

PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM & CESSATIONISM:
WHY THEY ARE INCOMPATIBLE

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The Need and Purpose of the Study

“Like every true science, Systematic Theology is interdependent and interrelated in all its parts.”¹ While this observation by Chafer was intended to convey the necessity of an “unabridged” theology,² the truth of this statement is not limited to this topic alone. Since Systematic Theology does not utilize “individual texts in isolation from one another,” but instead attempts to “coalesce the varied teachings into some type of harmonious or coherent whole,”³ one must not view individual doctrines as complete in and of themselves, but rather understand them as part of a network or web of related truths. Therefore, one should expect that when one strand of the web is pulled, there will be movement throughout the rest of the web as well.

Understanding the far-reaching consequences of any new doctrinal formulation is usually a process that takes some time. Only rarely are all the ramifications of a doctrinal revision

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Prolegomena” in *Systematic Theology*, vol. one (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947–48; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 11.

² “The astronomer or chemist would not attempt to organize his materials or to reach dependable conclusions with a third of the elements or facts pertaining to his science unaccounted for. Nor should the theologian expect to reach any true estimation of his various doctrines when vast fields of the divine revelation have been eliminated from his consideration. Theologians, more than any other scientists, are apt to be bound by tradition or mere sectarian prejudice. The field of investigation is no less than the entire Bible, which field extends beyond the boundaries of creeds and that limited body of truth which was recovered in the Reformation. Published systems of theology too often omit the dispensational program of God; the Pauline revelation concerning the Church which is Christ’s body; the entire field of life truth; Angelology with satanology and demonology; prophecy, which occupies more than one-fifth of the text of the Scriptures; typology; and the present ministry of Christ in heaven. Considering the interdependent and interrelated character of theological doctrine, the theologian, having eliminated all or any part of this great field of revelation, cannot hope to hold truth in its right perspective or to give to it its right emphasis. The aim of every theologian should be to hold the entire divine revelation in a true balance of all its parts and free from fads and inaccuracies.” Ibid., 11-12.

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, unabridged one vol. edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 21.

understood early on. This seems to be true in the modification to dispensationalism that appeared in 1986, which is commonly referred to as progressive dispensationalism. While much ink has been devoted to the implications of progressive dispensationalism in the area of hermeneutics,⁴ considerably less attention has been given to the effects of progressive dispensationalism on pneumatology,⁵ particularly as it relates to miraculous gifts and the modern “signs and wonders” movement. Yet, as it has been noted above, the interrelationships that exist between various doctrines makes such an examination prudent.

This paper, therefore, will examine the relationship between progressive dispensationalism, the Davidic Covenant, and the signs of the kingdom. This paper will attempt to show that *the progressive dispensationalist’s assertion that the Davidic Covenant has been inaugurated logically leads to an abandonment of the cessationist position of miraculous signs in the present*

⁴ See Bruce A. Baker “Complementary Hermeneutics And The Early Church” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 7 (Spring 2003); Baker, “Luke’s Use of the Old Testament: An Examination of Attributed Citations,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 7 (August 2003); Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (September 2001); Darrell L. Bock, “Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment” *Trinity Journal* 15 (Spring 1994); Bock, “Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Parts I & II” in *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Roy B. Zuck, gen. ed., (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996); Bock, “Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, Herbert W. Bateman IV ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999); Bock, “Interpreting the Bible” in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-To-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton: BridgePoint, 1993); Bock, “The Son of David and the Saints’ Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 600 (Oct-Dec 1993); Mal Couch, “Progressive Dispensationalism: What Really Is It?” *Conservative Theological Journal* 9 (August 1999); Ronald N. Glass, “The Parables of the Kingdom: A Paradigm for Consistent Dispensational Hermeneutics” *Michigan Theological Journal* 5 (Spring/Fall 1994); Elliott E. Johnson, “A Traditional Dispensational Hermeneutic” in *Three Central Issues*; Mike Stallard, “Literal Interpretation, Theological Method, and the Essence of Dispensationalism” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 1 (Spring, 1997); Robert L. Thomas, “The Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 6 (Spring 1995);

⁵ One notable exception is Larry D. Pettegrew, “Dispensationalists and Spirit Baptism,” *Masters Seminary Journal* 8 (Spring 1997).

*age as well.*⁶ In other words, if the Davidic Covenant has been inaugurated, there must be some sort of inauguration of its blessings as well. If there are no blessings promised by the Davidic Covenant active in the present age, then the covenant cannot be considered “already, but not yet.”

The Davidic Covenant

Stipulations of the Davidic Covenant

There are two primary passages that detail the stipulations of the Davidic Covenant: 2 Samuel 7:11–14 and 1 Chronicles 17:10–15. While it is true that the promises given to David are not called a covenant in either passage, these promises are declared a covenant in other places.⁷ Relying on these two passages alone, Fruchtenbaum sees seven promises in this covenant.

First, David was promised an eternal house, or dynasty (2 Sam. 7:11, 16; 1 Chron. 17:10). Second, one of David’s own sons, specifically Solomon, was to be established on the throne after David (2 Sam. 7:12). Third, Solomon would build the temple (2 Sam. 7:13). Fourth, the throne of David’s and Solomon’s kingdom was to be established forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 16). It was not Solomon himself who was promised to be established forever, but rather the throne upon which he would sit. Fifth, Solomon would be disciplined for disobedience, but God would not remove His lovingkindness from him (2 Sam. 7:14–15). God did remove Saul, but Saul was not under an unconditional covenant, as was Solomon. Sixth, the Messiah will come from the seed of David (1 Chron. 17:11). Seventh, the

⁶ For the purposes of this investigation, the term cessationist will be defined as the position that “argues that there are no miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit today. Gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and healing were confined to the first century, and were used at the time the apostles were establishing the churches and the New Testament was not complete.” Wayne Grudem, “Preface,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views*, Wayne A Grudem, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 10.

⁷ See 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 89:3, 28, 34, 39; 2 Chron. 13:5; 21:7; Isa. 55:3; Jer. 33:20 among others.

Messiah's throne, house, and kingdom will be established forever (1 Chron. 17:12–14).⁸ Of these seven promises, it is the promise of a house, a throne, and a kingdom that is eternal in nature. “The term *house* must refer to David's physical descendants. This meant that a line stemming from David would continue indefinitely and would be the divinely recognized royal line. The term *throne* refers not so much to the material throne on which David sat as to the *right to rule*, the *authority as king* vested in him. The term *kingdom* must refer to the *political body* David would rule and over which David's descendants would successively reign.”⁹

At this point it should be noticed that all the promises directly related to the Davidic Covenant are earthly promises, that is, they deal with realities external to the individual rather than internal. This is not to say that there are not spiritual aspects to the Davidic Covenant. Far from it! Isaiah 11:1-5 describes the righteous character of the Davidic King and his rule in purely spiritual terms.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.¹⁰

⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “Davidic Covenant” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, Mal Couch gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 86.

⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton: Victor, 1990), 142.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

This being said, it should be noted that these provisions describe the character and rule of the King with regards to his government of the earth and its people, and says nothing with regards to the spiritual life of those being ruled. Therefore, if there are blessings from the inauguration of this covenant, one should expect them to be earthly and physical rather than heavenly and spiritual.¹¹

The Davidic Covenant in Relation to the New Covenant

In contrast to the Davidic Covenant, the New Covenant is introduced with a combination of physical and the spiritual blessings. Decker notes that the provisions of the New Covenant include, “the internalization of the Word of God (Jer 31:33), a personal relationship with God (31:33), a comprehensive knowledge of God (31:34), final forgiveness of sin (31:34), the continued national existence of Israel (31:35–37), Jerusalem to be rebuilt, never again to be demolished (31:38–40), restoration to the land (Ezek 36:24, 28, 33), cleansing from sin (36:25), a responsive heart guaranteed (36:26), indwelling of the Spirit (36:27), motivation and ability for obedience (36:27), personal relationship with God (36:28), material prosperity and fruitfulness of the land (36:29–30, 34–35), and a large population in the restored land (36:37–38).¹² In fact, the New Covenant is often mentioned in relation to the physical blessings of the kingdom. Ezekiel 36:24–38, for example, includes not only the promise of a new heart and the regathering

¹¹ This statement should not be taken to infer that there is a dichotomy between earthly and spiritual, nor is there one between the ideas of physical and heavenly. This author recognizes that there are physical realities that currently exist in heaven (our resurrected Lord in his physical body for example), and that there are spiritual realities that are present here on earth, such as the indwelling of each believer by the Holy Spirit.

¹² Rodney J. Decker, “The Church’s Relationship with the New Covenant” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (Jul-Sep 1995), 294.

of Israel, but also of abundant harvests, the refortification of the cities and an increase in the general population.

Understanding the relationship between the covenants is vital at this point, for while many of the promised spiritual blessings are new,¹³ most of the physical promises can be traced back to previous covenants. The restoration of the land as promised in Ezekiel 36, for example, can be seen as a recapitulation of the Land Covenant promises of Deuteronomy 30:1–4.¹⁴ Therefore, just as theological dogmas do not exist in isolation to each other, one must realize that the biblical covenants are not isolated from one another either. As Grisanti explains:

Every student of the Bible must realize that the various biblical covenants revealed in the OT are interconnected. One must not keep the promises they contain separate from each other as mutually exclusive sets of covenant provisions (like distinct post office boxes). Rather, throughout the OT God is weaving a beautiful covenant tapestry, weaving each new covenant into the fabric of the former covenants. ... The recognition of continuity or sameness and discontinuity or differences in God's revelation of the biblical covenants must accompany belief in progressive revelation. As God reveals His will for mankind and Israel in particular, He repeats certain features already presented and introduces other brand-new elements. Students of God's Word must take great care not to ignore either side of that coin.¹⁵

¹³ Many are new but not all. Compare, for example, the promise of a responsive heart with the promise of Deut. 30:6—“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.” Although the spiritual promises are new in that they are not connected with any other covenant, they are not new in that God had promised them before.

¹⁴ While Progressives spend a great deal of ink on the alleged linkage between the Davidic and New Covenants (i.e. that the sending of the Holy Spirit as promised in the New Covenant is actually a regal function of the Davidic Covenant), they are conspicuously silent on the implications of these covenants upon the Land Covenant. If the covenants are indeed inextricably linked together, then one must wonder why the Land Covenant seems to be exempt from their “already, not yet” system. This inconsistency is one that should be addressed both by Progressive and Traditional Dispensationalists.

¹⁵ Michael A. Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant” *Masters Seminary Journal* 10 (Fall 1999), 245.

This blending of the various covenants makes discovery of which covenant is being referred to in a particular text difficult at times. This is especially true when one considers that the complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants will all occur at the same time. Thus, when the future is spoken of, particularly in the prophets, it is not at all unusual to find elements from each of the covenants being mentioned together. This fact, however, does not justify confusing the covenants so that in essence their number is diminished. God revealed each of these covenants as distinct covenants with differing parties for a reason. To compress them into one overarching idea over emphasizes the sameness while ignoring the differences.

It is important to note that while it is possible to see in the later covenants aspects of the earlier covenants—“weaving each new covenant into the fabric of the former covenants”—it is not possible to read the later covenants into the earlier ones. Thus, while it is possible to see aspects of the Davidic Covenant in the New Covenant, one should not read stipulations of the New Covenant into the Davidic Covenant. This is really the heart of progressive revelation.

Kaiser calls this approach the “analogy of antecedent Scripture.”¹⁶ He asserts that one must “carefully restrict the process [of exegesis] to (1) examination of explicit affirmations found in the text being exegeted and (2) comparisons with similar (sometimes rudimentary) affirmations found in passages that have *preceded* in time the passage under study. Thus the *hermeneutical* or *exegetical* use of the analogy of faith...must be carefully controlled diachronically.”¹⁷ In practical

¹⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 136.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

terms this means that in certain texts that were written subsequent to the proclamation of the New Covenant, one can see the promises of the Davidic and New Covenants mingled together so that it can become difficult to distinguish which covenant is in view. This being said, one should never read into texts discussing the Davidic Covenant that were written prior to the proclamation of the New Covenant, aspects of that later covenant. As a result, using the “analogy of antecedent Scripture,” it is possible to see which of the physical blessings (so often mentioned in texts discussing the New Covenant) are actually associated with the Davidic Covenant.

The first mention of the New Covenant is in Jeremiah 31.¹⁸ According to conservative estimates, the prophet Jeremiah ministered between the years 627–586 BC. The prophet Isaiah ministered between 758–698 BC, a difference of at least 70 years.¹⁹ Since the book of Isaiah was completed before the announcement of the New Covenant, one must conclude that any covenantal blessings associated with the kingdom mentioned in Isaiah are associated with the Davidic Covenant. Any subsequent mention of these blessings in passages regarding the New Covenant are a result of “weaving the fabric of the covenants together.” Even so, as the Davidic and New Covenants are separate Covenants, one must not confuse the blessings associated with each. As Grisanti notes, “The connections between these two covenants are limited in scope

¹⁸ Some may argue with this contention by citing Joel 2:28–32, which many conservative scholars contend predates Isaiah. While this passage undoubtedly speaks of New Covenant blessings, nowhere does Joel associate these blessings with any specific covenant. This is merely a prophetic passage that describes what will happen after the Lord brings Israel back into the land of blessing. The actual announcement of the New Covenant is only found much later in Jeremiah.

¹⁹ W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption, Three Volumes in One*, vol 1, *The Prologue and Act I of The Drama: Embracing the Old Testament* (n.p.: Pickering and Inglis, 1953; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 493.

since the Davidic Covenant focuses on regal issues and the New Covenant concerns redemptive issues.”²⁰ And yet it is this linking of the regal and redemptive issues that is at the heart of Progressive Dispensationalism.

Dispensational Views of the Davidic Covenant

Traditional Dispensationalism²¹

Traditional Dispensationalists have been of one voice in their assertion that Christ is not ruling from the Throne of David in the present age. Walvoord’s view is typical.

The New Testament has fifty-nine references to David. It also has many references to the present session of Christ. A search of the New Testament reveals that *there is not one reference connecting the present session of Christ with the Davidic throne*. While this argument is, of course, not conclusive, it is almost incredible that in so many references to David and in so frequent reference to the present session of Christ on the Father’s throne there should be not one reference connecting the two in any authoritative way. The New Testament is totally lacking in positive teaching that the throne of the Father in heaven is to be identified with the Davidic throne. The inference is plain that Christ is seated on the Fathers’ throne, but that this is not at all the same as being seated on the throne of David.²²

In the interest of fairness it should be noted that Walvoord does not completely rule out a partial fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant in the present age. This partial fulfillment, however,

²⁰ Grisanti, “The Davidic Covenant,” 249.

²¹ Darrell Bock divides the recent history of dispensationalism into three categories: “Scofieldian dispensationalism,” which reflects the approach of the 1909 and 1917 editions of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, “Essentialist dispensationalism,” which applies to those subscribing to the approach of later dispensationalists, particularly those who hold to Ryrie’s *sine qua non* description of the fundamental elements of dispensationalism, and “Progressive dispensationalism,” which focuses on the progress of revelation, so that each subsequent dispensation represents “progress” in the unified plan of God. (Darrell L. Bock, “The Son of David and the Saints’ Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (Oct-Dec 1993), 440 n. 1.) This author uses the term “Traditional” when describing the dispensationalism of Ryrie and his contemporaries.

²² John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 203.

is limited to the fact that “Christ is identified as the one thorough whom it will be fulfilled.”²³

In fact, Walvoord insists that this partial fulfillment of the covenant does not indicate any kind of spiritual fulfillment but “rather lays the foundation for a literal fulfillment.”²⁴

Progressive Dispensationalism

In contrast to traditional dispensationalism, one of the hallmarks of progressive dispensationalism is its insistence that Christ is partially fulfilling the Davidic Covenant in that he is ruling from the throne of David in this present age. Bock contends that

the Davidic throne and the heavenly throne of Jesus at the right hand of the Father are one and the same, but there are two stages to the rule of that throne, so that the earthly, national character of OT promises is maintained, even though their scope is broadened in the NT to include universal, salvific blessings bestowed by the messianic king through the Holy Spirit.²⁵

The equation of the Father’s throne with the Davidic throne is in direct contrast to the traditional view as articulated by Walvoord.

At first blush, the progressive’s view of the kingdom appears to be more in line with amillennialism instead of dispensationalism in that Christ occupies the throne now and that the nature of that throne is heavenly rather than earthly. Amillennialists contend that Christ is ruling from the throne of David now in a spiritual sense. The kingdom had a historical component to it when the promised descendant of David was born, but the promised kingdom is, in reality, a

²³ Ibid., 202.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, “Evidence from Acts” in *The Coming Millennial Kingdom: A Case for Premillennial Interpretation*, Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 194.

spiritual one—namely the church—over which Christ rules as King. The future earthly kingdom is then seen to be the “the final and glorious consummation of the kingdom of God.”²⁶ But in actuality, progressives do not see the present reigning of Christ from David’s throne as anything but literal and physical.

Progressive dispensationalists do not believe that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants are being fulfilled today “in a spiritual sense.” The spiritual blessings being given today are blessings actually predicted by the new covenant. These blessings are given in a partial and inaugurated form, which looks forward to complete fulfillment at the return of Christ. . . . The present inauguration and future fullness of new covenant fulfillment reveals another aspect in which the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are being fulfilled today. All of these covenants will be fulfilled in a future dispensation consistent with the historical-grammatical sense of their promises. However, the progressive nature of the dispensations and the interconnection between the covenants is such that present blessings are a *partial*, not “allegorical,” fulfillment of those promises. They look forward to complete fulfillment at the return of Christ.”²⁷

²⁶ This view is more fully expressed as follows: “The kingdom of God is that moral and spiritual kingdom which the God of grace is setting up in this fallen world, whose subjects consist of as many as have been brought into hearty subjection to His gracious scepter, and of which His Son Jesus is the glorious Head. In the inward reality of it, this kingdom existed ever since there were men who “walked with God” (Genesis v. 24), and “waited for His salvation” (Genesis xlix. 18); who were “continually with Him, holden by His right hand” (Psalms lxxiii. 23), and who, even in the valley of the shadow of death, feared no evil when He was with them (Psalms xxiii. 4). When Messiah Himself appeared, it was, as a visible kingdom, “at hand.” His death laid the deep foundations of it — His ascension on high, “leading captivity captive and receiving gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them,” and the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit, by which those gifts for men descended upon the rebellious, and the Lord God was beheld, in the persons of thousands upon thousands, “dwelling” among men — was a glorious “coming” of this kingdom. But it is still to come, and this petition, “Thy kingdom come,” must not cease to ascend so long as one subject of it remains to be brought in. But does not this prayer stretch further forward — to “the glory to be revealed,” or that stage of the kingdom called “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter i. 11)? Not directly, perhaps, since the petition that follows this — “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” — would then bring us back to this present state of imperfection. Still, the mind refuses to be so bounded by stages and degrees, and in the act of praying, “Thy kingdom come,” it irresistibly stretches the wings of its faith, and longing, and joyous expectation out to the final and glorious consummation of the kingdom of God.” Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset And David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments: American Edition with a Biographical Sketch of the Authors by Dr. Wilbur M. Smith*, vol. 5, *Matthew—John*, by David Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 40.

In other words, progressives maintain the physical reality of David's throne in heaven right now as well as the literal earthly throne of David in the Millennial Kingdom that is yet to come. The present form of the kingdom is, therefore, a partial physical fulfillment of the literal kingdom that is still future. According to progressives, the promises of the Old Testament are currently being fulfilled, not in an allegorical way, but in a partial yet nevertheless historical and grammatical way. What the church experiences now is a "sneak preview"²⁸ of the kingdom.

The kingdom is invisible in the sense that he does not rule over every person directly, but in those who share in the benefits he offers, especially in the provision of the Spirit... Jesus rules from heaven, not earth, and thus the kingdom is invisible only in the sense that the rule does not originate visibly from earth... Thus there is continuity with the future kingdom in the present kingdom, though there is a distinction in the visibility of the King in the two phases of the reign and in the fact that the current kingdom lacks political, nationalistic elements."²⁹

In other words, the kingdom should be viewed as similar in substance with the future Millennial Kingdom, minus the elements of universal rule and a visible political structure.

As has been noted earlier, there is no direct evidence of this from any New Testament passage. The best exegetical evidence presented is an abundance of allusions. By this author's count Bock uses some form of the word "allusion" 16 times in 9 pages in his discussion of Acts 2, not counting his copious use of synonyms such as link, connection, imagery, comparison

²⁷ Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism" in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-To-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought*, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Wheaton: BridgePoint, 1993) 53.

²⁸ Bock, "The Reign of the Lord Christ," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 53.

²⁹ Ibid.

and so forth.³⁰ Despite the nature of the evidence, Bock still manages to state that the connection to Christ's current reign from David's throne in Acts 2 is "clear."³¹

Yet the theological argument is relatively straightforward. Bock contends that since Jesus is the promised king of the Davidic Covenant and also the mediator of the New Covenant, these two covenants are so linked that the salvific blessings of the New Covenant indicate the inauguration of the Davidic Covenant as well. Indeed, Bock maintains that "what begins with the Spirit's outpouring leads eventually into the rule and judgment that is tied to the Day of the Lord. The period is a package, and the program of fulfillment has begun."³² This is why when people respond to the gospel, "they enter into the new community, which is the realm where Jesus' active, current rule is most manifest in the mediation and powerful work of the Spirit."³³ Ryrie's summary of this point is helpful.

"Progressives view the new covenant (like the Davidic covenant) as already inaugurated by Christ, who is dispensing certain of its blessings in this age, even though its provisions will not yet be fully realized until the Millennium. Furthermore, the new covenant will be mediated by the Davidic King, since the new covenant is the form in which the Abrahamic covenant blessing will be fulfilled. Exactly how this can be established is unclear, though what it intends to establish seems to be an attempt to interrelate the major covenants of Israel under the supremacy of the Davidic king (and the Davidic covenant) as well as making the Abrahamic and new covenants progressively fulfilled so that the Davidic can be said to be fulfilled also. Even if the Abrahamic and/or

³⁰ "Reference is often made, not through the identification of a single term or by naming a specific covenant, but through clear allusions to features of the covenants in question. Through allusion, Luke indicates either fulfillment or anticipation of fulfillment. By this clever association of concepts, Luke presents Jesus as the fulfillment of promises and covenants made to Israel." *Ibid.*, 37–38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 47–55.

³² *Ibid.*, 48.

³³ *Ibid.*, 54.

the new covenant has been inaugurated, that does not prove that the Davidic has been.”³⁴

Implications of an Inaugurated Davidic Covenant

One of the major weaknesses in this position has received comparatively little attention. Exactly when did the rule of Christ on David’s throne begin? It is at this point that Bock demurs, “The Gospels and Acts are not clear on this point.”³⁵

It would seem, if indeed the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant are so closely linked, that the inauguration of the Davidic Covenant would begin either at the cross or at Pentecost. In fact, Bock argues that “the benefits that are really tied to the kingdom and to Old Testament promise do not come until the Spirit is bestowed after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 2). In the Spirit comes the real inauguration of new-covenant blessings that display regal authority.”³⁶ Yet this solution leaves a question begging to be asked: “What is one to make of the signs of the kingdom in the Gospels?” Bock agrees that “certain passages such as Luke 11:20 declare its presence in the power that comes with the healings performed by Jesus and his disciples.”³⁷ If this is so, then why have these signs of the kingdom ceased, or have they? It seems reasonable to expect the signs of the kingdom that occurred prior to its actual inauguration to continue once the kingdom has actually begun.

³⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 170.

³⁵ Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Ryrie suggests that this is a significant issue that has been slighted or omitted in the system of progressive dispensationalism.³⁸

Noncharismatic progressive dispensationalists have not faced the question as to why signs and wonders are not characteristic of the church age if in fact Christ is already on David's throne. During our Lord's earthly life many signs validated His claim to be the promised Davidic king for Israel. Now that He is allegedly reigning as Davidic king (according to progressives), why are there not miraculous signs happening today in the 'already' stage of His Davidic reign?³⁹

This question has not been confined to proponents of Dispensationalism. Douglas Moo has addressed this issue as well within the context of the "health and wealth gospel." He reduces the question to a simple syllogism: where the kingdom of God is present, the healing of disease is present; the kingdom of God is present in this age; therefore the healing of diseases is present in this age.⁴⁰ Moo's evaluation of this syllogism is insightful.

To be sure, one could quarrel with either of the premises. The second, for instance, is denied by advocates of the "postponed kingdom" theory: that Jesus offered the kingdom to the Jews, only to have it rejected, and so "postponed" until his second coming. On this view, held by many dispensationalists, we should not necessarily expect divine healing in our day because the kingdom is not, in fact, present. But this view of the kingdom appears to be losing ground; and a pretty good consensus of evangelicals from various theological persuasions hold to some form of "inaugurated" eschatology, whereby it is held that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated through Jesus' first coming, but will be "climaxed" or fulfilled only at this second. On this view, the kingdom is indeed present in our day, and we should expect to see signs of that kingdom.⁴¹

³⁸ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 176.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 177

⁴⁰ Douglas Moo, "Divine Healing In the Health And Wealth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 9 (Fall 1988), 195.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

While one can not help but be disappointed by Moo's rejection of the traditional dispensationalist position merely as a result of a show of hands, his insistence that the premises of this syllogism be examined is wise. Progressive Dispensationalists will be unable to reject the second premise by definition. Therefore, if they are to hold to a cessationist view of miraculous healings and signs, they must reject the first premise. But is this possible? A close examination of the biblical data is required.

Signs of the Kingdom

The Signs

Any study of the signs of the kingdom cannot be limited to merely a computer search on the appropriate words. "Terms are not the only key to biblical themes. For example, more is required for a study of the kingdom than simply picking up a concordance and looking up *basilei÷a* (kingdom) and its related verbal forms. Likewise, a study of the covenants requires more than an examination of passages containing the term *diagh/kh* (covenant), and a study of promise involves more than the texts where *ejpaggeli/a* (promise) occurs. A thorough treatment of any theme requires a look at associated concepts as well as individual terms."⁴²

Among such passages where the concept of the signs of the kingdom occurs is Matthew 11:1–6 along with its parallel account in Luke 7:18–23, and Matthew 12:28 and its parallel account in Luke 11:20.

Matthew 11:1–6

Matthew 11:1 begins a new section in the book⁴³ by stating that Jesus “went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.” While the immediate context does not indicate the exact content of Jesus’ teaching and preaching, the larger context proves helpful. In each of the four previous instances of Jesus preaching as recorded by Matthew, the subject was the “kingdom of heaven” (4:17) or the “good news of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35). When Jesus sent out the twelve to the “lost sheep of Israel,” he also commanded them to “preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’” (10:7). It seems best then, in keeping with the larger context, to assume that Jesus is preaching about the kingdom here as well.

It is also evident from the text that Jesus was doing some sort of work that was being spread abroad since John the Baptist hears in prison about “what Christ was doing” (11:2). Once again Matthew speaks in only general terms, but the larger context suggests that it was the healings and exorcisms that caught John’s attention. The parallel account in Luke 7 confirms this. Immediately prior to the statement “John’s disciples told him about all these things,” (7:18) are the accounts of the healing of the centurion’s servant and the raising of the widow’s son at

⁴² Bock, Darrell L., “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” 37.

⁴³ While there is some disagreement on the subject, this author subscribes to five divisions in the book marked off by the phrase “kai« e’ge÷neto o¢te e’te÷lesen oJ Δ Ihsouvß” (usually translated “after Jesus had finished saying these things” with only minor variations) in 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1. See R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 59–62.

Nain. “All these things” in Luke’s context must refer to the healings just reported, and to the supernatural events typical of Jesus’ ministry in Matthew.

Therefore, one must conclude that the context for the question is Jesus’ preaching concerning the kingdom and supernatural works that accompanied that preaching. Appreciation of this context is vital to understanding both the question and, more importantly, the answer.

Hearing of these events while in prison, John was facing something of a dilemma. The church father Theodore of Mopsuestia⁴⁴ comments,

John had already said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ He already knew very well that the Messiah would offer his suffering up to God for the sake of all humanity. Certainly, if John indeed knew that Jesus was the Christ, he was not ignorant of the Christ. On the contrary, he knew exactly what benefits were to come to humanity through him.⁴⁵

But if Jesus really was the Christ, why was John languishing in prison? Undoubtedly his mind raced back to the first Servant Song⁴⁶ in Isaiah’s prophecy where he stated that the Christ would “free captives from prison” and “release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (Isa. 42:7). Evidently John was unsure as to how to reconcile what he knew to be true of the kingdom with what he knew to be true of Jesus.

⁴⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia was one of the brightest lights of the Antiochian school of theology. Of this school, “Theodore was the exegete, Chrysostom the homilist, Theodoret the annotator.” Philip Schaff, “Prolegomena: The Life and Work of St. John Chrysostom” in *Chrysostom: On the Priesthood, Ascetic Treatises, Select Homilies and Letter, Homilies on the Statues*, vol 9. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (United States: Christian Literature, 1889; reprint, United States: Hendrickson, 1999), 18.

⁴⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia *Fragment 57* (Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 1a, *Matthew 1–13*, Thomas C. Oden, gen. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001] 217).

⁴⁶ “The first seven verses of chapter 42 comprise the first Servant Song and present aspects of the ministry of the Messiah.” Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1985) 47.

The entire event in Matthew is reported in such a way that it is clear that the question concerns the Messianic claims of Jesus. Toussaint observes, “That the question concerned Messiahship is shown by several factors. The mention of the works of *touv Cristouv* (not of Jesus) brings the subject to the readers mind. In fact, this is the only place in Matthew where *Cristo/β* standing alone is used of Jesus. In addition *oJ e`rco/menoβ* is used of the Messiah (Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; 19:38; Hebrews 10:37). Finally, the use of *e^oteron* in contrast to *oJ e`rco/menoβ* points to the Messianic implications of the question.”⁴⁷

Not only is the question reported in such a way as to show its Messianic implications, the answer that Jesus provides is also rich with Messianic connotations, even though the question is not answered directly.⁴⁸ Instead, Jesus responds with a litany of signs that harkens back to Isaiah’s prophecies of the kingdom.⁴⁹ Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matt. 11:4–50).

It is worthy of note that Jesus responds with a recitation of some of the promises directly associated with the Davidic Covenant. As McClain observes, “of the six items mentioned here,

⁴⁷ Stanley D. Toussaint, “The Argument of Matthew” (Ph.D diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1957), 173.

⁴⁸ “This answer is typical of Jesus: strongly suggestive yet reticent, decisive in substance yet not direct as far as the form of the question is concerned.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 427.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 29:18; 33:24; 35:5–6; and 61:1.

five are concerned with what is purely *physical*. Only one can be regarded as *spiritual*, the preaching of the gospel, and even this has a *social* aspect—the “poor” are to hear it.”⁵⁰ Bock takes special notice of this last item, stating,

The list’s significance is that every activity is a healing of some kind, except the last item about preaching good news to the poor. The phrase ptwcoi« eujaggeli÷zontai... stands out, not only because it comes last and so functions climactically, but also because of its distinct character.... Jesus tells John the same thing that he has proclaimed publicly. The miracles depict the arrival of a special time. Blessing is not only individual; it points to a special time period.... These events show the presence of the eschaton (Isa. 35:5–6 is a picture of paradise, when God’s rule is fully manifested...) for that is the period to which all these Isaianic passages allude.⁵¹

Since the eschaton is the time when God’s rule is fully manifested, Bock’s usage of it here seems to be synonymous with the concept of “kingdom.” Thus, to state it another way, the signs of the kingdom were there because the kingdom was there. McClain asserts that “In his own teaching, Christ and the kingdom which he proclaimed were inseparably connected. The kingdom was ‘at hand’ because the King was present.”⁵²

Yet it seems important to note that, not only was the kingdom not universal, not all of the signs of the kingdom were present. In fact, the liberation of the captives was not taking place. This seems to be the point of Jesus’ statement, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me” (Matt. 11:6). This required a significant amount of faith on the part of John the Baptist, his disciples, and those standing near who heard this exchange. Since there were some of the signs of the kingdom, but not all, one had to conclude that the kingdom was not there in

⁵⁰ Alva J. McClain, “The Greatness of the Kingdom: Part III” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112 (Jul–Sep 1955), 213 n 6.

⁵¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, 1:1–9:50 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 668.

⁵² McClain, “The Greatness of the Kingdom,” 215.

completeness. In fact, this period of time appears to be a “sneak peak” (to borrow Bock’s phrase) of the promised kingdom. Thus Jesus seems to be telling John to trust the signs of the kingdom that were there, knowing that if some of the signs were present, he was indeed the “Coming One” and eventually the kingdom with all of its promises would be brought to completion.

What is important for the purposes of this study is that when Jesus was asked about his Messianic office, he responded by drawing attention to his supernatural healings and the beginnings of social justice (the good news being preached to the poor), both of which are promises of the Davidic Covenant as predicted by Isaiah.

Matthew 12:28

The context of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 12:28 once again concerns the kingdom. Jesus has just healed a demonized man who was both blind and mute and the reaction of the people sets up this exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. Evidently the people were in a state of amazement at this miracle but had not been moved to genuine faith since they begin their question with *mh/ti* indicating that they expected a negative answer. Thus the question of 12:23 could be translated, “He couldn’t be the Messiah, could he?” Louw and Nida point out that “this form of the question would have avoided an overt commitment, while at the same time indicating people’s evident interest and concern.”⁵³

⁵³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d ed., vol. 1, *Introduction & Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), § 69.16.

Still, even in unbelief they recognized that the issue at stake was Messianic due to their use of the term “Son of David.” France notes, “It is especially noticeable that almost every use of the title in Jesus’ ministry is in direct connection with his healing power, either requested (9:27; 15:22; 20:30f) or experienced (12:22f; 21:14f). There is almost a standard formula in such cases, involving the appeal to ‘Have mercy’, and the titles ‘Son of David’ and ‘Lord’ (compare the wording of 9:27–28; 15:22, 25; 17:15; 20:30–33). Mercy and healing are apparently understood to be the proper activities of the son of David (cf. 11:2–6 where the ‘deeds of the Messiah’ similarly consist in works of healing and mercy).⁵⁴

The Pharisees, recognizing both the amazement and the wavering unbelief, attempt to drive the people further into unbelief by denigrating the miracle that they had all just witnessed. Unable to deny that a supernatural power was at work,⁵⁵ they assign this miracle to the work of demonic powers, referring to Jesus with the pejorative οὗτος — “this one.”⁵⁶

When Jesus answers the charge of the Pharisees, he does so with three lines of defense. “First, he says that the accusation of the Pharisees is untenable because it is impossible for a kingdom, a city, or even a family to exist when it is divided against itself (Matthew 12:25). Secondly, the King states in Matthew 12:27 that if other exorcists cast out demons, the Pharisees affirm that it is done by divine power. A third reply is seen in the inference the King makes

⁵⁴ R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist & Teacher*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 285.

⁵⁵ In fact, as Jesus notes in 12:27, the Jews themselves practiced exorcisms from the time of Solomon. For detailed explanations concerning their practices and beliefs on this subject see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8.5.2, and *Wars of the Jews*, 7.6.3.

⁵⁶ Louw and Nida, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon*, § 92.29.

concerning the kingdom of God (Matthew 12:28). The deduction is clear and simple. The powers which the Pharisees were beholding were clear evidences of the nearness of the kingdom. This sign was a demonstration of Messianic authority.”⁵⁷

The verb εἰσφάσκειν in 12:28 is of particular interest since its meaning is somewhat disputed.⁵⁸ Some hold that it means “come near” while others maintain that it should be translated “arrive.” Bock notes, “The difference is crucial.... Jesus is either teaching that the kingdom draws close in the present activity or that it arrives. At stake is whether an inaugural kingdom is present in Jesus’ first coming or whether *kingdom* functions as it did in the OT and inter-testamental Judaism, as an eschatological term referring exclusively to the consummation of God’s rule on earth through Israel.”⁵⁹

The standard Greek lexicon defines φαίνω as, “have just arrived, then simply arrive,

⁵⁷ Toussaint, “The Argument of Matthew,” 192.

⁵⁸ Fitzner offers an opposing view, maintaining that the distinctions in the lexical meaning of the word are of minimal importance. “For the material understanding of the statement in which φαίνω occurs depends upon theological exegesis of the concept of the kingdom of God and upon exegesis of the conditional clause, namely, upon interpretation of the connection of expelling demons with the figure of Jesus and its significance for the lordship of God. The statement also offers occasion to discuss more fully the question of the eschatological orientation of the proclamation of the divine rule in the Synoptic tradition of Jesus and the question of the so-called delay in the Parousia. At any rate, apart from the αἰῶν with its emphasis on the conclusion, the contribution that φαίνω makes semasiologically and with the aorist form to the shaping of the saying is perfectly clear.” Gottfried Fitzner, “φαίνω ktl.” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Gerhard Friedrich, vol. IX, *F-W*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 91–92.

⁵⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, 9:51–24:53 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1079.

come...come upon someone, overtake.”⁶⁰ Moulton and Milligan agree stating, “Apart from I Thess 4¹⁵, the verb in the NT has lost its sense of priority, and means simply ‘come,’ ‘arrive,’ as in Mt. 12²⁸.”⁶¹ Louw and Nida state that this word means “to attain or arrive at a particular state — ‘to come to be, to attain, to achieve.’”⁶² Based on this evidence, it seems that the most natural reading of this word would be “to arrive.”

In addition to the lexical reasons for subscribing to this reading, there are exegetical reasons as well. Toussaint notes, “The fact that the Lord uses it in a first class conditional sentence shows that He assumes the kingdom had come.”⁶³ Bock adds, “Above all considerations, however, stands the prepositional reference to ‘upon you’ (ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς, *eph’ hymas*) which because of its personal object cannot look at approach, but must refer to arrival.”⁶⁴ Therefore, Bock concludes with Toussaint that the kingdom had come. “The point is that Jesus’ activity gives evidence of the arrival of God’s kingdom....That arrival is vividly evident in his power, which his followers also exhibit.”⁶⁵ It should be noted that not only do dispensationalists like Toussaint (traditional) and Bock (progressive) subscribe to this interpretation, so do many non-

⁶⁰ William F Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, tran. William F. Arndt and F. Wilber Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. and aug. Wilber Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 856.

⁶¹ J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930; reprint, United States: Hendrickson, 1997), 667.

⁶² Louw and Nida, ed., *Greek-English Lexicon*, § 13.16.

⁶³ Toussaint, “The Argument of Matthew,” 193.

⁶⁴ Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, 1080.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

dispensationalists. Mounce, for example, writes, “It is best to take it to mean that the kingdom has arrived but not necessarily in its fullness.”⁶⁶

What is important to notice is that Jesus is once again tying his healing ministry to the presence of the promised kingdom. But it should be noticed that Jesus goes even further than this. While it is true that a blind and mute man was healed, this healing is special because it also shows Jesus’ authority over the spiritual powers of darkness through the power of the Holy Spirit. If the kingdom is present in this age, and since the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and empowered by him, one would think that this healing would have special significance for the church.

Implications of the Signs of the Kingdom

Moo’s Syllogism

As has been shown, dispensationalists (both traditional and progressive) maintain that the kingdom was present in some limited form during Jesus’ earthly ministry. It is at this point that a fresh look at Moo’s syllogism is in order: where the kingdom of God is present, the healing of disease is present; the kingdom of God is present in this age; therefore the healing of diseases is present in this age.⁶⁷ As has been pointed out above, progressive dispensationalists cannot negate the second premise by definition. Therefore they must, if they are to take a cessationist

⁶⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, New International Biblical Commentary, W. Ward Gasque, ed. (United States: Hendrickson, 1991), 118.

⁶⁷ Moo, “Divine Healing In the Health And Wealth Gospel,” 195.

viewpoint,⁶⁸ negate the first—where the kingdom of God is present, the healing of disease is present.

Regarding the signs of the kingdom, Moo discusses the same miraculous healings addressed in this paper and concludes, “Jesus’ miracles do not just prove who he is, but reveal the presence of the kingdom. Their evidential value lies not in their being pointers *to* the kingdom, but in being signs *of* the kingdom. The miracles of Jesus are not ‘external’ signs, but ‘internal’ signs, part of the reality to which they point. When the reign of God is established, Satan is vanquished, the dead are raised, illness is no more. Jesus’ exorcisms, raisings of the dead and healings give evidence that the kingdom of God is at work in his ministry”⁶⁹

This being said, Moo still hedges somewhat with his first premise: where the kingdom of God is present, the healing of diseases is present. He concludes that “the presence of the reign of God in and through the church makes miracles of healing *possible*, but not *necessary*. Biblical balance is best preserved if Christians remain open to the exercise of miraculous healings, but do not insist on them....Scripture and history suggest that God bestows miracles in sovereign freedom; and we would do well not to force the evidence one way or the other.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Interestingly, Moo assigns the “cessationist” view as the one “espoused by many dispensationalists.” *Ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 197–198. Moo states his ultimate conclusion as follows: “Other points will arise in the course of this discussion that follows; but it suffices for now to say that we find no reason to rule out the possibility of miraculous healing after the age of the apostles; and some reason to expect that such healings would continue to occur. While critical of the hermeneutical naivete by which their conclusions are reached, we agree, then, with the HWG [Health-Wealth Gospel] that miracles of divine healing can still occur. Indeed, the openness in this movement to the possibility of miraculous interventions of God may be more ‘biblical’ than the skepticism that too many of us unwittingly share with our materialistic culture. When, however, the HWG argues that the healings of Jesus or the

But does Moo go far enough? Jesus used his miracles of healing as one of the primary evidences that the kingdom had arrived. He stated that his healing was done through the power of the Holy Spirit which he promised to give to his disciples. The Holy Spirit, in turn, has given to the church the grace gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:9). When one combines this evidence with Jesus' solemn statement, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me *will do what I have been doing*. He will do *even greater things than these* because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12), it is difficult to see why miraculous gifts of healing in the church age are not only possible, but necessary. This is not to say that healings can be demanded of God, as in the "name it and claim it" theologies, nor does this imply that everyone who is sick should be healed, since neither of these conditions existed during Jesus' earthly ministry. What is being said is that gifts of healing, wrought through the power of the Holy Spirit, should be regularly active in the church if we are indeed in an inaugurated kingdom, especially if that kingdom is the same as the inaugurated kingdom that was active at the time of the Gospels.⁷¹ Not only so, but it seems reasonable to expect inaugurated blessings from the Davidic Covenant in the same way that the church experiences inaugurated blessings from the New Covenant if, in fact, both are inaugurated in the same way. It is at this point that progressive dispensationalists seem to balk.

apostolic church give reason to think that *all* Christians should be healed, they have gone far beyond the evidence." Ibid., 196.

⁷¹ It should be noted for sake of clarity that Amillennialists (who do not hold to a future earthly kingdom) do not have this problem. If the present kingdom is actually a spiritual form of the physical kingdom promised in the Old Testament, then all of its blessings can reasonably be expected to be spiritual in nature as well. It is only when one holds to an inaugurated kingdom that is a literal fulfillment of the Old Testament promises that one encounters these difficulties. A literal, physical kingdom should experience literal physical blessings, even if that kingdom is merely in an inaugurated form.

The Progressive Position

Darrell L. Bock

Remarkably, even though Bock bases his entire argument about the presence of the kingdom in the fact that Christ has sent the Holy Spirit—a “regal” function,⁷² Bock limits the benefits that both the ruling King and the Spirit give to salvific blessings.

If the kingdom has come in an initial but not consummative form, what does its current form involve? The portrait of Luke–Acts provides a good answer. . . . Jesus is perceived as ruling of God’s many salvation benefits. He has authority to distribute them to anyone who responds to his message (Luke 3:15–17 [where the Stronger One brings the Spirit, showing that he is the Messiah]; Acts 2:16–39). In addition, he provides the Spirit as a sign of the arrival of the promised age and as a source of guidance over those he rules (Luke 24:44–49; Acts 2). The emphasis of the kingdom picture in the present phase is not on realm, but rule.

Nonetheless, a realm is envisioned. Jesus’ realm is the world as it is manifested in his scattered followers and contained in his total authority over salvific blessing, an authority that is present over everyone. The presence of his rule in believers anticipates his coming to earth to rule physically, when he will exercise dominion and judgment over the earth.⁷³

It is curious that in Bock’s explanation of the current form of the kingdom (in the context of Jesus’ exorcism of the blind and mute man and his use of this healing as evidence of the presence of the kingdom), he provides no justification for the cessation of such miraculous signs, nor does he even address the issue. In fact, there is no justification given for limiting the blessings of the Davidic Covenant (or even the New Covenant for that matter) to salvific benefits alone.

Yet if one accepts that the kingdom was present in some way in the Gospels as noted by signs of the Davidic Covenant, and if one assumes that the Davidic Covenant is partially fulfilled

⁷² “In the Spirit comes the real inauguration of new-covenant blessings that display regal authority, benefits that required Jesus’ death and resurrection to be realized.” Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” 55.

⁷³ Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, 1080-1081.

(inaugurated) in the present age, then one must conclude that the same signs that testified to the presence of an inaugurated covenant should be present today. Those that would deny this must argue in one of two ways: (1) that one of the above premises is wrong, that is, that either the covenant was not inaugurated in the Gospels or that it is not inaugurated today, or (2) that the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant in the Gospels is different from the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant today.

In actual fact, progressive dispensationalists subscribe to a line of reasoning that is (surprisingly) a combination of both (1) and (2) above. Even though Bock has already stated that “Jesus’ activity gives evidence of the arrival of God’s kingdom,”⁷⁴ he contends:

The key to the answer is that it is the presence of Jesus that brings the kingdom. The Gospels picture a transition period with its display of authority (Luke 11:20). These displays show Jesus’ current authority and the presence of fulfillment. But the benefits that are really tied to the kingdom and to Old Testament promise do not come until the Spirit is bestowed after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 2). In the Spirit comes the real inauguration of new covenant blessings that display regal authority, benefits that required Jesus’ death and resurrection to be realized. The kingdom’s power and blessing are not given full to manifest the transformation and deliverance of people until after the Resurrection. The ambiguity of Luke’s gospel is the ambiguity of a program in transition, but it is a transition in continuity with God’s promise.⁷⁵

Yet this answer is fraught with problems. If it is “the presence of Jesus that brings the kingdom,” then how can the kingdom be present here on earth today? Christ is currently sitting with the Father on his throne in heaven (Rev. 3:21). Equating this throne with the Davidic

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1080.

⁷⁵ Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ” 55.

Throne⁷⁶ does not solve this problem, for if the kingdom is where the King is, then the kingdom must currently be in heaven and not inaugurated here on earth. We cannot have a “sneak peek” at the kingdom here on earth if it is in heaven with the King.

Furthermore, when one argues that the signs and wonders in the Gospels showed “Jesus’ current authority and the presence of fulfillment,”⁷⁷ then on what basis could one argue that these signs and wonders have ceased? Has the authority of the King been diminished? Bock’s statement, “the benefits that are really tied to the kingdom and to Old Testament promise do not come until the Spirit is bestowed after Jesus’ ascension,”⁷⁸ implies that the church enjoys more benefits of the kingdom than was available during Jesus’ earthly ministry. In one respect at least, this is a true statement, for Jesus said, “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). But this acknowledgement in no way suggests the lessening of the blessings of the kingdom already enjoyed during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Why should one expect the signs and wonders to cease now that the Spirit has come? If anything, it seems reasonable to expect more of such miraculous healings since the wonder-working power of the Spirit indwells every

⁷⁶ “The relationship of Christ’s throne to the Father’s in this verse has been understood in two ways. One way is to identify the two as one and the same throne. The other is to distinguish them, one in heaven belonging to the Father and the other on earth belonging to Christ as the son of David. The one throne approach is based largely on Rev. 22:1 where the same throne is said to belong to the Father and to the Lamb. The oneness of the Father and the Son and the future participation of believers in the glory of the Father and the Son (cf. John 17:22, 24) are also cited as supporting a single throne. In spite of this information, the fact remains that v. 21 distinguishes between two thrones and to merge them into one is to ignore the obvious.” Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: And Exegetical Commentary*, Kenneth Barker, gen. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 325.

⁷⁷ Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” 55.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

believer and is not localized in the person of Christ alone. What does Bock mean when he mentions those “benefits that are really tied to the kingdom?”⁷⁹ Does he actually mean to imply that the healings and exorcisms that Jesus performed were *not* benefits of the kingdom? Why then would Jesus use them as proofs that he was the Coming One? What, exactly, are the differences between the presence of the kingdom in the Gospels—the transition period—and the presence of the kingdom today—the inaugurated kingdom? Why was such a transition necessary? What exegetical evidence is there that such a change in the kingdom plan of God ever took place? The fact is that appealing to a “transition period” raises more questions than it answers.

Robert L. Saucy

In contrast to Bock, Robert Saucy has directly addressed the issue of miraculous gifts in the church age. He argues for “an open but cautious view” in the helpful volume *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*.⁸⁰ In defining an “open but cautious view” he writes, “To state my opinion up front, the New Testament does not explicitly teach the cessation of certain gifts at a particular point in the experience of the church. It is, therefore, impossible to say, on the basis of biblical teaching, that certain gifts cannot occur at any given time according to God’s sovereign purpose. On the other hand, there are several lines of evidence that demonstrate that the miraculous phenomena experienced in the early biblical church are not standard for the life of the

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Robert L. Saucy, “An Open But Cautious View” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Wayne A. Grudem, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 97–148.

church throughout all time.”⁸¹ This works out in practice that Saucy is very hesitant to accept the charismatic and “third wave” spiritual phenomenon as genuine but cannot bring himself to completely rule out the possibility of miraculous gifts since there is no explicit biblical teaching to that effect.⁸² After a thorough examination of his position, one must agree with Gaffin that “Saucy’s position, in its basic thrust, is really more ‘cautious’ and less ‘open’ than it appears.”⁸³

Saucy is able to take this position, at least in part because, in contrast to Bock, he does not see an inaugurated kingdom in the Gospels. He contends that the sign miracles “provided glimpses into the nature of God’s kingdom as manifestations of the divine power that is able to overcome the effects of sin. But the *primary purpose* of the miracles was as signs of authentication pointing to God, his messengers or spokesmen, and the message, which was the word of God.”⁸⁴ “The “sign” purpose of the miracles suggests that such miracles are not a part of the kingdom blessing available to all believers during this age. The miracles of Jesus and the disciples as signs point beyond themselves to the power of God and the nature of the kingdom (i.e., the reversal of the effects of sin). They are not a part of an already inaugurated kingdom.”⁸⁵

As has been shown, this position carries with it significant exegetical difficulties. What is one to do with Jesus’ statement, “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the

⁸¹ Ibid., 100.

⁸² What is interesting about this position is that there is no explicit biblical teaching to the effect that the kingdom has already been inaugurated, yet Saucy wholeheartedly embraces that doctrine.

⁸³ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “A Cessationist Response to Robert L. Saucy,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Wayne A. Grudem, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 151.

⁸⁴ Saucy, “An Open But Cautious View,” 106.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 118.

kingdom of God has come upon you,” (Matt. 12:28) for example? That being said, this position concerning the signs of the kingdom in the Gospels is not new.⁸⁶ What makes this position interesting is the way Saucy seemingly arrived at it.

That miraculous signs are not part of the inaugurated kingdom may be demonstrated by comparing miracles with those realities that, according to Scripture, clearly belong to the presence of the kingdom today. These kingdom realities focus on the *spiritual* blessings of the new covenant, i.e., forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit with its resultant new life. While the presence of the Spirit today is a “deposit guaranteeing” our full kingdom inheritance (Eph. 1:14), it is never said to be a “sign.” Instead the Spirit and the blessing of forgiveness *are* the presence of the kingdom itself and as such are available to anyone and everyone who receives them through faith in Christ. Only those blessings of the kingdom that are promised to *every* believer through saving faith in Christ may be said to belong to the “already” aspect of the kingdom during this age.⁸⁷

Saucy’s argument can really be broken down into two syllogisms: (1) miraculous signs are not a part of the spiritual blessings of the church; the spiritual blessings of the church are due to the inauguration of the kingdom; therefore miraculous signs are not a part of an inaugurated kingdom; and (2) miraculous signs are not a part of an inaugurated kingdom; there were miraculous signs in the Gospels; therefore there could not be an inaugurated kingdom at that time. There is much to question in these two arguments and in Saucy’s position in general.

First, Saucy’s argument appears to be circular in that he assumes the very premise that he is trying to prove. The “cautious” side of his argument holds that miraculous signs are not a normal

⁸⁶ See, for example, Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste, Raymond O. Zorn, ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 115ff.

⁸⁷ Saucy, “An Open But Cautious View,” 118 n 37.

part of the church age. Yet he dismisses the evidence of an inaugurated kingdom in the Gospels based on the premise that he is trying to prove.

Saucy's argument seems to stem from his total commitment to an inaugurated kingdom in the present age. In fact, this is the presupposition that supports the rest of his argument. But this is really putting the cart before the horse, for there is significantly more exegetical evidence for an inaugurated kingdom in the Gospels than there is for an inaugurated kingdom in the church age. And if there is an inaugurated kingdom in the Gospels, then it should be reasonably expected that there should be miraculous healings present in the church.

Second, Saucy contends that "a theology of healing must recognize that bodily health is nowhere promised as a provision of salvation for this age."⁸⁸ This is true. However, it should also be recognized that bodily health is promised as a provision of the Davidic Covenant which has been inaugurated in this age if progressives are right. One should also mention in passing that, while progressives easily recognize the evidences in the church of an inaugurated New Covenant, they allow no evidences of an inaugurated Davidic Covenant in this age, other than those spiritual blessings associated with the New Covenant. In other words, they assign the salvific blessings of the New Covenant to the Davidic Covenant and dismiss as future the blessings that are directly associated with the Davidic Covenant.

Third, Saucy contends that, "the miracles of Jesus and the disciples as signs point beyond themselves to the power of God and the nature of the kingdom."⁸⁹ Even if one grants this, this does not help his position. Scripture explicitly states that the Holy Spirit gives sign gifts to the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 130.

church (1 Cor. 14:22). Additionally, Saucy shows no evidence to state why the signs of the kingdom should cease upon the inauguration of the kingdom. There is also no evidence that the signs of the kingdom were for the consummated kingdom alone. Instead, they were for the power of the kingdom that was at work within Christ and his disciples. One must wonder what signs of an inaugurated Davidic Covenant one *should* look for in this present age. Again, the only answer given are the blessings of the New Covenant, not the Davidic Covenant. For example, Saucy writes,

As I indicated in my essay, miracles such as bodily healing, which are only temporary, do not belong to the essence of the kingdom blessing. ... Scripture likewise does not support an emphasis on miracles as part of the new covenant ministry of the Spirit, as suggested by Oss. The explicitly Old Testament prophecies of the new covenant clearly focus on inner-transforming work of the Spirit. The hearts of God's people will be changed so that they will love God and walk in his ways (cf. Jer. 31:33; 32:28–40; Ezek. 36:26–27). In the New Testament Jesus specifically speaks of the new covenant in relation to forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28), and Paul connects it again to the inner spiritual work of the Spirit of being “transformed into [the Lord's] likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3:18; see also Heb. 8:8–12; 10:16–17).⁹⁰

While one must agree with Saucy that bodily healing is not part of the New Covenant, one cannot help but wonder why he does not mention the Davidic Covenant in his discussion, which explicitly mentions bodily healing.

Finally, Saucy writes, “Only those blessings of the kingdom that are promised to *every* believer through saving faith in Christ may be said to belong to the ‘already’ aspect of the kingdom during this age.”⁹¹ Why is this so? This Spirit gives gifts to each believer “just as he

⁸⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁹⁰ Robert L. Saucy, “An Open but Cautious Response to Douglas A. Oss” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 303.

⁹¹ Ibid., 118 n 37.

determines” (1 Cor. 12:11). There is no evidence that all of the apostles performed miraculous healings; why should one expect it to be any different today?

At the end of the day, Saucy can provide no substantial exegetical evidence for the cessation of signs and wonders. His argument is reduced to an investigation of the empirical evidence of those claiming such gifts.

Conclusion

This section has attempted to show that Jesus’ miraculous healings in the Gospels were signs of an inaugurated Davidic Kingdom. The traditional dispensational viewpoint is that this offer of the kingdom was withdrawn due to Israel’s rejection of the King. Progressive dispensationalism, in contrast, holds that the Davidic Kingdom has been inaugurated in the Church. Whether one contends that the kingdom was transitionally inaugurated in the Gospels like Bock, or that the kingdom was not inaugurated until the church age, like Saucy, the fact remains that an inaugurated kingdom in the church age demands some sign of this inauguration. Those that subscribe to an inaugurated Davidic Covenant have not successfully shown why there should be no signs of that covenant active in the Church. Assigning the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant to the Davidic Covenant ignores the progress of revelation and confuses the blessings of two different covenants.

Pentecostal/Charismatic, and Third Wave Theologies and the Kingdom

The implications of an inaugurated kingdom has not been missed on those who subscribe to miraculous healings in this age. Douglas Oss, for example, argues for the Pentecostal/Charismatic View in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*. Arguing that the “last days”

spoken of by the prophet Joel and referred to in Acts 2 have begun, he recites Bock's argument that the Davidic reign began at Pentecost with the giving of the Holy Spirit. He then concludes,

With regard to the issue of cessationism, the significance of this fulfillment is found in Acts 2:30. In his capacity as the ruling Davidic king, Jesus has poured out the Holy Spirit. This is the central dimension of the present phase of the Davidic kingdom, which Luke continues to demonstrate throughout Acts by detailing the new life in the Spirit. For example, Jesus, the eternally reigning Davidite, continues to pour out the Holy Spirit on diverse people groups (chs. 8, 10, 19), whose experiences are similar or identical to those on whom the Spirit was poured out at the beginning.... Moreover, the experiences of the early church are also similar to those of Jesus, particularly with regard to the empowerment of the Spirit for evangelism.... Having received the same anointing as David, the anointing with the Spirit and power (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13; Luke 3:21–22; 4:1, 14, 16–21, 31–32; Acts 10:38), Jesus passes that anointing on to the church to empower the believers for witness (Acts 1:6–8; 2:4ff., 33; 4:8, 31; etc.).... There can be no doubt that one of Luke's primary points is to demonstrate the inclusion of all people in the Davidic kingdom (e.g., Samaritans and Gentiles in Acts 8 and 10 respectively). And their inclusion in the kingdom is marked by the outpouring of the Spirit on them.⁹²

What is important to notice is that Oss has correctly picked up on the implications of an inaugurated kingdom. While he fails to mention the signs of the Davidic Covenant directly, he does connect the dots between Jesus' miraculous kingdom ministry, and the kingdom ministry of the church.

Jack Deere is another who applies an inaugurated kingdom to current day miracles.

Who could imagine a messianic kingdom without miracles and healings? The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would usher in a kingdom that would have both spiritual and physical healings.... The coming messianic kingdom meant that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people, without distinction in regard to age, sex or economic position (Joel 2:28–29).... These miraculous phenomena were not simply signs of the kingdom of God; they were an essential part of it. The kingdom of God means the rule of God and his Christ. When Jesus came, the kingdom of God came. God began to exercise

⁹² Douglas A. Oss, "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View" in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 269–270.

his rule in a new and more decisive fashion.⁹³

One must agree with Deere that for the kingdom to exist, there must be some elements that are essential to it. In other words, if the Davidic kingdom is present today in the church, one must expect some elements of that kingdom to be present as well. As Ryrie notes, “If Christ inaugurated His Davidic reign at His ascension, does it not seem incongruous that His first act as reigning Davidic king was the sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), something not included in the promises of the Davidic covenant?”⁹⁴ The only way to make sense of this is to regard the Holy Spirit as necessary for the healings that are a promised part of that kingdom.

John Wimber is another who takes the same basic approach as progressive dispensationalists to the kingdom.⁹⁵ Referring to the healings and exorcisms in the Gospels, he writes, “Every miraculous act had a purpose: to confront people with his message that the kingdom had come and that they had to decide to accept or reject it.”⁹⁶ As a result of Israel’s rejection of the king, “the kingdom of God created the church at Pentecost through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The church is the primary (though not exclusive) residence of

⁹³ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: Discovering How God Speaks and Heals Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 224–225.

⁹⁴ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 169.

⁹⁵ Since Wimber’s theology predates the beginning of progressive dispensationalism (1986), he takes much of his theology of the kingdom from George Ladd. Ladd’s view of the inaugurated kingdom is nearly identical to progressive dispensationalism, with only minor differences, although this connection is vigorously denied by Bock. See George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), Bock, “Why I am a Dispensationalist with a Small ‘d’,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (September 1998), 387–392.

⁹⁶ John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 1.

God's rule."⁹⁷ As a result, "to fight effectively, we must correctly understand power and authority in the kingdom. In Luke 9:1–2 we read; 'When Jesus had called the Twelve together, *he gave them power and authority* to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.' He gave them power and authority to cure diseases and to drive out all demons. Everyone, according to Acts 1:8, can receive power from the Holy Spirit. Power is the ability, the strength, the might to complete a given task. Authority is the right to use the power of God."⁹⁸

What these examples are meant to show is that the logical necessity of miraculous healings are part and parcel with an inaugurated kingdom as described in progressive dispensationalism. This by no means was intended to suggest that all progressive dispensationalists subscribe to the current signs and wonders movement. But these examples are pertinent in that they show the logical conclusions of an inaugurated kingdom; that is, a literal fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom promised in the Old Testament.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that the progressive dispensationalist's assertion that the Davidic Covenant has been inaugurated logically leads to an abandonment of the cessationist position of miraculous signs in the present age as well. In fact, not only is a strictly cessationist position incompatible with progressive dispensationalism, any claim that the Davidic Covenant is in force today must logically carry with it some sort of acknowledgement of the signs associated

⁹⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 11.

with that covenant. For even though the blessings of the Davidic Covenant are often mentioned in coordination with the New Covenant, the Davidic Covenant promises of Isaiah, which pre-date the New Covenant and to which Christ appealed, are physical and miraculous in nature.

Therefore, this author has concluded that any attempt to limit miraculous sign gifts in this age, especially those associated with physical healing, is inconsistent with the inaugurated kingdom of the progressive dispensational system.

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