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The Doctrine of Progressive Dispensationalism By Todd Baker, Th.M.

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“We have received requests to define Progressive Dispensationalism, the doctrine we have criticized at such well-respected seminaries as Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. Our staff theologian, Todd Baker, has expertly discussed the flaw in that doctrine in **[the following article]**. Todd has noted that the Progressive Dispensationalists purposely confuse the throne of God in heaven with the throne of David. God’s throne in heaven is obviously not an earthly place. We see it in Revelation, and it is spoken of elsewhere in Scripture. David’s throne was certainly earthly and will be in the Kingdom to come. By saying they are the same throne, the Progressive Dispensationalists effectively cut Israel out of the prophetic picture and accelerate a Kingdom event—Jesus literally sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem—to the present day.

According to the Progressive Dispensationalists, Jesus is now sitting on the throne of David in heaven, and we are enjoying the beginning of the Kingdom at this point. It doesn’t take a deep theologian to see the flaw in this reasoning.

While the following article clarifies all of those issues with the relevant Scriptures, I am concerned mainly with the effort, however unconscious, to shut out Israel and the Chosen People from the Kingdom to come. This is a completely wasted exercise on the part of those who are, to say it kindly, not particularly preferential to those whom God loves, the Jews. For Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Seminary, and any number of other fine Bible schools who formerly supported Israel and praised the Chosen People to have turned to an error of this magnitude is shocking. The logical end of this doctrine, out-and-out Replacement Theology, would be the complete dispossession of those whom God chose and the Land He promised from Christian thinking. This simply must not happen.” — Zola

[Today there is a growing movement within dispensational theology that is gaining influence among some leading dispensational seminaries and churches across the land. It is called “Progressive Dispensationalism.” Traditional dispensationalism has always maintained a clear distinction between Israel and the Church, and that the Messianic Kingdom, of which the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:8–16; Ps. 89) is a main feature, still is a future earthly event that will occur when Christ returns to Jerusalem to reign over the earth for 1,000 years (Rev. 19:11 – 20:1–6).

However, proponents of Progressive Dispensationalism have changed some of this with their interpretation of Acts 2 (particularly verses 30–36). They teach from Acts 2:30 that the throne of God in heaven where Jesus now sits is the throne of David. Hence, Jesus is currently reigning from David’s throne in heaven, and the Messianic Kingdom is now inaugurated and is beginning

to be fulfilled! What was once clearly a future event is now, somehow, a present reality. This is a disturbing departure from a normal literal understanding of Bible prophecy that views the Throne of David as an earthly throne Christ will sit on and reign from Jerusalem when He returns (Is. 2:1–5; Ezk. 43:1–7).

To believe this is now being “progressively” fulfilled blurs the distinction between Israel and the Church and minimizes the prophetic importance and position of modern-day Israel. The context of Acts 2 does not teach that Jesus is now reigning on the throne of David. Rather, the main point of Peter’s sermon is that God has demonstrated the man Jesus, who was crucified by the Jewish leaders, to be “both Lord and Christ” by the following three events in Acts 2: (1) By the resurrection v. 31; (2) By the exaltation at God’s right hand v. 33; (3) By sending the Holy Spirit of promise v. 33. The gist of Acts 2:30–36 is Christ’s resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of God on the heavenly throne that guarantees His future reign on the earthly Davidic thrones as David’s Lord and greater descendant.

Nowhere in Acts or, for that matter, in the entire Bible does one find the earthly throne of David and the heavenly throne of God explicitly identified as ever being the same.

They are always distinct and different in Scripture. In the book of Acts, it is even more evident that Christ is not presently reigning on the throne of David as Progressive Dispensationalism claims. Luke opens Acts with Christ’s post-resurrection ministry to the disciples for forty days. During that time, Jesus spoke to them “of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Surely, in all that time, if Jesus were to shortly reign on the throne of David in heaven, He would have plainly told them of this important change and transference of David’s throne from earth to heaven when they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Christ did not reply, “You are mistaken about this Jewish misconception of an earthly throne and Kingdom in Israel. The throne of David has been transferred to the throne of God in heaven where I will ascend and shortly reign from.”

Instead, Jesus told the disciples that God the Father has appointed the time and season in the future when the Davidic Kingdom will be established in Israel (Acts 1:7). In the meantime, they were to go out and preach the Gospel in all the world, starting in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). The Davidic rule and Kingdom did not begin when the Lord ascended to heaven, or He would have obviously told them so when questioned about the time and season for the establishment of the Kingdom in Israel. If Jesus is currently reigning on David’s throne in heaven, then Acts 15:16–18 contradicts this novel idea of Progressive Dispensationalism. The passage in Acts 15 deals with the issue of Gentile salvation and whether or not Gentiles must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law to become Christians. James answers for the group at the Jerusalem Council by saying the calling out of Gentile believers is in keeping with the future promise of a Davidic Kingdom in Israel. Once the present age ends after the taking out of a Gentile body of believers “for His name” (a distinct characteristic and divine work of the present age), Christ will return to rebuild and restore “the tabernacle of David.” The phrase “Tabernacle of David” is a descriptive synonym of the Davidic throne and earthly Kingdom that has long been in ruins (Acts 15:16). It still remains this way during the present age and awaits the final restoration at the return of

Christ to earth. If Christ were reigning on the throne of David in heaven at this time, why then did James say the Davidic monarchy was still in ruins? The only reasonable and clear answer is that Jesus has yet to return to earth to repair and rebuild it when He comes to reign on an earthly throne of David in Jerusalem, not heaven.

Clearly, in the book of Acts, the Jewish disciples, along with the Jewish Church of Jerusalem, were looking forward to a future, earthly, literal Davidic Messianic Kingdom in Israel to be ruled over by the Messiah Jesus. It was not spiritualized and transferred to heaven where Christ presently is, contrary to the belief of Progressive Dispensationalism. Carried to its logical conclusion, Progressive Dispensationalism could lead to saying the Church is Israel followed by a denial of the Jewish people's status as God's Chosen People and the vital role Israel will play in the future Davidic Kingdom to come. Christ is King over the created universe and His Church. He will be an earthly King over a redeemed Israel as their Davidic ruler on David's earthly throne when He returns to earth. Therefore, ...

Christ's rule from the throne of David totally awaits a future fulfillment currently not realized now.]