

THE DAVIDIC MESSIAH IN LUKE-ACTS

The Promise and Its Fulfilment in Lukan Christology¹

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This work investigates one theme within Luke's christological 'proclamation from prophecy and pattern' motif, that of the coming king from the line of David. To determine the background to this theme, in chapter 2 the Davidic promise tradition is examined in its first century context of meaning. While the diverse writings of first century Judaism exhibit a range of eschatological expectations, evidence is found of widespread hope for a coming Davidic deliverer. Sometimes this figure is described as a new 'David', other times as a 'seed' or 'shoot' from David; sometimes he plays a relatively passive role, other times an active and executive one. Throughout, the essential hope is the same: a deliverer modelled after David, Israel's greatest king, who will restore the nation and reign with justice and righteousness. A mediating position is reached between the traditional view that messianic expectations were quite fixed by the first century, and the more recent perspective that speculation was so diverse as to render the 'messianic hope' a fiction. At the turn of the Christian era, royal-Davidic expectations were widespread and *relatively* stable within a broader context of eschatological diversity.

The pre-Pauline formula in Romans 1:3-4 confirms that from an early period Christians took up the Davidic promise tradition as an aid in explaining the salvation-historical significance of Jesus the messiah. In their case, Davidic descent, divine sonship, and royal exaltation language were the most utilised aspects of the promise tradition. Jesus was the promised seed of David, now 'raised up' as Son of God in fulfilment of scripture.

Chapters 3-6 examine Luke's use of this royal-Davidic theme. In chapter 3 the birth narrative is found to be thoroughly Lukan in language, style and theology, introducing

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themes of importance for Luke and serving as an introduction to the whole of his two-volume work. It is significant, then, that Davidic messianism plays a central role in the christology of these two chapters. Of the nativity's five major christological sections, three are explicitly royal-Davidic (Lk. 1:26-38; 1:68-76; 2:1-20) and two are implicitly so (2:8-20; 2:41-52). Using Old Testament language, style and motifs, Luke grounds the birth narrative firmly in an Old Testament 'promise' context, with Davidic messianism as its centrepiece.

Chapter 4 investigates the speeches in Acts, generally acknowledged to provide special insight into Luke's christological perspective. It is significant that the keynote addresses of three of the most important characters in Acts are strongly royal-Davidic in perspective. In Peter's Pentecost speech (Acts 2:14-40)—representing for Luke the Petrine (and hence the apostolic) gospel to the Jews—the spokesman for the apostolic band cites Psalm 16:8-11 and Psalm 110.1 to demonstrate that Jesus' resurrection and exaltation were prophesied in scripture and together represent the fulfilment of the 'oath' God swore to David to seat one of his descendants upon his throne (Ps. 132:11). A programmatic role must also be assigned to Paul's sermon at Pisidian-Antioch (Acts 13:14-48). As the inaugural sermon on Paul's first missionary journey and the only synagogue sermon recorded in Acts, this address represents Luke's version of the Pauline kerygma to Jews and God-fearers. After summarising the history of Israel to David, Paul presents Jesus as the saviour from David's seed raised up to deliver his people. Finally, in James' crucial decision at the Council of Jerusalem (15:1-29)—the structural and theological centre of Acts—the leader of the Jerusalem church confirms that all along it was part of God's plan to bring Gentiles into the community of the saved. As proof of this he cites Amos 9:11-13, where the prophet predicts that the Davidic dynasty, the fallen 'hut of David', will be rebuilt, 'so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord'. The implication is that the Gentile mission is in fulfilment of scripture and directly proceeds from the re-establishment of the Davidic throne through Jesus the messiah.

Together chapters 3 and 4 achieve an important result: Luke has a tendency to introduce Davidic messianism into christological sections which are introductory and programmatic for his two-volume work. This suggests that this

theme plays a central role in Luke's Old Testament christology. Such a conclusion, however, raises an enigma for Luke-Acts as a whole. There is a growing trend in New Testament scholarship to regard Luke's christology—especially as presented in the Gospel—as *essentially* prophetic. Those who emphasise this aspect of Jesus' identity often regard Davidic messianism as merely traditional (and hence unimportant), or as an exaltation category which has little to do with Jesus' earthly ministry.

With this question in view, chapters 5 and 6 turn to the Gospel narrative, which at first sight appears to give little emphasis to royal-messianic themes. In the programmatic Nazareth sermon, Jesus presents himself as the prophet-herald of Isaiah 61:1-2 (58:6), anointed by the Spirit to preach good news to the poor, to bring release to captives and sight to the blind, and to announce the favourable year of the Lord. This prophetic portrait does not rule out royal-messianic categories, however. Indeed, there is remarkable thematic and verbal correspondence between the prophet-herald of Isaiah 61, the servant of the Isaianic servant songs, and the coming Davidic king of Isaiah 9 and 11. When Isaiah is read as a unity, the eschatological deliverer is at the same time Davidic king, suffering servant of Yahweh, and eschatological prophet. Luke's christological presentation closely parallels this Isaianic portrait. In the birth narrative he introduces Jesus as the coming Davidic king; he previews his public ministry with the 'new exodus' announcement of Isaiah 40:3-5 (Lk. 3:4-6); and he defines the ministry in terms of the herald of Isaiah 61:1-2 (Lk. 4:18-21). Allusions to Isaiah, particularly the servant songs, permeate Luke's narrative, and in Luke 22:37 and Acts 8:32-3 Jesus is explicitly identified with the suffering 'servant' of Isaiah 53. For Luke the Christ is at the same time messianic king, prophet (like Moses), and suffering servant of Yahweh. This christological synthesis also explains why Luke sets the Nazareth sermon—which identifies Jesus as a *prophet*—in the context of the inauguration of a royal-messianic ministry. The messiah (like David and Moses before him) is both prophet and king. He is not only the herald of salvation but also its executor, announcing *and* bringing to fulfilment the eschatological 'year' of God's favour.

In chapter 6 Jesus' Jerusalem dénouement is examined in more detail. Luke's transfiguration account, which contains royal-messianic, servant, and Moses/Sinai imagery, serves as a preview of Jesus' 'exodus' in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). While some have claimed that the Lukan travel narrative is a Christian midrash on the book of Deuteronomy, and that Jesus is depicted throughout as the prophet like Moses leading a new exodus, the present work argues that the *primary* Old Testament model for Luke's exodus motif is not the first exodus, but the eschatological *new* exodus predicted in Isaiah and the prophets. This not only fits well with Luke's eschatological perspective and his particular interest in Isaiah, but is also in line with his distinctive prophet-servant-king christology. In both Luke and Isaiah the eschatological deliverer may be viewed as the Davidic king who (like Moses) leads an eschatological new exodus of God's people through suffering as the servant of Yahweh.

In chapter 7 the results of the work are summarised and implications are drawn for Lukan purpose and theology (christology, ecclesiology and eschatology). Suggestions are made for further research.