JESUS AS DAVIDIC MESSIAH AND SON OF MAN

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The Bible traces Jesus’s lineage back to David but through Joseph; but Joseph was not Jesus’s father. How then is Jesus the Davidic messiah?

During David’s reign, the prophet Nathan delivered an oracle to David. In the oracle, God says that he will ensure that Israel and its rulers will last forever.

2 Sam 7:4-5, 12-13, 16, “the word of the Lord came to Nathan, 5 “Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: . . . I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 . . . I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. . . . 16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.””

In David’s prayer responding to the oracle, one again finds the idea that Israel and its rulers will last forever.

2 Sam 7:25-29, “as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it forever; do as you have promised. . . . 29 now, therefore, may it please you to bless the house of your servant so that it may continue forever before you, for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.”

2 Sam 7 is the basis for the belief in a Davidic Messiah. But references to a Davidic Messiah appear elsewhere in the Old Testament: Gen 49:8-12; 2 Sam 23:1-7; 1 Chr 17:4-14; Pss 2:7-9; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89: 3-4, 36; 101; 110; 132; Isa 7:10-17; 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 32:1-8; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-26; Ezek 34:22-24; 37:24-28; Mic 5:1-5.

If Jesus was the Messiah, then he should have fulfilled the prophecy of a Davidic Messiah. But at this point, the genealogies of Jesus present a problem. Joseph was a descendant of David. (In Matt 1:16, Joseph’s father is Jacob; but in Matt 1:20, the angel Gabriel addresses Joseph as “Joseph, son of David.”) But Mary was not a descendant of David. She was a “relative” (Luke 1:36, συγγενίς, *sunggenis*) to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth is “descended from the daughters of Aaron” (Luke 1:5). Aaron, however, was of the tribe of Levi; so Mary and Elizabeth are also of the tribe of Levi.

Jesus was born by means of a virgin birth (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Therefore, he is a descendant of Mary but not of Joseph. How then was the prophecy of a Davidic Messiah fulfilled?

There are various possibilities.

(1) A child born by parthenogenesis (virgin birth) would have exactly the same genes as its mother and would therefore be female. Since Jesus was male, God must have manipulated Jesus’ DNA. Perhaps he also manipulated Jesus’ DNA to make him a member of the tribe of Judah (David’s tribe). I don’t believe this explanation, but it’s possible. (As the angel said [Gen 18:14], “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”)

(2) The *Mishnah* is a compilation of legislative decisions by rabbis; it was compiled c. 200 CE. In the *Mishnah*, Baba Bathra 8:6, we find the statement, “If a man says, ‘This is my son,’ he is to be believed.” In Matt 1:21 an angel instructs Joseph: “She will bear a son, and *you* are to name him Jesus . . .” Thus Joseph becomes Jesus’ legal father. According to New Testament scholar Raymond E. Brown, “legal father” is “a more correct de­s­cription than adoptive father or foster father.” Thus, “Ac­cord­ing to Jewish law, Joseph’s acknowl­edg­ment of Jesus would make him the legal father of the child . . ., and so Jesus was tru­ly a Son of Da­vid.” (*A Coming Christ in Advent*: *Essays on the Gospel Nar­ra­tives Preparing for the Birth of Jesus*, *Matthew 1 and Luke 1*. Col­legeville: Liturgical, 1988. 34, 10.)

(3) In the Old Testament, kings were anointed with oil at their coronations; hence a king was called “the anointed.” In Hebrew “the anointed” is מָשִׁיחַ, *meshiach*, which in English is translated “messiah.” In Greek “the anointed” is χριστός, *christos*, which in English is translated “Christ.” (See English “chrism,” meaning oil). But one other group in addition to kings were anointed in ancient Israel: priests at their ordinations. So priests, like kings, were called “the anointed” (“messiah”). According to some of the Dead Sea Scrolls (*Manual of Discipline* 9.11; *Rule of the Congregation* 2.11-22), there were to have been two messiahs. One would be the royal, conquering messiah of Davidic descent (and therefore of the tribe of Judah); the other would be a priestly messiah, the “messiah of Aar­on” (and therefore of the tribe of Levi). Since Jesus was a kingly messiah on his (legal) father’s side and a priestly messiah on his mother’s side, perhaps the infancy narratives are making a theological point: Jesus is both king and priest.

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Did the prophesies of a coming messiah in any way indicate that the messiah would be a son of God? Or God himself in some form?

A prophecy in Daniel suggests a supernatural figure.

Dan 7:2, 9, 13-14, “I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night . . . 9 As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. . . . 13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.”

Here the figure seems to be both human and superhuman. He is in human form; but he is “like” a man, and he is on clouds and before God. This figure, like the Davidic messiah, is also a king (“To him was given dominion”), and an everlasting king (an everlasting dominion).

In the period immediately prior to Christ, the hope for a Davidic messiah seems to have become more militantly nationalistic. The messiah was to be an earthly conqueror. Thus the *Psalms of Solomon* 17, written c. 45 BCE, says, “O Lord, raise up unto them their king, the son of David . . . gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample [her] down to destruction.” (See also *Ps Sol* 35 and 36.)

By contrast, the supernatural yet human figure of Dan 7 is not a military messiah.

Jesus almost never acknowledges that he is the Davidic messiah. I know of only two exceptions. In Matt 16:20, “he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.” In Mark 14:61-62, “the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” 62 Jesus said, “I am . . .” But he immediately diverts attention from the Davidic messiah to the Son of man: “Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

Jesus much preferred the title “Son of man.” “Son of man” occurs 82 times in the gospels—and “in all four gospels the title occurs *exclusively* on the lips of Jesus.” (Jeremias, Joachim. *New Testament Theology*: *The Proclamation of Jesus*. Trans. John Bowden. New York: Macmillan, 1971. 266.) (In John 12:34, the crowd says “Son of man”; but they are quoting a saying of Jesus. Jeremias 265 n 2.)

Perhaps Jesus preferred “Son of man” to “messiah” because “Son of man” did not imply militarism. But perhaps Jesus also preferred “Son of man” because, unlike the “messiah,” who was merely human, the “Son of man” was both natural and supernatural, both human and divine.