

Jesus as David

2 Samuel 7:12, “When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom.”

Question: Is Jesus the rightful ruler of Israel?

Key Verses: Psalm 89:3-4; Isaiah 11:1; Matt 1:1, 17

David was a national hero for ushering in the “golden age” of Israel both politically and spiritually. He was a fabled warrior conquering daunting odds, starting with his *mano a mano* stand-off with Goliath. He was a famed poet, responsible for the lion’s share of Psalms in Israel’s worship hymnal. He imported the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and acquired the building materials for the Temple. As a warrior, musician, architect, and leader, he stands next to the Titans Abraham and Moses. These three form the trinity of Hebrew royalty. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the Scriptures record the people’s longing for his return. After David’s death, the national longing continued to seek the golden age of his reign. God agreed. In 2 Samuel 7:12–13 He promised a perpetual royal seed: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” It was a divine prophecy most welcomed by Israel.

This promise reverberates throughout the Psalms and the Prophets. For example, Psalm 89:3–4: You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.’” Again, Isaiah 11:1 says, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” Paul quotes this very passage in Romans 15:12 and alludes to it in his sermon in Acts 13:23. Others voice similar sentiments (Psa 132; Isa 16:5; Mic 4:6–13; Zech 9:9; 12:7–9). Why not? David led the nation not just on the battle field but in temple worship. Militarily, monetarily, and morally, Israel hit a high mark under his rule.

This longing for David’s return was not merely a Scriptural phenomenon. God’s promise to David was picked up in other Jewish writings. The Apocryphal Book Psalms of Solomon document the prophecy, “The kingdom of our God is forever over the nations in judgment. You, O Lord, chose David (to be) king over Israel, and swore to him concerning his seed that never should his kingdom fail before You.” Similarly, the desert monastics of Qumran longed for new leadership. They recorded their aspirations in one of their ancient Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q174 1:10–13), citing three separate Davidic prophecies: “YHWH declares to you that he will build you a house. I will raise up your seed after you and establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me (2 Sam 7:12–14). This (refers to the) branch of David (Isa 11:1), who will arise with the Interpreter of the law who [will rise up] in Zion in the

last days, as it is written: I will raise up the hut of David which has fallen (Amos 9:11). This (refers to) the hut of David which has fallen, which he will raise up to save Israel.” It is clear from this passage that the interpretation of the Gospel authors that Jesus was David was nothing novel. Applying it to a carpenter from Galilee would have certainly caused some eyebrows to raise. Nonetheless, the expectation that a descendant of David would retake the throne was standard Jewish worldview.

Another scroll leaned into Genesis 49:10 to affirm the promise of David’s descendant: “The scepter shall not depart from the tribe of Judah. While Israel has the dominion, there will not be cut off someone who sits on the throne of David. For the staff is the covenant of royalty” (4Q252). Some four hundred years later, the Talmud declares the same expectation of the coming of David’s son, the Messiah. “But a master said: In the sixth [year, i.e., the one preceding the messianic seventh year, there will be extensive] thunder (*qolot*); in the seventh year, [there will be extensive] wars. At the end of the seventh year, the [messiah,] son of David will come” (*b. Meg. 2.1*).

In other words, this longing for a return to the glory days of David was virtually unanimous throughout all strands of Judaism. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that David looms large in the New Testament as well. What *is* surprising is just how heavy that emphasis is when all the relevant verses are stacked together.

The New Testament opens with a genealogy in Matthew. This is, arguably, the most boring paragraph of the Bible, that is until we peek behind the curtain. This ex-tax collector proves quite clever in how he arranged the list of names in three consecutive groups of 14 generations each: Abraham to David, David to Exile, and Exile to Christ (Matt 1:17). Perhaps you’ve never taken the time to check his math. Upon careful examination we discover that the second group included only thirteen (not fourteen) names by Matthew. Did he miscount? While that’s possible, that would not be my first suspicion of a Tax Collector! Perhaps he rounded up for convenience? Actually, that’s not case. How do we know? We can compare Matthew’s genealogy to the parallel genealogical record in 1 Chronicles. There we discover Matthew actually had seventeen names to draw from. Matthew deliberately omitted four. Why? Well, he wanted the central group to have thirteen names, not fourteen. Again, why? In our modern mechanized society, that makes no sense because numbers are supposed to be precisely counted. For the Jews, however, it was more important to weigh a number than to count it. Jewish numbers had symbolic value, not merely numeric value. In this instance, Matthew was doing what every Jewish father did when dispensing his inheritance. He gave a double portion to the eldest brother. In this instance, the older brother, figuratively speaking, is David. If we count David twice, if we give him double honor, then we have precisely 14/14/14. He is the most important figure and the person who looms large over the whole book. Look again at Matthew 1:1 and you will find an embedded clue to David’s importance. He is listed first, even before Abraham who came a thousand years before him.

Moreover, if we can think like a Jew for a moment we would see something that jumped out at every Rabbi: The number fourteen. You see, Jews counted with letters, not numbers. Each letter of your name had a numerical value. In Hebrew, David is spelled with three letters, DVD. D is the fourth letter of their alphabet and V is the sixth. Add them all together: 4+6+4= 14. The very numbers in the genealogy testify to the supremacy of David who is given a double portion. Hence, from the opening paragraph of the New Testament, the attentive reader would put the pieces together: The promise God made to David that a descendant would forever sit on his throne was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

Even the Gentile Luke understood Jesus' connection with King David. His birth narrative depends on the Davidic promise. The Angel Gabriel promised Mary concerning her son, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). This is immediately followed by Zechariah's prophetic poem which includes this key sentence: "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:69). This was the whole reason he had to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Luke 2:4, 11; cf. Matt 2:1-12; John 7:42). Even Jesus understood himself to be David's heir to the throne (Luke 6:3-4; Mark 12:35-37/Matt 22:41-46/Luke 20:41-44).

Beyond the birth narratives, the title "Son of David" appears in the story of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52/Matt 20:29-34/Luke 18:35-43). And Matthew has the most pronounced acclamation of Jesus as David's descendant. Through his own redactional interests, he portrays Jesus, the "Son of David", as a healer of the blind (9:27; cf. 11:5; 15:30; 21:14), an exorcist (12:22-23; 15:22), and a triumphal king who enters the capital city (21:9, 15; cf. Mark 11:10).

When we turn the page from the Gospels to Acts, Jesus' Davidic descent is featured in Peter's Pentecost address. "But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne" (Acts 2:30). This is, obviously, a crucial moment in church history and David's appearance adds gravitas to the event. Another critical moment of Church history was the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), when the very nature of salvation was up for debate. The question was whether Gentiles had to become Jews first before becoming Christians or whether they could have immediate access to Jesus. In this context, it is highly significant that Jesus' half-brother James affirmed the house of David as the destined dwelling of Gentiles, "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it" (Acts 15:16; quoted from Amos 9:11-12).

The great Apostle Paul opened his magisterial message of Romans with a nod to Jesus' Davidic descendant: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:1-4). In his final penned letter, Paul had not

changed his tune: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel” (2 Timothy 2:8).

As late as Revelation this ascription never abated: “Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals’” (Rev 5:5). Jesus himself affirms it: Revelation 22:16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (22:16).

All of this is simply to say that throughout the New Testament, there was a strong connection between Jesus and David. The question then becomes: Why did Jesus never overtly claim to be king? Sure, there were the obvious enactments of the Triumphal Entry and the Cleansing of the Temple. Both were political theater. Both made regal claims. Furthermore, Jesus’ establishment of Twelve Apostles, promising them Twelve Thrones, is nothing less than a cabinet over the Twelve Tribes. His actions were overt enough that his trial was precisely over his royal claims to the throne. Nonetheless, he never clearly claimed to be king. Why? This is where the previous lesson on 1 Samuel 16:7 and this one must be read in tandem. The true king of Israel is Yahweh alone. Anyone vassal who sits on His throne to carry out his rule must never usurp his authority. The very claim to the throne is a dangerous step in the wrong direction. The rightful heir to the throne would be anointed by God without ever asking for it. He would be installed in God’s timing without ever rushing it or racing after it. This is precisely where the kings of past, even and especially Saul, went wrong. In their attempt to self-promote and self-protect, they lost the royal heritage.

It is in his self-abnegation that Jesus truly modeled David’s heart for God. David, as you will recall, was anointed king decades before actually sitting on the throne. During those days he was reject and maligned, abused and attacked, until Saul’s own self-destruction inaugurated David as the ruler over Israel. So too for Jesus, suffering was the prelude to enthronement. Because he did NOT assert his rule, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11).

Key Points:

- David was Israel’s most effective king. It’s little wonder, therefore, that Israel longed for the return of his reign which God promised in 2 Samuel 7:12.
- The New Testament has many references to David’s rule through Jesus, the Messiah.
- Jesus is the king on David’s throne so Christians are citizens of his nation, Israel.

Action Step: Ask your pastor what practical difference it should make that you are a citizen of a kingdom not merely members of a church.

Further Resources: Norman Perrin, [*The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*](#) (SCM, 1963)