

The Davidic Jesus in Matthew and Luke

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Some passages in Mark present Jesus as a Davidic Messiah, who would realize God's promise to David (2 Sam 7:10-13, 1 Chron 17:11-14, 2 Chron 6:16) and restore sovereignty to Israel.¹ That attempt, if it was made, clearly failed; it ended in Jesus' crucifixion as a would-be "King of the Jews." So, are these Davidic passages original in Mark? or are they later interpolations?² I here ask, what happens to them in the later gospels, Matthew and Luke? Answer: the conspiratorial ones are omitted, and the rest get a new spin, giving Jesus a Davidic ancestry (despite his denial in Mk 12:35f) and a birth in David's Bethlehem. The old goal of political renewal is transformed into an eschatological future Kingdom, as was done already in a late layer of Mark (14:62).³ The one-time *national* saviour has been reconfigured as a future *universal* saviour.

Mark's Davidic Jesus

Among references to, or actions in support of, Jesus' Davidic intentions are:⁴

- **Mk 2:25-28.** Jesus invokes the example of David to justify plucking the grain
- **Mk 4:1-9, 21-24.** Jesus preaches the coming Kingdom in veiled terms⁵
- **Mk 10:47.** Blind Bartimaeus calls on "Jesus, thou Son of David" to heal him
- **Mk 11:1-10.** Jesus' disciples stage his entry into Jerusalem so as to evoke Zech 9:9 ("riding on an ass"); the crowd acclaims "the Kingdom of David"
- **Mk 11:11f.** Jesus and his party inspect the Temple and return to their lodging
- **Mk 11:15, 17.** Jesus purifies the Temple by driving out the moneychangers. (It was at the Temple that God would return to Israel; Malachi 3:1).
- **Mk 11:16.** Jesus' party prevent commercial access to the Temple grounds
- **Mk 12:35f.** Jesus argues that the Messiah *need not* be a descendant of David
- **Mk 15:2.** Jesus acknowledges his intent before Pilate ("You say so")
- **Mk 15: 9, 12, 18, 32.** Jesus is mocked by Romans and Jews as a Messianic pretender, "the King of the Jews [or Israel]"
- **Mk 15:26.** The Roman inscription on the cross reads, "King of the Jews"
- **Mk 15:34.** Jesus dies feeling that he has been abandoned by God

Other passages might be added, but these twelve will suffice for present purposes.

¹Note Lk 24:21, "But we hoped it was he who should redeem Israel;" so also Acts 1:6.

²See Beckwith et al **Two Reconstructions**; I here reply to Beckwith **Mark's Jesus**.

³Mark contains both early and late material; for a brief exposition, see Brooks **Time Depth**.

⁴This list is lifted, largely intact, from Brooks **Resurrection** 85.

⁵Veiled because the whole program was seditious. See further Brooks **Parables**.

In Matthew and Luke, the Davidic identification is *reinforced*, not in the sense of the political Messiah, but as the one who would return as judge at the End Days. Jesus' preaching (necessary to the Davidic agenda, in order to win erring Israel back to God, and regain God's military favor) is expanded in this new sense of personal salvation, but no longer with an implication of national salvation. It has been transformed.

1. **Mk 2:23-28**. Preserved essentially intact in Mt 12:1-8 and Luke 6:1-5.

2. **Mk 4:1-9, 21** (Parables of the Seed and the Lamp). Preserved in Mt 13:1-9, 5:15; and in Luke 8:4-8, 16. (The opaque Parable of the Seed (Mk 4:26-29) is recast as Matthew's hostile Parable of the Tares (Mt 13:24-30), and omitted altogether in Luke). In sum, key parts of this material are preserved largely intact in Matthew and Luke.

3. **Mk 10:47**. Mt 20:30 and Lk 18:38 both retain "Jesus, thou son of David." Matthew, with his notable fondness for the number two,⁶ has made Bartimaeus into *two* blind men, whence his variant "have mercy on *us*." The phrase is preserved.

4. **Mk 11:1-10**. Mt 21:4-7 quotes the Zech 9:9 prediction. The crowd acclaim him as "son of David." Luke (19:30-35) needs only one colt; his crowd acclaim "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." In Mt 21:15-16, Jesus *accepts* the children's cries, "Hosanna to the Son of David." In Lk 19:13-40, Jesus *refuses* the Pharisees' demand that he rebuke his disciples. These are further developments of Mk 11:1-10.

5. **Mk 11:11f**. The return of Jesus and his party to their lodging after inspecting the Temple precincts, a conspiratorial note, is absent in both Matthew and Luke.

6. **Mk 11:15, 17**. The expulsion of the merchants and moneychangers, which can be seen as piety toward the Temple, is retained in Mt 21:12-13 and Lk 19:45-46.

7. **Mk 11:16**. Another conspiratorial Markan detail, that Jesus and party prevent anyone from carrying a vessel through the Temple, is absent in both Mt and Lk.

8. **Mk 12:35f**, Jesus' argument from Scripture (Psalm 110) that the Messiah is not a son of David, but rather his Lord, is retained in Mt 22:41-46 and Lk 20:41-44. Separately, the genealogies in Mt 1:1-17 and Lk 3:23-34 provide Jesus with Davidic credentials. The net effect is to make Jesus the fulfilment of God's promise to David, giving Jesus Scriptural authorization, but also making him a greater King than David.⁷ The significance of the passage is transformed.

9. **Mk 15:2**, Jesus' seeming acceptance of Pilate's charge ("You say so") is repeated (σὺ λέγεις) in Mt 27:11 and Lk 23:3. A like ambiguous form is added to Jesus' reply to the High Priest (Mt 26:64 σὺ εἶπας; Lk 22:70 ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶμι), replacing the Markan original (Mk 14:62 ἐγὼ εἶμι). This blunts the Markan Jesus' claim to an earthly Kingdom, and emphasizes his claim to a Heavenly Kingdom. The original Markan implication has been transformed into something less directly challenging to the Roman occupation or its Temple sympathizers.

⁶Matthew just loves twos. Not only does he send Jesus into Jerusalem riding on two animals (Mt 21:7), but he makes Mark's one demoniac (Mk 5:1-8) into two (Mt 8:28-29).

⁷It is Matthew who emphasizes fulfilment of Scripture in Jesus, and it is thus relevant that Luke's genealogy, like his Infancy Narrative (Luke B; see Brooks **Acts-Luke** 143) is secondary to Matthew's. For Jesus' other literal Davidic credential, his Bethlehem birthplace, supplied only in the Second Tier Gospels, see Mt 2:1f and Lk 2:4f (no such detail anywhere in Mark).

10. **Mk 15: 9, 12, 18, 32.** The taunting title “King of the Jews” is played down in the parallels. **Mk 15:9** (said by Pilate) > Mt 27:17 “Jesus who is called Christ” (absent in Lk). **Mk 15:12** (Pilate) > Mt 27:22 “Jesus who is called Christ” (also absent in Lk). **Mk 15:18** (Roman soldiers) = Mt 27:29 “King of the Jews” (again no parallel in Lk). **Mk 15:32** (scribes) “the Christ, the King of Israel” > Mt 27:42 “the King of Israel,” Lk 23:35 “The Christ of God, his chosen,” and also, unique to Luke, 23:37 (soldiers) “King of the Jews.” The background assumption that Jesus himself claimed the title “King of the Jews” persists, though it is somewhat less prominent, in both Mt and Lk.

11. **Mk 15:26** (Roman inscription “King of the Jews”) = Mt 27:37 = Lk 23:38.

12. **Mk 15:34** (“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”) = Mt 27:46; transformed in Lk 23:46, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” The Markan cry (kept by Matthew) tells us that Jesus died disappointed, most plausibly because his hope of God’s military appearance at the just-purified Temple had not been realized. Luke transforms Jesus’ final disappointment into Jesus’ perfects dedication.

The Gospel of John. In John, the Jesus party’s preparations for the return of God to the Temple, inaugurating the Davidic Rule, are largely dismantled; the cleansing of the Temple is shifted to an earlier year (2:13-16). The idea of Jesus as a King is transferred to others, and disavowed by Jesus himself (6:15). Jesus answers Pilate, not ambiguously, but with an explicit denial: “My Kingdom is not of this world” (18:36). The transformation of Jesus’ Davidic Rule into something else is complete.⁸

But the presence of that expectation in Mark is impressive. Were something of this sort not in Mark, it would seem necessary to supply it, to explain its transformation, first in Mark itself, then more elaborately in Matthew and Luke, and finally in John.

Options. In any case, Mark’s Davidic passages *were there* for Matthew and Luke. Either they were present in Mark as he completed it, or they were interpolated later. If they were present in Mark, they are most easily construed as a historical memory, albeit an awkward one. If they were later added, why? What benefit would such an addition have conferred? In the absence of a convincing scenario for a later addition to Mark, a Davidic Jesus seems to be the inevitable interpretation; a Jesus who has begun to be transformed in Mark 14:62, and is further transformed in later Gospels. That effort makes little sense unless there was something there *to be* transformed.

The Historical Jesus

If there *was* a historical memory, what was the history behind that memory? Mark, in its earliest form, ended in the symbolic Rending of The Veil (Mk 15:38), showing that God had disapproved the Temple (by desacralizing it), and thus vindicated Jesus. Vindicated him against what? Against the Jerusalem hierarchy and the Pharisees, the teachers of the Temple purity code. Mark told the story of Jesus as a *triumph* for Jesus, in what amounts to a theological dispute: Jesus against the Temple.

What could have put Jesus on the Temple’s wrong side in the first place?

⁸So is the abject admission of the Baptist that he is not the Messiah. From the other side, in the Mandaean or late Baptist writings, Jesus is often called *mshisha kdaba*, “lying Messiah.”

Every Jew burned to expel the Romans. God's return in power would do the job. How to get God back? If Israel would again obey God's laws, that should do it.

What did the law require? John the Baptist, the son of a priest, went with purity. He far exceeded the requirements of the priestly purity rules; he ate food and wore clothes gathered from nature, untouched by human hands. Jesus, whose education in conservative Galilee had disposed him to strictness, was admitted to John's movement.

But John was killed. It hadn't worked. So Jesus went back again to the Scriptures, and there found a quite different governing conception: one which rejected sacrifices and all other merely formal observances. This is how Micah 6:6-8 puts it:

Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, with the thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give up my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Inspired, but now in *opposition* to the Temple, Jesus returned to Galilee, and started his own Messianic movement. He found a ready hearing. He had to be careful, since it was seditious. He urged those he healed to keep it quiet, but one blabbed, and Jesus thereafter had to avoid the towns (Mk 1:45), where the police presence was strongest. He saw himself as David, and cited David to justify a Sabbath violation (Mk 2:25f). Only his followers, and they only in private, called him the Anointed One (Mk 8:29).

When he felt that enough had returned to the Covenant, by obeying the simpler law (Mk 10:19, six rules), he and a picked few went to Jerusalem, intending to purify the Temple itself, at which point, God would "suddenly return" to it (Malachi 3:1). Jesus symbolically entered Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-10, evoking Zechariah 9:9; Mt 21:4f gives the Zechariah quote, for the slow readers among us), but lodged outside for safety, entering the city by day to scope out the setup (Mk 11:11). Then they made their move. They did block off the Temple (Mk 11:15-16), long enough for it to count as purified.

And nothing happened. No Chariots of Fire appeared to expel the Romans.

Again covertly, the party arranged a place to eat the Passover (Mk 14:12-16). One of them, figuring that the plot was a bust and he might as well get something out of it, betrayed that location to the priests (Mk 14:1-2, 10-11). As he died, Jesus complained of his abandonment: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34).

Then came the later Gospels with their reinterpretation – the Sacrificial Jesus.

Works Cited

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