingdom of David by a messianic figure.

In our next lesson we will begin our study of how this Davidic hope plays out in the pages of the New Testament.



Section III. End

LESSON THREE

THE SON *of* DAVID *in* MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Lesson Outline

1. Beginning with the Old Testament
 - I. The Book of the Genealogy
 - II. The Perfect Number
 - III. Still in Exile
2. The Lord's Anointed
 - I. The Baptism of Jesus
 - II. Anointing the Christ
 - III. Son of God
 - IV. Jesus Anointed in the Jordan
3. The Kingdom
 - I. What the Kingdom is Like
 - II. Son of David
 - III. Repent!
 - IV. The Last Instruction
4. Discussion Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand the symbolism Matthew uses to convey the truth that Jesus Christ is the perfect Son of David.
- II. To see how the baptism of Jesus corresponds to the anointing of the Davidic kings.
- III. To understand how Matthew sees Jesus' kingdom as the fulfillment of the promises in the prophets.

Beginning with the Old Testament

The Book of the Genealogy

The very first chapter of the New Testament begins by recapitulating the Old Testament:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (see Matthew 1:1).

A long genealogy of Jesus Christ follows.

Many readers skip over these first seventeen verses of Matthew, and with some good reason. The genealogy seems to be simply reference material: it tells no story and it preserves no sayings of Jesus.

But a closer look at this passage reveals that it carries some very important messages for us.

First of all, the placement of the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, which later Christians placed at the beginning of the New Testament, tells us something very important about who Jesus Christ is. The first thing to know, Matthew tells us, is how Jesus is related to Old Testament Scripture.

Matthew even chooses his words to echo the Old Testament.

Compare Genesis 5:1, “This is the record of the descendants of Adam,” to Matthew 1:1: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

In the Septuagint — the Greek translation of the Old Testament that the early Christians used — “the record of the descendants” in Genesis is the same as “the book of the genealogy” in Matthew.

Now notice how Matthew divides the genealogy into three parts. He sums up his method in verse 17:

“Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations;
from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations;
from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations (see Matthew 1:17).



The Perfect Number

Ancient Jewish writers attached great symbolic value to numbers. The number seven suggested completeness and covenant: in fact, the Hebrew word for making a covenant literally meant “to seven oneself.” Fourteen was doubly complete, since it was twice seven.

The number three suggested perfection. Often the two numbers are used together to signify absolute completeness: Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines from all nations, symbolizing his authority over the whole world. (Not that it was a good idea for him to have all those wives; see 1 Kings 11:1-8.)

There is another numerical significance that is less obvious to us, but that probably would have been obvious to Matthew’s first audience.

Most scholars think that Matthew’s Gospel was written primarily for Jewish Christians. Those Jewish Christians would have learned Hebrew as part of their education: It was essential to be able to read the Scriptures in the original.

Hebrew, like Latin and Greek, uses letters to represent numbers. (For example, in Roman numerals we write the year 2005 as MMV.)

It was common to take the numerical values of the letters in a name and add them up, coming up with a number that was supposed to have mystical or symbolic significance.

Hebrew has no letters for vowels, so the name David is spelled *daleth-vau-daleth* (DVD).

In Hebrew numerals the letter *daleth* (D) stands for 4, and the letter *vau* (V) stands for 6.

Numerically, then, David’s name is 4 + 6 + 4, or fourteen.

In other words, when Matthew divides the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations, he

numerically repeats David’s name a perfectly complete three times. Matthew is showing us that Jesus is the perfect Son of David, in whom all the promises God made to David are completed.

Still in Exile

For Matthew, history falls into three important periods:

- I. **from Abraham to David;**
- II. **from David to the Babylonian exile;**
- III. **from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah (see Matthew 1:17).**

Another historian might have thought that the restoration of Jerusalem was as important as the deportation to Babylon. But for Matthew, the Babylonian exile did not end then. It ends only with the coming of the Messiah.

Why would Matthew see it that way?

First of all, we should remember that only a tiny remnant of Israel returned to Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Over the many years of exile in Babylon, many of the transplanted Israelites had grown rich, or at least comfortably prosperous. They saw no reason to leave their luxurious surroundings for the risky project of resettling a land most of them had never seen.

At the time of the Exile, other refugees had made their way to Egypt (see 2 Kings 25:26) — symbolically undoing the Exodus. They, too, had prospered. By the time of Christ, Alexandria in Egypt was second only to Rome in wealth and splendor, and about a quarter of its population was Jewish.

And, of course, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been completely dispersed even before Judah was conquered (see 2 Kings 17:5-6). The northern tribes never returned to their homeland (see 2 Kings 17:22-23).

Some remnants of the northern tribes remained: Zebulun and Naphtali, the first to be conquered, had not been entirely displaced, and we read that the prophetess Anna was of the tribe of Asher (see Luke 2:36). But most of northern Israel was gone completely, dispersed among the nations so thoroughly that the remnants of the tribes could never even be identified.

So, most of the original twelve tribes were lost completely; and of those that could be accounted for, most lived outside the Promised Land.

Yet the prophets, as we saw in the previous lesson, had promised that all the descendants of Israel would be brought back together “from all the lands to which I banished them; they shall again live on their own land” (see Jeremiah 23:8).

And along with that incredible promise came the even more incredible promise that the kingdom of David would be restored:

“Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with day, and my covenant with night, so that day and night no longer alternate in sequence, then can my covenant with my servant David also be broken” (see Jeremiah 33:19-21).

Even after the kingdom of David’s descendants had fallen in a heap, the prophets were promising that the covenant with David could never be broken.

This promise was not fulfilled when Jerusalem was restored under Cyrus (see Ezra 1:1-4). Even after the Jewish nation, against all odds, won its independence (as recorded in the books of the Maccabees), no son of David sat on the throne, and most of the exiles were still in exile. And by the time of Christ, the Promised Land was once again merely a province of a great foreign empire.

In fact, the promise seemed impossible. How could all the tribes ever be reunited? The northern tribes had been so thoroughly scattered and mixed up with other nations that they had lost all memory of being descendants of Israel. How could the whole house of Israel be gathered together if most of them didn’t even know they were supposed to be gathered?



Section I. End

The Lord's Anointed

The Baptism of Jesus

John the Baptist was a popular and successful preacher who lived in the wilderness and called the people to repentance. As a sign of their repentance, he baptized them — that is, gave them a ceremonial washing — in the river Jordan.

All kinds of people came in crowds to be baptized by John. But one of those people was a surprise to John. It was John's own cousin Jesus:

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed him” (see Matthew 3:13-15).



Jesus' response is a little hard to understand. What did He mean when He said, “it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”?

Even though Jesus had no sin himself, it was necessary for Him to be identified with sinners.

But John the Baptist was a Levite and a prophet, and his baptizing Jesus had another ceremonial significance.

Anointing the Christ

All the kings of the house of David were anointed by Levite priests, and often those priests were known as prophets as well. David himself was anointed by Samuel (see 1 Samuel 16:13), a Levite priest and one of the most illustrious prophets of the Old Testament. Saul, who was king before David, had also been anointed by Samuel.

The anointing was done by pouring oil on the head of the anointed one. The effect that followed the anointing was the coming of the Spirit of the Lord:

“The spirit of the LORD will rush upon you” (see 1 Samuel 10:6); “the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David” (see 1 Samuel 16:13).

When the king had been anointed that way, he was known as the Lord's Anointed One.

Even Saul, wicked though he was in his later years, was still the Lord's Anointed in David's eyes. In spite of years of civil war between Saul and David, when David had a chance to kill Saul, he refused:

“He said to his men, ‘The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD'S anointed, as to lay a hand on him, for he is the LORD's anointed’” (see 1 Samuel 24:7).

The Hebrew word for “Anointed One” is “Messiah.” The Greek translation is “Christ.”

In other words, every king in David’s line was the Christ, the Anointed One.

Son of God

David and all the kings of his line were given an extraordinary promise by God: “I will be a Father to him and he shall be a son to Me” (see 2 Samuel 7:14).

As we saw in the first lesson in this series, this is the first time in Scripture that the idea of divine sonship is applied to one individual. While God had referred to Israel as His first-born son, no one as yet in the Bible has been called, in effect, a “son of God.”

Psalm 2 puts the promise in poetic form:

“I will proclaim the decree of the LORD, who said to me, ‘You are my son; today I am your father. Only ask it of me, and I will make your inheritance the nations, your possession the ends of the earth’” (see Psalm 2:7).

Not only is the Lord’s Anointed promised that he will be son of God, but he also has all nations to “the ends of the earth” for his inheritance.

Jesus Anointed in the Jordan

Matthew has already shown us that Jesus was the perfect Son of David, the heir to the kingdom of David.

David and the kings that followed him were anointed by Levites. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by a Levite.

When an Old Testament king was anointed, “the spirit of the LORD rushed upon” that king (see 1 Samuel 16:13). Matthew tells us:

“After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water

and behold, the heavens were opened (for him), and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove (and) coming upon him (see Matthew 3:16).

David and the kings of his line were also adopted as sons of God: God promised them that He would be their father. When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven made the same proclamation about Him: “And a voice came from the heavens, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (see Matthew 3:17).

All the familiar images of the Davidic king from the Old Testament come back at once in the story of Jesus’ baptism. Matthew shows us that Jesus is not simply being washed in the river: He is being anointed by a Levite prophet.

Jesus is the Lord’s Anointed, the Son of God — the titles that by God’s unalterable promise belong to the Son of David who reigns as King of Israel.



The Kingdom

What the Kingdom is Like

What will this new kingdom be like?

Jesus gave his followers a good citizens' manual for life in the kingdom. We know it as the Sermon on the Mount, the longest continuous collection of Jesus' sayings in the Bible. It stretches across three chapters, from Matthew 5:3 to Matthew 7:27.

The whole sermon begins with the kingdom:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (see Matthew 5:3).

The poor, the mourners, the meek, the seekers of righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, the persecuted — these are the people to whom the kingdom belongs (see Matthew 5:3 to 5:11).

The kingdom is also rooted in the Old Testament. “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (see Matthew 5:19).

But the true citizen of the kingdom is held to an even higher standard than the law of the Old Testament. The spirit of the law, not the letter, is the guiding principle (see Matthew 5:21 to 5:48, and compare Jeremiah 31:33-34).

In this world's kingdoms, the rich and powerful rule. But the poor and forgotten will inherit the new kingdom of the Son of David.



Son of David

Having started his Gospel by showing us that Jesus is the perfect Son of David, Matthew uses that title for Jesus more than any of the other Gospel writers. Usually it comes from bystanders who address Jesus as “Son of David,” and almost always those bystanders are hoping for miraculous healing.

“And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed (him), crying out, ‘Son of David, have pity on us!’” (see Matthew 9:27). The blind men call on the Son of David, and because of their faith they receive their sight.

“Then they brought to him a demoniac who was blind and mute. He cured the mute person so that he could speak and see. All the crowd was astounded, and said, ‘Could this perhaps be the Son of David?’” (see Matthew 12:22-23). Here it is the miraculous healing that causes the crowd to suspect they might be seeing the promised Son of David.

“And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, ‘Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon’” (see Matthew 15:22). In this case, a non-Israelite — a descendant of the hated Canaanites who were always leading Israel astray — recognizes Jesus as Son of David. She acknowledges that the Son of David has authority over all nations, not just Israel.

The emphasis on healing is not surprising. The prophets had foretold that no one would be sick in the time of the Messiah:

“No one who dwells there will say, ‘I am sick’; the people who live there will be forgiven their guilt” (see Isaiah 33:24).

Matthew shows us that Israelites and Gentiles alike recognized Jesus as the Son of David foretold in the prophets.

Repent!

So, what do we do to get ready for the new kingdom?

When John the Baptist preached, his main theme was this: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (see Matthew 3:2).

When Jesus first began to preach in public, his message was exactly the same (see Matthew 4:17).

When Jesus sent the Twelve out to preach, he gave them the same message again (see Matthew 10:7).

The most important thing for followers of Jesus’ way to know is how to prepare for living in the kingdom of Heaven. And the most important preparation is repentance — turning our lives away from sin and back toward God.

The Last Instruction

All the promises to the Son of David are finally fulfilled after Jesus has risen from the dead.

“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” Jesus told his disciples (see Matthew 28:18). We recall the promise in Psalm 2:8: “I will make your inheritance the nations, your possession the ends of the earth” — a promise now finally fulfilled.

Matthew recalls it, too. The last words of Jesus that he records are these:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (see Matthew 28:19-20).

As followers of the Son of David, we share in the responsibility for His kingdom. We have the duty to help extend it to “the ends of the earth.” And we have our King’s promise that the kingdom will endure forever.

Discussion Questions

- I. In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ, how many divisions does he make in the list? How many generations in each division?
- II. How are these numbers significant?
- III. In Matthew's division of history, when does the Babylonian Exile end?
- IV. According to the prophets (Jeremiah, for example), when would the covenant with David be broken?
- V. What ceremony marked the beginning of the rule of a king of the house of David?
- VI. What spiritual effect did this ceremony have?
- VII. What equivalent ceremony did Jesus undergo? How was it equivalent?
- VIII. According to Christ's teaching, what kinds of people will inherit His kingdom?
- IX. What is the most important thing we can do to prepare for the coming of Christ's kingdom?

NOTES

For prayer and reflection:

Are you ready for the coming of the kingdom? What would it mean to be "poor in spirit" in the everyday life of today's world?

LESSON FOUR

THE THRONE *of* DAVID, HIS FATHER

Lesson Outline

1. Born into the House of David
 - I. Luke the Master Painter
 - II. The City of David
 - III. Why Shepherds?
2. The Public Career of the Son of David
 - I. The Baptism of Jesus
 - II. David and his Band of Men
 - III. The Chosen Son
 - IV. Pity from the Son of David
 - V. The Triumph
3. King of the Jews
 - I. The New Covenant
 - II. Kingdom Table
 - III. Reading Luke
4. Discussion Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To see how Luke emphasizes Jesus' lineage as Son of David in the infancy narrative.
- II. To see how Jesus appears in public as the Son of David throughout Luke's Gospel.
- III. To understand how, at the climax of Luke's Gospel, Jesus takes his place as heir to the kingdom of David.

Born into the House of David

Luke the Master Painter

In the previous lesson, we saw how Matthew firmly established Jesus as the Son of David, heir to all the Old Testament promises we looked at in Lesson 1.

An ancient legend said that Luke was a skilled painter who painted a portrait from life of the Virgin Mary. The legend fits: where Matthew almost piles up evidence of Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and types, Luke makes his point with beautiful images.

Like Matthew, Luke begins by showing us that Jesus had the right genealogical credentials (see Luke 1:26-27).



He is careful to point out that Joseph was “of the house of David” (see Luke 1:27). Joseph was Jesus’ legal father; therefore, Jesus was of the house of David, as the prophets had foretold that the Christ would be.

But Luke gives us what Matthew and the other Gospel writers leave out: the story of the conception and birth of Jesus. He places this too firmly in the context of the Old Testament prophecies concerning God’s covenant with David.

Recall that through the prophet Nathan, God had promised David a dynasty – that his throne would be “firm forever,” always ruled by a son, whom God himself would consider His son (see 2 Samuel 7:12-13).

In Luke’s account of the Annunciation, Gabriel’s words clearly echo and even quote from that promise: “the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever” (see Luke 1:32-33).

In other words, Luke is telling us that Jesus is the long-expected Son of David in whom God’s promise is finally fulfilled.

Even more startling in Nathan’s prophecy was the promise that the Son of David would be considered Son of God (see 2 Samuel 7:14, and compare Psalm 2:7).

Again, Gabriel echoes the same language: the child, he says, “will be called Son of the Most High “ — a common title for God in the Old Testament (see, for example, Genesis 14:18 and 2 Samuel 22:14, where the title is used by David himself).

The City of David

The nativity of John the Baptist takes up almost as much space in the beginning of Luke's Gospel as the nativity of Jesus Christ. Just as John the Baptist himself had the mission of preparing the way for the Christ, so Luke's story of John the Baptist's birth prepares us to understand who Christ is.

When his son John the Baptist was born, the priest Zechariah sang a hymn of praise to God, Who "has raised up a horn for our salvation within the house of David his servant, even as he promised through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (see Luke 1:68-70).

The horn is a common symbol of strength in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms (see, for example, Psalm 89:18 and Psalm 148:14). David himself called God, "the horn of my salvation" (see 2 Samuel 22:3).

Having told us exactly who the coming King is, Luke carefully locates His birth in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, was where the



prophet Samuel first found David and anointed him king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 16:4-13).

When a Roman enrollment sent every man to his home town (see Luke 2:1-3), Mary had to go to Bethlehem with her husband Joseph — "because," as Luke is careful to remind us, "he was of the house and family of David" (see Luke 2:4).

But Bethlehem was more than an ancestral marker for Luke and his audience. The prophet Micah had predicted the birth of a future king in Bethlehem — and something far greater, a child "whose origin is from of old" (see Micah 5:1-3; compare the "Ancient One" in Daniel 7:9 and 7:13).

The familiar picture of the Nativity that Luke paints for us is exactly what the prophet Micah foresaw: a divine King born in Bethlehem and his mother.

Why Shepherds?

Micah also sees the coming King as a "shepherd" — another allusion to David, who a shepherd in the countryside around Bethlehem (see 1 Samuel 16:11).

So as soon as Jesus is born, Luke, the master painter, shows us a field full of shepherds.

This, too, may be a reference designed to stir the hopes of Luke's readers.

The Lord was Israel's "shepherd" (see Psalm 23:1 and Psalm 80:2). And God had promised, through the prophet Ezekiel, that He himself would punish Israel's false shepherds — the rulers and teachers — and replace them with a good shepherd, a new David (see Ezekiel 34), who would gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

How fitting then, that the shepherds heard the good news first! Once again, Luke does not speak this directly, but uses evocative language from the Old Testament to show us that the Good Shepherd had arrived.

Section I. End

Putting the Messiah in His ‘Place’

The Baptism of Jesus

The public career of Jesus began with His baptism — an event that Luke again paints in obviously Davidic colors.

When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan, “a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” (see Luke 3:22). The words are intended to remind us of Psalm 2:7 — words originally understood to refer to the Davidic king of Israel.

In case we don’t get the point, Luke immediately follows the story of Jesus’ baptism with the genealogy of Jesus (see Luke 3:23-38). It’s somewhat different from Matthew’s (see Matthew 1:1-16), but it agrees with Matthew’s in the essential particular: Jesus comes from the line of David (see Luke 3:31).

Luke goes farther back than Matthew did: he carries Jesus’ line back through “Adam, the son of God” (see Luke 3:38). In other words, the real founder of the family is God himself. This too may be a subtle confirmation of the prophecy made to David — Jesus, a son of David, like his ancestor Adam, is a son of God.

David and his Band of Men

As Jesus’ ministry progresses, Luke stresses how much Jesus looks like David. For example, when Jesus’ hungry disciples picked a few ears of grain on the Sabbath, the ever-vigilant Pharisees accused them of breaking the law. Jesus responded by telling a story about David.

He recalls the time when David, who had been chosen by God and anointed as Israel’s true king, was on the run from King Saul, who had been rejected by God. Saul, jealous of David and desperate to retain the throne, was out to kill him. With only a small band of faithful followers by his side, David was constantly on the run.

This was the background to the story Jesus recalls — of how David once entered the house of God and “took the bread of offering,” sharing it with his companions, even though only the priests were permitted to eat it (see Luke 6:3-4 and 1 Samuel 21:2-7).

In comparing himself to David, Jesus seems to be deliberately drawing parallels between his situation.

Like David, Jesus is the rightful, God-anointed heir of Israel’s throne. He has even been baptized — which causes the Spirit to come upon Him as it rushed about David (see 1 Samuel 16:12-14).

He, too, is on the run, with only a small band of faithful disciples by his side. And, He seems to say, like Saul, the Pharisees and their allies might rule Israel for now, but their days were numbered.

The Chosen Son

Even geography is used by Luke to signal the Davidic pedigree of Jesus.

To see this, we have to remember the sequence of events by which David’s kingdom was destroyed. The Assyrians first struck in Galilee (see 2 Kings 15:29), finally capturing Samaria, the northern portion of the kingdom (see 2 Kings 17:1-6). Then, ultimately, the southern portion, Judah, fell to the Babylonians (see 2 Kings 24:10-15).

Now notice some of the geographic details in Luke’s account.

Jesus’ ministry begins in Galilee (see Luke 4:14), moves to Samaria (see Luke 9:51), and finally reaches Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, where a great mob welcomes Jesus as the promised King (see Luke 19:28).

What’s Luke doing here? He is subtly painting a picture, showing Jesus undoing the destruction of Israel,

restoring the kingdom in the order in which it was originally destroyed.

Near the end of Jesus' ministry, Luke shows us Jesus transfigured.

The Transfiguration (see Luke 9:28-36), is another vivid picture for Luke of Jesus' divine and Davidic sonship.

Note that the voice from the cloud reaffirms what the voice had proclaimed at Jesus' baptism: "This is my chosen Son; listen to him" (see Luke 9:35).

The scene evokes Moses, and Moses himself is there to emphasize the association. The words "listen to him" recall the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15: that a "prophet like me" will come, and the people will "listen" to him.

By showing us Jesus glorified with Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament, Luke shows us that Jesus is indeed the prophet like Moses who was to come.

But the words from the cloud also bring to mind Psalm 2 and Psalm 89 — both of which refer to the Davidic king as Son of God.

At the same time, the voice from the cloud proclaims Him more than a prophet: he is the Chosen One, the Son of God — titles that belong to the rightful King of Israel (see Psalm 89:4).

Pity from the Son of David

By the time He gets to Jerusalem, even the blind can see what Luke wants his readers to see — that Jesus is the son of David (see Luke 18:38).

But there is more the scene of the healing of the blind man on the way to Jerusalem.

If the Son of David is on His way to Jerusalem, it can only be for one purpose: to take his rightful throne as King of Israel, and to make Jerusalem his capital — just as David did.

Recall that in David's time, Jerusalem was the last part of Israel to be conquered. The Jebusites who held it were sure their defenses were impenetrable — so sure that they taunted David: "The blind and the lame will drive you away" (see 2 Samuel 5:6).

But this time, as David's son approaches Jerusalem, it is the blind and the lame who welcome him.

The Triumph

And Jesus even enters the city exactly the way the Son of David ought to enter.

When Solomon, the prototypical Son of David, was crowned king, he entered Jerusalem riding on a mule, and the shouts of the people could be heard in the distant hills (see 1 Kings 1:38-40).

The prophet Zechariah saw the future King coming the same way: "a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass" (see Zechariah 9:9).

This is exactly the scene Luke shows us: the King coming into Jerusalem meekly mounted on a colt (see Luke 19:29-40), with the people shouting so that the hills resound with their joy.

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord," Jesus' followers shout (see Luke 19:38). The words are from Psalm 118, which is probably a processional liturgy for a kingly triumph.

But Luke's account adds one important word that does not appear in the original Psalm. So that no one could possibly miss the significance of the occasion, Jesus' followers explicitly hail Jesus as King.



King of the Jews

The New Covenant

After David had conquered Jerusalem and established himself there, God established His covenant with David (see 2 Samuel 7).

And with the Son of David established in Jerusalem as King, Luke shows us that it is time for the New Covenant (see Luke 22:20).

The words “new covenant” used in Jesus’ last supper with His disciples, recall the promises of Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The day would one day come, Jeremiah had said, when “a righteous shoot to David” (see Jeremiah 23:5) would restore the kingdom to Israel and announce a new covenant.

This is what Jesus announces at the Last Supper.

Clearly, then, the New Covenant that Jeremiah prophesied and Jesus proclaims is not a completely new departure. Instead, it is a renewal of the covenant with David, which is now transformed into something even greater.

And Luke paints the Last Supper as a royal banquet, with Jesus taking his place as King of Israel.

Kingdom Table

The kingdom of David had ministers and governors who sat on thrones at court.

So, too, Jesus says to His ministers and governors, the disciples: “I confer a kingdom on you” (see Luke 22:29).

The word we translate as “confer” is the same Greek word used for “covenant” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Luke was familiar with. In Luke’s account, the act is more than simply conferring: it is a covenant.

Just as God made a covenant with David, so God the Father makes a covenant with God the Son, and God the Son makes a covenant with His followers.

What Jesus shows us is a perfect picture of the ideal Davidic kingdom, with all the original twelve tribes that made up the Davidic kingdom are gathered together and reunited at the original capital Jerusalem.

It is a grand picture. Jesus, the King, enthroned with twelve ministers, ruling the twelve tribes of the restored Israel.

In fact, the very words of the Last Supper account remind us of the description of Jerusalem at peace in Psalm 122: the tribes all gathered together to give thanks to the Lord, and above them “the thrones of the house of David” (see Psalm 122:4-5).

Reading Luke

Finally, in Luke’s account of the Passion, the list of Davidic titles begins to pile up. Notice that in these final chapters of the Gospel, Jesus is repeatedly called:

- The Christ (or Anointed One) of God
- The Chosen One
- The King of the Jews

The irony, which Luke certainly means for us to see, is that these titles were all hurled as insults as Jesus was dying on the cross (see Luke 23:35-38).

There was even a sign on the cross itself: “This is the King of the Jews.” It must have been very funny to the Roman soldiers in charge.

But in fact that sign, placed there in mockery, spoke the truth that Luke has been showing us throughout the book.

All those titles really did belong to Jesus, because He really was the promised Son of David: the Christ, the Chosen One, the King of the Jews.

After He rose from the dead, he appeared to many of the believers. Luke records two of those appearances in detail, and in both of them the message is the same: the prophets had already told us that the Son of David would suffer these things and be raised from the dead.

On the road to Emmaus, two of Jesus’ followers meet Him, but do not recognize Him. When they tell him the story of what happened to their Master, He explains everything that happened by interpreting Moses and the prophets (see Luke 24:13-35).

Likewise when He appears to the remaining eleven apostles, He explains that everything happened to fulfill what was written in “Moses and the prophets and the psalms” (see Luke 24:36-49)

The things that happened to the Christ (that is, the Messiah, the Anointed One) were exactly what the prophets had foretold would happen to Him.

That is what Luke’s vivid images show us over and over throughout his Gospel: Jesus perfectly fulfilled everything that was expected of the Son of David:

That sign on the cross only proclaimed what all the signs before had already made clear: “This is the King of the Jews.”



Section III. End

Discussion Questions

- I. Why was it important to Luke to point out that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem?
- II. Why were shepherds the first people to hear that the Christ had been born?
- III. When the Pharisees rebuke His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus compares himself to David. In what ways does Jesus' situation resemble David's?
- IV. What is significant about the geographical course of Jesus' ministry in Luke?
- V. Whose coronation did Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem resemble?
- VI. According to Jesus, what is the difference between the kingdoms of the Gentiles and His own Kingdom?
- VII. What sign was posted on the cross when Jesus was crucified?
- VIII. What did Jesus explain to His followers in both the post-resurrection appearances recounted in Luke's Gospel?

NOTES

For personal reflection:

Are we "foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke" (see Luke 24:25)? What can we learn from Jesus' own interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures?

LESSON FIVE

THE SPREAD *of* THE KINGDOM *in* ACTS

Lesson Outline

1. The Mission
 - I. The Argument of the Book
 - II. The Ideal Kingdom
 - III. The Promise Forgotten?
2. The Kingdom Restored
 - I. The Structure of the Book
 - II. Enthroned in Heaven
 - III. Twelve Thrones
 - IV. The Prime Minister
3. The Good News
 - I. Peter's First Sermon
 - II. The Dispersion Reversed
 - III. Preaching the Kingdom Restored
 - IV. The Ends of the Earth
4. Discussion Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand how Jesus' parting words to His disciples form a map of the ideal Davidic kingdom .
- II. To see how the structure of the Acts of the Apostles follows that map.
- III. To see how Luke paints the nascent Church as the Davidic kingdom perfectly restored.

The Mission

The Argument of the Book

In the previous lesson, we saw how Luke's Gospel painted a picture of Jesus Christ as the perfect Son of David, King of Israel.

After writing the story of Jesus' life, Luke turned to the sequel: the establishment of Christ's Church in the world. We call this second book the Acts of the Apostles.

Since in his Gospel Luke had painted Christ as the perfect fulfillment of the Davidic king, in Acts Luke naturally paints the Church as the perfect fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom. The Kingdom will be the theme of the book — a theme laid out by Christ himself.

It will also be the key to the message the Apostles have to bring to the world — the message that the Church is built on. And to spread that message, the Apostles need some preparation.

The kingdom theme begins almost immediately in Acts. For forty days after the Resurrection, Luke tells us, Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom (see Acts 1:3).

"Lord," his disciples ask him, "are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (see Acts 1:6).

Perhaps they still expect something mundane from the Kingdom — something that involves expelling the Romans and setting up an Israelite civil authority. Or perhaps, after all Jesus' teaching, they are beginning to understand that the Kingdom Jesus proclaims "does not belong to this world" (see John 18:36).

But Jesus does not give them an answer. It is not their business to know exactly when things would happen, he tells them. They will "receive power" when the



Holy Spirit comes. As for when the Kingdom will be restored — that is what they will spend the rest of the book finding out.

What He does tell them is that it will be their business to restore the Kingdom. They will be His witnesses

- in Jerusalem,
- throughout Judea
- and Samaria,
- and to the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8).

As we'll see, this forms a kind of program for the whole book. Just as Jesus said, the spread of the Gospel begins in Jerusalem, then moves to Judea and Samaria, and then to the rest of the world.

But more than that, it's also a map of the ideal Davidic kingdom — the kingdom that was promised to the Son of David, but was never fully realized until the coming of Christ.

The Ideal Kingdom

After David had made Jerusalem his capital (see 2 Samuel 5:6-10), he contemplated building a temple to God (see 2 Samuel 7:1-3). But the prophet Nathan brought him an amazing message.

David would not build a temple (see 2 Samuel 7:4-7); that work would be left for his son (see 2 Samuel 7:12-13). But God promised him a greater destiny than he had ever dreamed of.

Instead of David building a house for God, God would build a house for David (see 2 Samuel 7:11). That is, He would promise David that his son would rule after him, and the kingdom of the sons of David would be established forever (see 2 Samuel 7:16).

Psalms 89 puts the covenant with David in poetic terms. The Davidic king will be “Most High over the kings of the earth,” God has promised (see Psalm 89:28), and his throne will last as long as the sun and moon (see Psalm 89:37-38).

For a while it had looked as though the promise would be fulfilled very quickly. David himself ruled over Judah (the Judea of the New Testament) and Israel (the Samaria and Galilee of the New Testament), and he conquered large outside territories (see 2 Samuel 8:1-13, 10:6-19). His son Solomon ruled over a considerable empire (see 1 Kings 4:21-24).

The Promise Forgotten?

Yet in Psalm 89 the psalmist wrote almost in despair. Things were going very badly for the kingdom (see Psalm 89:39-46). God seemed to have forgotten His promise (see Psalm 89:50). Instead of an exalted position higher than all other kings, the Lord’s Anointed bore the insults of all the nations (see Psalm 89:51-52).

The ideal and the reality seemed to be poles apart. God had promised an eternal kingdom to rule over all the kings of the earth; instead, David’s descendants ruled over a tiny buffer state that was constantly in danger of being overrun by the mighty empires around it (see, for a few examples, 2 Chronicles 32:1-19, 2 Chronicles 33:11, 2 Chronicles 36:3-4).

Bit by bit, the sons of David lost everything: the outside territories (see 1 Kings 11:14-25), Israel when the northern tribes rebelled (see 2 Chronicles 10:16-19), then most of Judah, until finally the son of David was shut up in Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 25:1-3). Finally, Jerusalem itself fell (see 2 Kings 25:4-10).

David’s kingdom had collapsed like an old hut. Yet it would not lie collapsed forever (see Amos 9:11).

The prophets foretold the destruction of Israel (see, for example, Isaiah 3:1, Jeremiah 15:1-4), and their prophecies came true. But they also foretold a time when the kingdom would be restored.

Isaiah foresaw a time when all the earth would acknowledge the God of Israel (see Isaiah 45:22). Israel would return from exile (see Isaiah 48:20-21). The King of Israel really would rule to the ends of the earth (see Isaiah 49:6-7).

With this history in front of us, we can see now what Jesus had commanded the Apostles to do. He had sent them to restore the kingdom: starting in Jerusalem, then taking back Judah, then Israel, then the ends of the earth, undoing all the destruction since the death of Solomon, until the promise to David was fulfilled completely, as the prophets had foretold that — against all odds — it must be (see, for example, Isaiah 2:1-4, Amos 9:11-12, Zechariah 14:16).

That is exactly what Luke will show the Apostles doing in the rest of the book.

The Kingdom Restored

The Structure of the Book

We can see the pattern first of all in the outline of the book.

Acts begins in Jerusalem (see Acts 1-7).

With the death of Stephen and the ensuing persecution, the Gospel spreads throughout Judea and Samaria (see Acts 8).

With the conversion of Paul (see Acts 9), the scene moves for a time to Damascus — part of David’s conquered territory outside Israel (see 2 Samuel 8:6).

Then, with Peter’s visit to Cornelius and Peter’s vision of the clean and unclean foods (see Acts 10:1-33), the mission to the Gentiles begins in earnest (see Acts 10:34-48).

From there, the Gospel spreads to the great city of Antioch (see Acts 11:19-30), then to Cyprus (see Acts 13:4-13), to Asia Minor (see Acts 13:14-14:28), to Greece (see Acts 16-20), and finally to Rome itself (see Acts 27-28).

Rome was the capital of the Empire that covered most of the known world. In that way, Rome could truly be called the ends of the earth.

Thus the outline of the book itself shows the Apostles restoring the ideal Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, following the mandate of Christ himself at the beginning of the book (see Acts 1:8).

In fact, the book itself on a large scale, like Jesus’ commission, is a map of the ideal Davidic kingdom, now coming to life in the spread of the Church.



Enthroned in Heaven

As soon as Jesus gives his last orders to the disciples, He is “lifted up” into heaven (see Acts 1:9). As Mark tells us, He is enthroned “at the right hand of God” (see Mark 16:19, and compare Acts 7:55-56).

Luke shows us the divine enthronement of Jesus with an instantly recognizable image: “a cloud took him from their sight” (see Acts 1:9). Throughout the Bible, a cloud is the visible sign of God’s presence, hiding the blinding glory of divinity (see, for example, Exodus 13:21, Exodus 16:10, Exodus 40:34, Leviticus 16:2,

Numbers 11:25, Isaiah 19:1, Matthew 17:5).

The vision reminds us in particular of the “Son of Man” in Daniel, who is carried to the Ancient One on a cloud (see Daniel 7:13).

Like God the Father, Jesus — God the Son — is now hidden from sight by a cloud. But the heavenly Kingdom has not disappeared from the earth. On the contrary, it is only beginning.

Twelve Thrones

If the true Davidic kingdom was to be restored, that would have to mean all twelve tribes, the descendants of the sons of Jacob (see Genesis 49), united under the King of Israel.

That was what the prophets had foretold: Judah (the tribe that had been loyal to the sons of David) and Ephraim (the prophets’ name for Israel, the kingdom of the northern tribes) would be united again under the Son of David (see, for example, Ezekiel 37:15-28).

We remember from the previous lesson how Jesus had given His Apostles “thrones” from which they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel (see Luke 22:30), echoing the description of Jerusalem at peace in Psalm 122: the tribes all gathered together to give thanks to the Lord, and above them “the thrones of the house of David” (see Psalm 122:4-5).

The problem was that there were only eleven Apostles now. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus (see Luke 22:47-48), had killed himself in despair (see Matthew 27:3-5, Acts 1:16-19).

Peter told the rest that it was necessary for them to have another “witness” to carry on in Judas’s place (see Acts 1:21-22), quoting two psalms that curse the enemies of God (see Acts 1:20; the quotations are from Psalm 69:26 and Psalm 109:8).

Matthias was chosen, and from that point on he was numbered among the Twelve (see Acts 1:23-26).

Twelve tribes, twelve thrones: it was necessary to establish the Kingdom properly from the beginning.

The Prime Minister

The Twelve thus took their positions as the King’s ministers. Just as David and his successors had had ministers to sit on thrones and judge the people (see, for example, 1 Kings 4:1-19, and compare Psalm 122:4-5), so Jesus, the ideal Davidic King, would have His ministers.

And just as in the original Davidic kingdom, one of those ministers would be the leader of the rest.

David had Joab (see 1 Chronicles 11:6), and every one of his successors had what we today would call a prime minister.

Following that pattern, we see that Jesus, too, had a prime minister.



As soon as He told His disciples that they would sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (see Luke 22:28-30), Jesus turned to Simon Peter and told him that he must strengthen the others (see Luke 22:31-32).

Peter was the “Rock” (which is what the name Peter means) on which Jesus had promised to build His Church (see Matthew 16:18).

All the Apostles were Jesus’ ministers, but Simon Peter was the prime minister.

Now we see Peter exercising that authority. It is Peter who announces to the Twelve and the rest of the church in Jerusalem that Judas must be replaced (see Acts 1:15-22), and his decision is accepted without debate (see Acts 1:23-28).

We see him acting as the unquestioned leader at Pentecost, too, when he speaks for all the Apostles in front of the astonished crowds (see Acts 2:14).



Peter speaks for them again before the leaders of the people and the priests (see Acts 4:8). He exercises a healing power like Christ’s (see Acts 3:1-12), pronounces God’s judgment on Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:1-11), and gains such a reputation that people line up just to be touched by his shadow (see Acts 5:15).

Finally, it is Peter whose word determines the whole future course of the Kingdom on earth. When some converted Pharisees have argued that Christians are bound by the whole law (see Acts 15:5), Peter is the one who interprets the will of God for the rest of the Apostles (see Acts 15:7-11).

James, summarizing the decision of the Apostles, refers to Amos’s prophecy about the fallen hut, in which the restoration of the Davidic kingdom comes about so that the rest of the world may also come to God (see Acts 15:14-18).

A kingdom that includes “the rest of humanity” is what God had promised through the Prophets, and the mission of the Church is to be the fulfillment of that promise.

Luke leaves us in no doubt whatsoever: Peter has taken over as leader of the Twelve, just as Jesus had ordained. He interprets the will of God, and he decides the course of the whole Church.

But Peter is only the first among the ministers of the Kingdom. Jesus, as Peter himself will tell us, is still the King.

Section II. End

The Good News

Peter's First Sermon

At Pentecost, Peter's address to the crowd had one central message: the kingdom promised to David had finally arrived, with Jesus Christ as the King.

Peter quoted from David's own words in Psalm 16, where David says that God will not allow His Holy One to see corruption (see Acts 2:27, quoting from Psalm 16:10).

Now David, Peter argued, is dead and buried, and everyone knows where his tomb is (see Acts 2:29).

Therefore, David could not have been speaking about himself. Instead, as a prophet, he foresaw the coming



of Christ, who would rise from the dead and sit on the throne of David (see Acts 2:30-31). Christ sits at the right hand of God, just as David had prophesied (see Acts 2:33-34).

The Dispersion Reversed

The result of Peter's sermon was amazing: three thousand people baptized in a single day (see Acts 2:41).

Even more significant was the variety of people who heard the Good News. Pentecost was an important festival in the Jewish calendar, and Jerusalem had filled up with "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" (see Acts 2:5).

There were "Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs" (see Acts 2:9-11).

This is nothing short of a verbal map of the known world, both inside and outside the Roman Empire. From Rome in the west to Parthia (a giant empire that included large parts of India) in the east, from Pontus in the north to Egypt and Arabia in the south, the people of God had come back together to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their King.

All the nations had Jewish populations because, after Israel and Judah were conquered, the Jews had been dispersed throughout the world.

Now "devout Jews" from everywhere in the Dispersion had heard and accepted the message Peter brought them: the message that the Kingdom was restored, and that the perfect King prophesied long ago was now reigning.

In this scene, Luke paints a picture of Israel reunited under Christ as king. It is the news that the Son of David, the Lord's Anointed, the perfect Davidic King, has begun his reign that persuades three thousand people to accept Christian baptism.

Preaching the Kingdom Restored

The Kingdom is restored! This is the message the first Christians preach again and again throughout the book. It is always the Apostles' most effective message. The news that the Kingdom had been restored is what brings thousands of souls into the Kingdom.

Peter's first sermon sets the tone. After the Church is scattered from Jerusalem (see Acts 8:1), Philip preaches the Kingdom in Samaria (see Acts 8:12).

Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:14-42) has the same theme as Peter's first sermon, and even quotes some of the same texts from Scripture.

Paul gives a brief summary of salvation history, from the Exodus to David (see Acts 13:17-22), and then announces that Jesus Christ was the promised Son of David who came to save Israel (see Acts 13:23).

He backs up his declaration with quotations from the Psalms (see Acts 13:33; Psalm 2:7; Acts 13:35; Psalm 16:10) and the prophets (see Acts 13:34; Isaiah 55:3; Acts 13:41; Habakkuk 1:5).

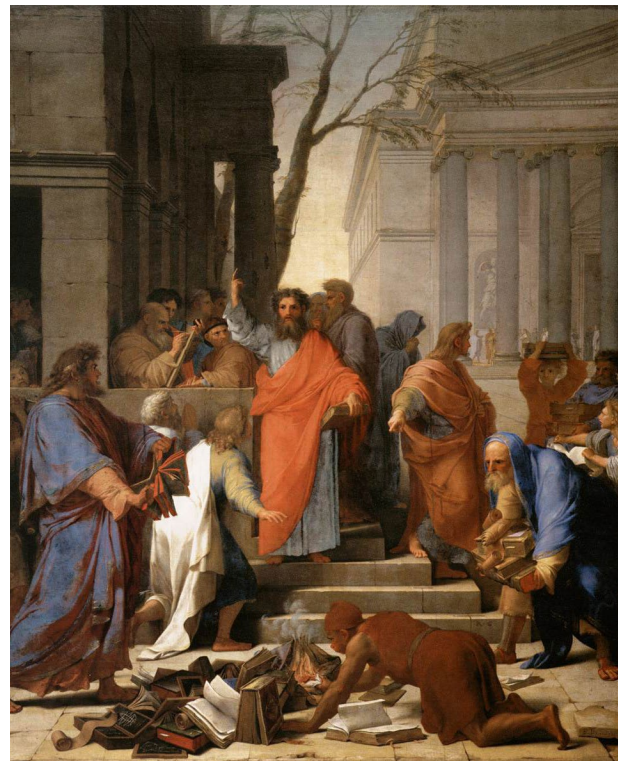
Paul even makes the same argument that Peter did: that David died and was buried, so the promises could not have been for him (see Acts 13:36); instead, it was Jesus Christ in whom the promises were fulfilled (see Acts 13:37).

Once again, the message is received with enthusiasm, and many of the people who heard it are persuaded (see Acts 13:42-43) — especially among the Gentile “god-fearers” who believe in the True God but have not been circumcised.

Paul preaches the same news about the Kingdom all through Asia (see Acts 19:8-10, Acts 20:25).

When the newly converted Christians are suffering trials, it does not cause them to doubt the news of the Kingdom. Instead, the news of the Kingdom is what comforts and strengthens them (see Acts 14:22).

Not only are the dispersed Israelites being reunited under their true King, but His dominion is also being extended to all the nations of the earth, as God had promised the Son of David (see Psalm 89:28).



The Ends of the Earth

As a narrative, the Acts of the Apostles seems to end abruptly. Indeed, it may well have stopped at what for Luke was the present time.

Paul is in prison — really more of a house arrest (see Acts 28:16) in Rome. He had appealed to the Emperor (see Acts 25:10-12), which was the right of a Roman citizen, a privilege into which Paul was born (see Acts 22:25-29).

We do not know what happens to Paul after that — which seems a very strange lack of resolution by modern narrative standards.

But when we look at the structure of the book, we see that Luke has perfectly completed his program.

Jesus had told His followers that they would be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (see Acts 1:8).

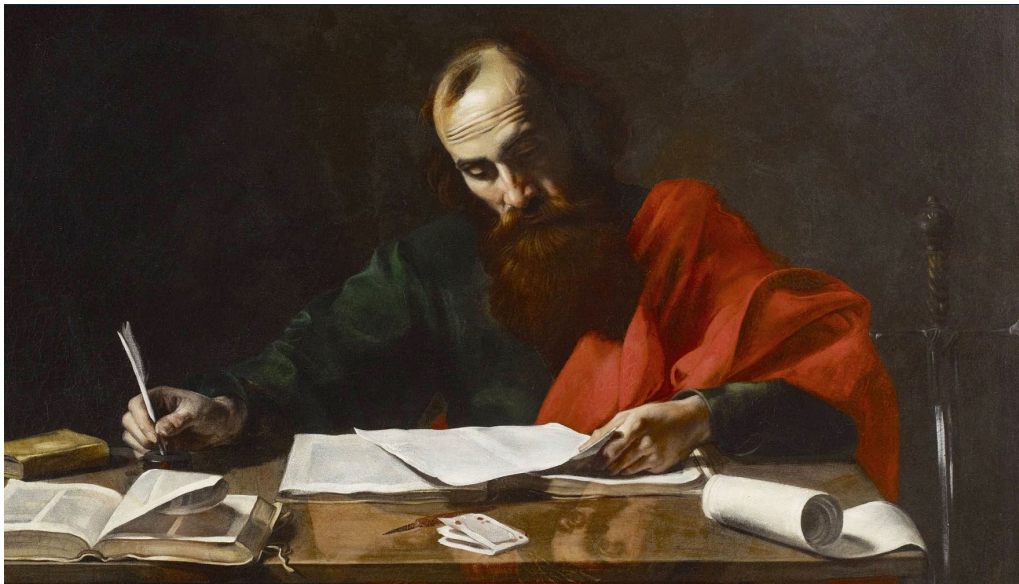
Now, having stopped at all the points between, here we are at the ends of the earth: Rome, the capital of the world.

Here Paul spends his time teaching anyone who will listen about the Kingdom (see Acts 28:23)

In fact, our very last glimpse of Paul, and Luke’s very last words to us, show him still proclaiming the Kingdom. The Acts of the Apostles ends with the news about the Kingdom still ringing in our ears.

The reason we don’t know what happens to Paul is this: it makes no difference. That is not the point of the book. The point is that the mission is accomplished. Paul has reached Rome, preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The Kingdom is restored, and whatever happens to Paul will not change that. Christ the King reigns, Most High over all the kings of the earth. He rules a Kingdom not built on conquest but on persuasion; not held together by force but by love. It is a kingdom infinitely more glorious than Solomon’s (compare Matthew 12:42), and it will last forever.



Section III. End

Discussion Questions

- I. At the beginning of Acts, who states the argument or program for the whole book?
- II. According to the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, how long would the Davidic kingdom last?
- III. Jesus chose twelve Apostles, and Peter declared that a replacement for Judas was necessary to fill out the number. Why was the number twelve significant?
- IV. What position did Peter occupy in the newly restored kingdom?
- V. What was the theme of Peter's first sermon?
- VI. Why is it important for us to know where the people in the crowd at Pentecost came from?
- VII. Why does Luke end his narrative with Paul preaching in Rome?

NOTES

For prayer and reflection:

Christ reigns as "Most High over all the kings of the earth." What does that mean for the way we live every day? Is Christ King over everything in our lives, or are there parts of our daily routine where we refuse to acknowledge Christ as supreme?

LESSON SIX

“THE KEY *of* DAVID”: CHURCH *and* KINGDOM *in* THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Outline

1. Kingdom and Church
 - I. Review and Overview
 - II. The Beloved Son
2. The Covenants of Promise
 - I. The First-Born
 - II. Kingdom of Priests
3. The Key of David
 - I. The Light to the Nations
 - II. Davidic kingdom Restored
 - III. The Kingdom Come
4. Discussion Questions

Lesson Objectives

- I. To understand the characteristics and identity of the kingdom of God as it is portrayed in the New Testament epistles and the Book of Revelation.
- II. To see how the Church is identified with the kingdom in the New Testament.
- III. To understand how the Church, as it is portrayed in the New Testament, bears the characteristics of the Davidic kingdom.

Kingdom and Church

Review and Overview

In our first five lessons, we've explored in a detailed way the Old Testament's understanding of the kingdom of God and its significance to the overall narrative unity and meaning of the Bible.

We've also undertaken a close examination of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, as well as the Book of Acts, in order to consider how the kingdom was understood in the preaching of Jesus and in the proclamation of the apostolic Church.

In this final lesson, we want to look at the kingdom theme as found in the remainder of the New Testament writings.

It's true that outside of the synoptic gospels and Acts, explicit references to the kingdom of God are sparse. However, it is clear that these New Testament writings share the same presumption that the kingdom proclaimed by Christ is the restoration of the everlasting kingdom promised by God to the son of David (see 2 Samuel 7).

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus himself is designated as the messianic offspring promised to David (see Romans 1:3; Revelation 5:5, 22:16; Sirach 47:2). Hebrews applies a messianic psalm to Christ, identifying Him as David's anointed son whose kingdom will last forever (see Hebrews 1:8-9; Psalm 45:6-7).

Christ's resurrection and ascension are described as a heavenly enthronement at God's right hand. In this, Christ is shown to fulfill the messianic promise of Psalm 110:1 (see Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:13).

He is depicted as ruling from heaven over a restored Davidic kingdom — a kingdom that embraces both Jews and Gentiles (see Ephesians 3:6; 2:18-19).

Christ is said to have dominion and authority over both “those in heaven and on earth” (see Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:18). Furthermore, his rule is for all ages — “not only in this age but also in the age to come” (see Ephesians 1:20-21; Revelation 1:5; 2 Peter 1:11).

The Beloved Son

The core of Christ's gospel — the proclamation of the kingdom — underlies the New Testament writings, even if the term “kingdom” itself is only infrequently used. And in these writings, we're given a richer and fuller understanding of the identity and characteristics of the kingdom.

The kingdom is closely associated and, in a certain way, identified with the Church.

Colossians, for instance, uses language that harkens back to the exodus to describe the salvation that comes in the Church: “He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption” (see Colossians 1:13).

This passage introduces Colossians' great hymn to the beloved Son, who is described as “the head of . . . the Church” (see Colossians 1:18).

Thus, the kingdom of the beloved Son and the Church seem to be very nearly identical in the mind of Paul.

In Ephesians, too, it seems that the terms “Church” and “kingdom” are used almost interchangeably. Jesus is called the head of the Church (see Ephesians 1:22; 5:23) and His dominion is described as “the kingdom of Christ and of God” (see Ephesians 5:5).

The Covenants of Promise

The First-Born

We find a further association of kingdom and Church in the family imagery used to describe the New Testament community. This imagery shows the early Church seeing deep ties between the covenants of Israel's salvation history and the sacraments of the Church.

Jesus is described frequently as God's "first born" (see Luke 2:7; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15,18) — a designation that evokes a key theme in God's relationship with Israel.

God named Israel His first-born son among the nations (see Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 32:6; Hosea 11:1; Sirach 36:11).

This "primogeniture" was closely related to Israel's covenant mission as a "kingdom of priests" (see Exodus 19:6) — to be mediators of the knowledge and true worship of the living God to its "brother" nations.

In His covenant with David, God deepened this identification of Israel's first-born and priestly stature and its mission to reign over all nations — swearing that David's son would be His son, "the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth," and a "priest forever" (see 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Psalm 2:7; 89:27-29; 110:4; John 7:42).

In the New Testament, these promises are directly applied to Jesus (see Hebrews 1:5-6; 7:21; Revelation 1:5). Jesus, through His death and resurrection, becomes "the firstborn" of "many children" (see Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10-13).

The kingdom is frequently described in the New Testament epistles as an "inheritance" (see Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 15:20; Galatians 5:21; Colossians 1:12). This inheritance is claimed through faith in the gospel, a faith that finds expression in the sacrament of baptism.

In the only use of "kingdom" language in John's gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus that entry into the kingdom of God means being begotten by water and the Spirit (see John 3:3,5).

Baptism is how one enters the kingdom and how one enters the Church. Again we see a presumption of the near identity of Church and kingdom.

Through baptism, believers come to share in the national history of Israel, which is also the history of salvation. They become "sharers in the covenants of promise" that God made to Israel (see Ephesians 2:12).

In particular, they become heirs to the family of God, according to the promise made to Abraham — that through Abraham's descendants all the nations of the world would be blessed (see Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29)



As we looked at in detail in our first lesson, all of Israel's history, including the exodus from Egypt, the covenant made at Sinai, and the establishment of the monarchy under David, can be seen as partial fulfillments of God's covenant with Abraham.

The ultimate fulfillment of that covenant comes in the blood of Jesus, by which believers are made "children of Abraham" (see Galatians 3:7-9) and "children of God" through the working of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 3:26; 4:6-7).

The kingdom, then, is understood in a certain sense as a family of God, in which believers are called to conduct themselves worthily as God's children (see 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Kingdom of Priests

Here again, we see a tight connection between the early Christian notions of Church and kingdom. The Church, made up of royal sons and daughters of God, Jewish and Gentile, is the new, and true Israel of God (see Galatians 6:16).

In this, the Church fulfills the original commission and identity given to Israel in the covenant at Sinai. There, God established Israel as a "kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (see Exodus 19:6).

The New Testament writings apply this description of Israel as a priestly kingdom to the Church (see 1 Peter 2:5-10), in which members share in the priesthood and sonship of Christ (see Revelation 1:5-6).

In Revelation's vision of the scroll and the lamb, Christ is celebrated as purchasing with His blood "a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth" (see Revelation 5:10).

Significantly, this kingdom is made up of people, not only from Israel, but from "every tribe and tongue, people and nation" (see Revelation 5:9).

The vision itself is filled with images from the exodus and from Daniel's vision of the son of man. As

Daniel's son of man receives authority over peoples and nations of every tongue or language, so does the kingdom of priests, the Church, in Revelation (compare Daniel 7:14; Revelation 5:9).

As the son of man receives glory and honor in Daniel's vision, so does the Lamb in Revelation (compare Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 5:12). And as the holy ones of the Most High possessed the kingdom in Daniel, the kingdom of priests in Revelation is said to reign on earth (compare Daniel 7:22).

Daniel's vision evoked the original calling and purpose of Israel. And so does John's vision of the Lamb.

In this vision we have a summary of the New Testament understanding: The Church — the restored kingdom of David that encompasses the twelve tribes of Israel and all the Gentile nations — fulfills the prophecy of Daniel and is the heir and successor to the promises of Israel.



The Key of David



The Light to the Nations

The Church is the fulfillment of the kingdom promised to Israel. This is again stressed in Revelation's final pages.

John sees a vision of the new Jerusalem, the new capital of the new kingdom. The city gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the foundation stones are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles (see Revelation 21:9-13).

The depiction of the kingdom as a temple is similar to the depiction of the Church as a spiritual temple (see 1 Peter 2:5).

Israel was commissioned to be a light to the nations (see Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). The new Israel, the kingdom of the Church, fulfills that commission. As John sees it, the new Jerusalem is illuminated by the glory of God and enlightens the entire world, its light brighter than the sun and the moon. “The nations will walk by its light” and kings of the earth stream toward the light, bringing the wealth of nations to pay tribute (see Revelation 21:22-27).

John here is evoking the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the new exodus and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. Isaiah had prophesied that God would one day be an “everlasting light” brighter than the sun and moon (see Isaiah 60:19) and that nations would come to the light bearing their wealth (see Isaiah 60:3,5).

Isaiah foretold that the gates of the kingdom would be open to people of all nations — a promise that John likewise sees delivered in the kingdom of the Church (compare Isaiah 60:11; Revelation 21:25-26).

Isaiah also foretold that authority (“the key”) over the Davidic kingdom would be turned over to a new royal minister (see Isaiah 22:22).

Christ applied this prophecy to the apostle Peter, and interpreted the “keys to the kingdom” to mean authority in what He called “my Church” (see Matthew 16:18-19).

We see the same identification of kingdom and Church in Revelation, which also offers an interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the keys. Jesus is described as the “offspring of David” (see Revelation 22:16) and as “the holy one . . . who holds the key of David” (see Revelation 3:7).

Davidic Kingdom Restored

We are now in the position to see how the Church, as it is portrayed in the New Testament, bears the characteristics of the Davidic kingdom, as we identified them in Lesson One.

- First, the kingdom of the Church is founded on a divine covenant (see 1 Corinthians 11:25).
- The “king” is the son of David, and the Son of God (see Romans 1:3-4).
- The king is God’s “anointed” (see 1 John 2:20).
- The reign of God’s anointed king is to be eternal (see 1 Timothy 6:16).
- At the center of the kingdom is the spiritual Jerusalem or Zion (see Galatians 4:26).
- Worship in the kingdom is centered on the temple of Christ’s body, which replaces the temple of Jerusalem (see John 2:19-21; Revelation 21:22).
- The kingdom is international, drawing worshipers from Israel and from all the nations (see Revelation 7:1-12).
- Through the kingdom, the nations of the earth are instructed in the divine wisdom of the son of David (see Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:28; James 3:17).
- The kingdom is administered by a royal steward (see John 21:15-19) and various officers (see 1 Timothy 3:3-13), and includes a prominent role for the Queen Mother (see Revelation 12:1-6).
- Finally, the worship of the kingdom consists in the offering of sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the Eucharist (see Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5).

The Kingdom Come

The kingdom is a present reality for the New Testament writers. It is something that has come into the world with Christ (see Revelation 11:15; 12:10). It is an experience and relationship that that believers “share” in (see Revelation 1:9).

But the kingdom is at the same time something of a work in progress. Paul says that he is working for the kingdom of God (see Colossians 4:11). And he foresees a final day — “the end” — when Christ will “hand over the kingdom to His God and Father” (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-50).

At that time, Paul says, Christ will have destroyed every sovereignty, authority, and power, and will have conquered the final enemy, death itself.

Revelation also looks forward to a day when “the mysterious plan of God shall be fulfilled” (see Revelation 10:7). On this day, the kingdom of the world will belong to God and His anointed, a clear reference to Old Testament hopes for a messianic kingdom (see Revelation 11:15; 12:10; Daniel 2; Psalm 2).



Until that day, the New Testament sees the life of the kingdom, the life of the Church, as one of liturgy and anticipation — of worshiping God with a “sacrifice of praise” in union with Christ, who, through His blood consecrates believers as priests of His new covenant (see Hebrews 13:13-15).

We see this most clearly at the conclusion of Hebrews (see Hebrews 12:18-29), which characterizes the kingdom as both already come and not yet completely here. Believers “are receiving” the kingdom as a divine gift. It is something they now possess, but not yet fully.

This is a passage that is remarkable for the wealth of Old Testament imagery that it brings together. It seems to describe, in evocative and symbolic terms, the celebration of the Eucharist.

Believers are described coming to a heavenly Jerusalem to celebrate in a “festal gathering” as an “assembly of the first-born” (see vs. 22-23; compare Hebrews 2:12). The word translated “assembly” is the Greek word *ekklesia*, the word for “church.” The word translated “festal gathering” means religious or liturgical worship (see Isaiah 66:10)

So, we have the Church on earth worshiping in the new Jerusalem, along with the angels and Jesus, the firstborn from the dead and “the mediator of a new covenant.” The worship of this Church is a sacrifice of thanksgiving (see Hebrews 12:28) for the “unshakeable kingdom” that believers are in the process of “receiving” (v. 27).



Section III. End

Discussion Questions

- I. What does the kingdom of God mean in the preaching of Jesus and in the proclamation of the early Church?
- II. What does it mean to say that Jesus is “the son of David”?
- III. How does the Church fulfill the covenant mission given to Israel?
- IV. How does the Church, as it is portrayed in the New Testament, bears the characteristics of the Davidic kingdom?

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