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**YOU ARE MY SON**  
ROMANS 1:4 AND THE ENTHRONEMENT OF JESUS  
AS THE SON OF GOD

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## **You Are My Son**

Romans 1:4 and The Enthronement of Jesus as the Son of God

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In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, faithful to the Apostolic faith (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5), the Church confesses “one Lord Jesus Christ [ἓνα κυριον ἸΗΣΥΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΝ].” The confessed “oneness” of the Church’s incarnate Lord, however, does not mean that her conception of Jesus is simplistic, bland, or one-dimensional. Rather, in addition to the obvious anti-Arian polemical thrust of the adjective<sup>1</sup>, ἓνα also gathers up the rich complexity of the Scriptural names, titles, and descriptions of Jesus, both divine and human, in order to confess one divine-human Savior (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5). We confess one Lord Jesus Christ as the single divine-human subject who is described by Scripture with a complex web of descriptions, titles, and acts. And because we are likely to lose our balance when examining any one aspect of christology, such a confession must provide the orienting foothold for all such individual analyses. By examining one or another dimension of our Lord’s complex person and work we are working toward being “able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that we may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18-19).

The question before us in this essay concerns one facet of Holy Scripture’s comprehensive description Christ’s person and work. What does Paul mean when he confesses that Jesus Christ has been appointed the “Son of God with power” in Romans 1:4? In answering this carefully focused question, however, we will have to broaden our inquiry beyond Paul’s epistle to the Romans and even the larger New Testament context by collecting evidence from the Old Testament regarding the motif of sonship. Ultimately, our answer to the question “what does Paul mean when he confesses Jesus as the Son of God”? will be considerably more multi-

faceted than the way the phrase is typically employed by orthodox systematic theologies. Specifically, I will argue that confessing Jesus as the “Son of God” brings together many Old Covenant themes that are not always associated with this Messianic title, and, without denying or minimizing the confession of Jesus’ eternal filial relation to God the Father—indeed, presupposing it—Paul confesses that Jesus *as the incarnate Lord* now bears the title Son of God and that it was the elevation of Jesus’ humanity to the throne of his Father that constituted his investiture as the royal “Son of God with power.” In the end, based on my investigation, I will make some modest suggestions about the nature of Jesus sonship and the content of the preaching of the Gospel in the New Testament, which means that even a narrow focus on the meaning of this name or title in Paul’s epistolary introduction to Romans ought to provide us with a fruitful perspective on christology and soteriology as a whole. Indeed, Paul sums up the apostolic preaching of the Gospel itself with this climactic statement: Jesus Christ has been appointed to be the Son of God with power.

### **“Son of God” in Systematic Theology**

One danger must be addressed before we move on. Systematic, dogmatic, and polemic theology have largely come to identify the ascription “Son of God” with Jesus’ divinity. Most systematic theological treatments of the title “Son of God” take it to refer to Jesus’ essential or substantial oneness with the divinity of the Father. A few examples from Reformed and Lutheran theology will illustrate this. First, toward the beginning of his locus on “The Doctrine of Christ,” the Lutheran systematic theologian John T. Mueller writes under the subheading “The True Deity of Christ” that “Scripture ascribes to Christ— a) The name *God* (θεός, John 1:1) and *Son of God* (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, Matt. 16:16), and these not in an improper sense, in which they are applied also to creatures (θεοὶ λεγόμενοι, *dei nuncupativi*, 1 Cor. 8:5; John 10:35), but in their proper, or metaphysical sense, so that Christ is said to possess not only divine functions, but

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<sup>1</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume One: From the Apostolic Age*

also the one divine essence.”<sup>2</sup> This nice, neat division between the name as applied (improperly?) to creatures and metaphysically to Jesus as possessing the one divine essence gives the impression that the biblical phrase “Son of God” has some fixed technical meaning equivalent to its traditional use in trinitarian theology. Of the two biblical proof texts offered by Mueller, John 1:1 probably fits with this specific technical sense. One might wonder, however, how Mueller would exegete Matt. 16:16 in order to prove that Peter’s confession “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” references Jesus possession of the “divine essence.” Mueller’s statement illustrates the problem with technical theological terms like this. They tend to constrain and limit a reader’s openness to the rich semantic possibilities of biblical words and phrases.

Similarly, the Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck uses “Son of God” to refer to Jesus’ ontological union with his Father. Bavinck’s initial discussion of the name “Son of God” carefully notes the redemptive historical origin of the term in Israel’s corporate life, especially the theocratic origin of the term during the time of the Davidic Kingdom. Quickly, however, Bavinck moves from the historical to the metaphysical. Referencing Psalm 2:7, Bavinck explains,

With a view to David this refers to the decree of God of which mention is made in 2 Sam. 7, and with a view to the Messiah—of whom David is a type—Heb. 1:5; 5:5 interprets it as referring to eternity, in which Christ as the Son was generated by the Father, that is, in which he was brought forth as the effulgence of God’s glory and the very image of his substance. Moreover, according to Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:3, the second person of the trinity was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection of the dead.<sup>3</sup> (p. 269).

Aside from Bavinck’s questionable explanation of Heb. 1:5 and 5:5, the other two texts he cites (Heb. 13:3 & Romans 1:3 [4?]) *appear* to say that he became Son of God by God’s

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*to Chalcedon* (London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975; revised edition), pp. 264ff.

<sup>2</sup> John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 256.

appointment at his resurrection/ascension. For Bavinck, the verb ὀρίζω in Rom. 1:4 *must* mean “declare.” Bavinck goes on to clarify what he means by “Son of God.”

But the name Son of God when ascribed to Christ has a far deeper meaning than the theocratic: he was not a mere king of Israel who in time became an adopted Son of God; neither was he called Son of God because of his supernatural birth, as the Socinians and Hofmann held; neither is he the Son of God merely in an ethical sense, as others suppose; neither did he receive the title Son of God as a new name in connection with his atoning work and resurrection, an interpretation in support of which John 10:34-36; Acts 13:32, 33; and Rom. 1:4 are cited; but he is Son of God in a metaphysical sense; by nature and from eternity.<sup>4</sup>

This passage illustrates well the ever-present semantic temptation theologians are faced with when they exegete biblical texts. Because various heretics and heresies have advocated erroneous senses in which Jesus “became” the Son of God at some point in his temporal existence, Bavinck succumbs to the temptation to reject *any* sense in which Christ might have been so designated in time and history. Clearly Bavinck is not comfortable with understanding “Son of God” as a honorific title given in connection with his atoning work and resurrection. The resurrection can only declare or manifest to the world what is already true—that the second person of the Trinity is Son of God in a metaphysical sense from eternity. Whether this is the meaning of ὀρίζω in Rom. 1:4 remains to be seen.

At this point, we should note again the temptation to read into Paul’s words the precise systematic theological meaning that has come to be associated with this common New Testament christological ascription. For our purposes, we can note here that the designation “Son of God” or even “Son” does indeed refer to Christ’s divinity and essential unity with the Father in many places in the New Testament (e.g., John 1:14, 18; 3:17; 1 John 4:10; Heb. 1:2), and especially in

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. by William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 269. This is an edited translation of volume two of Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, published in the years 1895-1899.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

Paul's letters (1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6ff.; Col. 1:13, 16-17).<sup>5</sup> Even in his epistle to the Romans Paul sometimes uses "Son" with this nuance (Rom. 1:3; 8:3; 32),<sup>6</sup> but even so, it would be difficult to prove, even in these passages where the context (the Father's sending his Son) favors the "systematic theological definition" that Paul intends to exclude any reference to the incarnate Christ. It is extremely doubtful that the Apostolic authors intended everything that post-Nicea orthodox theologians mean when they speak of the eternal "Son of God." This is because in response to various christological and trinitarian heresies the technical theological phrase "Son of God" has been assigned a very precise meaning based on a large number of New Testament texts bearing upon the larger question of Jesus' essential divinity, some of which do not even use filial language. Thus, the meaning of the technical theological term "Son of God" has been built up from passages that do not necessarily use the phrase itself. In systematic theology the phrase now functions as a kind of short hand, an abbreviation, if you will, of a theological composite of teachings centering on questions concerning the divine nature of the Son in relation to God the Father. There is nothing wrong with this. But it does complicate the exegete's work and naïve readers are often prone to making such a basic category mistake when they come across familiar theological terms in the Bible.<sup>7</sup> We must recognize that in systematic

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<sup>5</sup> See L. W. Hurtado, "Son of God," *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL / Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 900-906.

<sup>6</sup> L. W. Hurtado, "Jesus Divine Sonship in Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in *Romans & the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon Fee on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. by Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 217-233.

<sup>7</sup> This mistake is similar to what is described by James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean: Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, 2nd edition (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), pp. 1124-125. James Barr refers to it as "illegitimate identity transfer" in *Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 217-218). Vern Poythress warns against this kind of category mistake with his second maxim of symphonic theology: "No term in the Bible is equal to a technical term of systematic theology." He explains that "if we want to develop technical terms in theology, such as 'Trinity' or 'saving faith,' we cannot make those terms perfectly match individual Hebrew or Greek vocabulary items. The reason is that we cannot make a word with a precise meaning exactly match a word with a broad, flexible meaning, or one with several shades of meaning in different

theology we have developed technical phrases and titles that have a precision not found in the New Testament writings. Traditionally “Son of God” has come to refer almost exclusively to Jesus divine nature. Theologians have other terms and phrases that designate his humanity. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your perspective), things are not so neat and tidy in the New Testament.<sup>8</sup>

But now, the question before us is this: what does Paul mean by υἱὸς θεοῦ in Rom. 1:4? Our investigation will proceed in three stages. First, we will examine the immediate context and the language of Rom. 1:4. Second, we will survey the Old Testament background, concentrating on the connection between Rom. 1:4 and the Davidic covenant (1 Sam. 7; Ps. 2; Ps. 89; etc.). Finally, some modest conclusions will be outlined and the significance of our findings will briefly surveyed.

### **Romans 1:4**

Why does Paul ascribe to Jesus the title “Son of God” in Romans 1:4? Is he simply borrowing a designation from contemporary Hellenistic or pagan religious culture in order to impress upon his readers a reverence for Jesus that they would be able to readily appreciate? Influential 20th century commentators have argued for this. The suggestion has been made that Paul (and other New Testament authors) utilized the Hellenistic notion of “divine men” as the “sons” of gods as one way to bridge the conceptual gap between the Greek culture and the

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contexts. If we really succeeded in making some English word “exactly match” a Hebrew or Greek word, the word in English would be just as vague and flexible as the one in Greek or Hebrew; it would not have any of the advantages of technical precision or fixity of meaning. The more precise we make the technical term, the greater the distance it *must* have from an exact match to any one word of Hebrew or Greek” (*Symphonic Theology*, p. 75).

<sup>8</sup> See Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 138-43; and Vern S. Poythress’s discussion of technical terms in *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 55-68 and 74-79.

Hebraic understanding of the Messiah.<sup>9</sup> Recently, however, this theory has been rejected for many good reasons, not the least of which being, on the one hand, the absence of genuine Greco-Roman pagan parallels that would account for Paul's view of Jesus as God's Son or render it more intelligible to his contemporary audience and, on the other hand, the abundance of Old Testament precedent that gives a much more satisfying explanation for the New Testament authors' ascription of this title to Jesus.<sup>10</sup> The impetus for employing the language of divine sonship need not have come from pagan traditions of divinized heroes. As we shall see, Paul's use of sonship derives from common Old Testament language and images as well as from both the history of Jesus' own verbal interaction with the Father as recorded in the Gospels (Mark 1:11; Matt. 11:27; Luke 6:22, etc.) and the confessions made by disciples, demons, and others (e.g., Matt. 4:3, 6; 8:29; 16:16; 26:63-64; 27:43, 54; Mark 15:39; Jn. 1:34, 49; 3:18; 10:36; 11:4, 27; Luke 1:35), some of which Paul had either already read or the substance of which had been passed down to him by apostolic tradition (Acts 9:20; 1 Cor. 15:1ff.).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, trans. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970 [German, 1913]), pp. 91-98 and 206-10; G. P. Wetter, "Der Sohn Gottes," *eine Untersuchung über den Charakter und die Tendenz des Johannes-Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1916); W. Grundmann, *Die Gotteskindschaft in der Geschichte Jesu und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Weimar: Verlag Deutsche Christen, 1938); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955), pp. 149-59; and H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 149-59.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origins of Christology and the History of Jewish Hellenistic Religion* (rev. ed; Philadelphia/London: Fortress Press/SCM, 1977 [German, 1975]); J. Bieneck, *Sohn Gottes als Christusbezeichnung der Synoptiker* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1951); Oscar Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 271ff.

<sup>11</sup> Many New Testament scholars have even regarded Paul's language here in Rom. 1:2-4 as evidence of an early, pre-pauline ecclesiastical confession. If this is the case—and its far from being established—it simply underscores the primitive character of Paul's confession of Jesus sonship and witnesses to the common confessional tradition of the original apostles and the earliest Christian communities that were founded by them. See Oscar Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), p. 55; V. H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 50; and Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 49.



If Paul does not borrow extra-biblical conceptions in order to ascribe sonship to Jesus, then what does he mean by the phrase “Son of God”? Does he desire thereby to denominate Jesus’ ontological union with God the Father’s divine essence as the eternal Son? This has been a common, indeed, maybe *the* traditional interpretation of this passage among orthodox commentators since the early church controversies over Arianism and Adoptionism.<sup>12</sup> On this interpretation the clause τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγγελωσύνῃς ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν refers to the historical *manifestation* or *declaration* that Jesus was truly the eternal Son of God, and the participle ὀρισθέντος is taken to mean “declare” or “show.” What was true ontologically remained hidden during Jesus’ earthly ministry, suffering, and death, but was made clear and manifest when Jesus rose from the dead.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the resurrection did not make or even provide the occasion for him to *become* the Son of God; rather, it powerfully *declared* to the world what he was already—God’s eternal son. The pressure of polemic theology has so influenced the interpretation of Rom. 1:4 that even the phrase “spirit of holiness” has some times been interpreted as a striking way of referring to Jesus’ divine nature in contradistinction to “according to the flesh” which designates his human nature. The antithetically parallel κατὰ-clauses, therefore, describe a contrast or distinction between Jesus’ human and divine natures. Robert Reymond suggests “that the entire clause can

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 1*; John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. by R. MacKenzie, ed. by D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1960), p. 16; Luther, *Lectures on Romans: Glosses and Scholia*, ed. by Hilton C. Oswald, Vol. 25 of *Luther’s Works*, American Edition (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 146-8; B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. by S. G. Craig (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), pp. 71-90; R. H. Mounce, *Romans* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 61; E. H. Gifford, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (London: John Murray, 1886); Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958 [1839]); William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (New York: Scribner’s, 1879).

<sup>13</sup> Luther says “Before the resurrection this was not revealed and manifested but hidden in the flesh of Christ” (Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 148).

be paraphrased as follows: “who was powerfully marked out the Son of God in accordance with His divine nature by His resurrection from the dead.”<sup>14</sup>

Against this two-natures interpretation at least five broad arguments might be offered. First, the divine-nature interpretation of “Son of God” seems to be advocated most often by those who are concerned to avoid any explanation that might lend credence to Adoptionist or Arian theological sympathizers. Apparently, if we allow any other meaning for “Son of God,” we open the door to those who would deny his divine nature as the eternal Son of the Father. The title Son of God must be reserved as a technical term that denotes the Son’s essential divinity. Reymond, for example, argues that

while it is true that the verb ὀρίζω can also mean ‘appoint’ or ‘constitute,’ Paul *cannot* mean that Jesus was ‘appointed’ or ‘constituted’ the Son of God at the point of or by reason of His resurrection from the dead inasmuch as he had already represented Jesus by the first ‘bracket’ phrase as the Son of God prior to and independent of not only his resurrection but also His birth in Bethlehem of the seed of David.<sup>15</sup>

Reymond seems to be chained to a technical definition of “Son of God” such that he cannot allow another dimension or meaning to arise other than the one that designates Jesus as the eternal Son of the Father.<sup>16</sup> The argument appears to be something like “if Paul uses ‘son’ in

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<sup>14</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New Testament Witness* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), p. 207. The Old Princeton Reformed theologian Charles Hodge agrees: “As the word holy often means august, *venerandus*, so ἀγιωσύνη expresses that attribute of a person which renders him worthy of reverence; πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης is, therefore *Spiritus summe venerandus*, the θεότης, divine nature, or Godhead, which dwelt in Jesus Christ; the Logos, who in the beginning was with God, and was God, and who became flesh and dwelt among us” (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974 (1886)], p. 20).

<sup>15</sup> Reymond, *Jesus*, p. 207 (emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup> Hodge also appears reluctant to give up Son of God as a technical term referring to Jesus divine nature: “. . . Son of God is not a title of office, but of nature, and therefore Christ cannot be said to have been constituted the Son of God” (*Commentary on Romans*, p. 19). Hodge seems not to have entertained the possibility that Son of God is both a title of nature and office. Jesus *as eternal God* is the Son of the Father from eternity and *as man* he was appointed

one sense in v. 3, he cannot use it in another sense in v. 4.” Without putting too fine a point on it, Paul does not use the phrase “son of God” in his first “bracket” as Raymond suggests; rather, Paul says “God sent his Son.” Paul introduces the phrase “Son of God” in v. 4 to designate that status and title to which Jesus was “appointed” by the Resurrection from the dead. By not allowing for the possibility that the word “Son” in v. 3 and 4 has two different nuances, those who advocate the two-natures interpretation are forced to reduce the significance of the resurrection in these verses to a *noetic* function with reference to Christ’s divine nature. His resurrection simply made evident his divinity. As Richard Gaffin notes, this is an odd, even foreign notion not found anywhere else in Paul. “The resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of the firstfruits, the firstborn, the second Adam. It has no meaning apart from the solidarity between Christ and believers, apart from what he has in common with them. With reference to Christ’s person, for Paul the resurrection concerns his human nature, not his divine nature.”<sup>17</sup> As Paul says in Romans 1:2-4, it is the Son *as man* that is raised from the dead and appointed “Son of God with power.”

Second, the two-natures interpretation does not do justice to the passive participle τοῦ ὀρισθέντος by translating it as “declared” or even “marked out.” Each time it occurs elsewhere in the New Testament (Lk. 22:22; Acts 2:23; 10:41; 11:29; 17:26, 31; Heb. 4:7) the verb ὀρίζω means “to determine, appoint, or fix.”<sup>18</sup> John Murray explains “that Jesus was ‘appointed’ or ‘constituted’ Son of God with power and points therefore to an investiture which had an historical beginning parallel to the historical beginning mentioned in verse 3.”<sup>19</sup> This meaning should not be abandoned by orthodox commentators and theologians simply because it threatens

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as the theocratic Son of God with power upon his resurrection and ascension to the throne of his Father (Acts 2:30; 13:33-34).

<sup>17</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 104-105.

<sup>18</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), p. 61

to be theologically suspect or troublesome. It becomes a theological burr only if one fails to acknowledge that when biblical authors speak of Jesus as “Son” and “Son of God” the meaning is often broader and more varied than its common usage in systematic, dogmatic, and polemical theology. Unfortunately, failure to appreciate differences in usage and a desire to defend a high orthodox christology drive many orthodox commentators to insist that ὀρίζω cannot here mean “appoint” or “determine” because Jesus was the Son of God from all eternity! John Murray’s comments are helpful:

It might appear that this encounters an insuperable objection; Jesus was not appointed Son of God; as we found [in v. 3], he is conceived to be the eternal Son, and this sonship had no historical beginning. But this objection has validity only as we overlook the force of the expression “with power.” The apostle does not say that Jesus was appointed “Son of God” but “Son of God in power.” This addition makes all the difference. Furthermore, we may not forget that already in verse 3 the Son of God is now viewed not simply as the eternal Son but as the eternal Son incarnate, the eternal Son subject to the historical conditions introduced by his being born of the seed of David. . . . The apostle is dealing with some particular event in the history of the Son of God incarnate by which he was instated in a position of sovereignty and invested with power, and event which in respect of investiture with power surpassed everything that could previously be ascribed to him in his incarnate state.<sup>20</sup>

Third, I will discuss below the rich web of associations and images connected with the concept of sonship in the Old and New Testaments, but for now it ought to be enough to recognize the meaning of the designation “Son” even when applied to Jesus cannot be determined before the immediate context is consulted. Even in the space of two verses Paul uses υἱός in two different, but not unrelated ways. Υἱός occurs twice in verses 3-4: once at the head of the περὶ clause in verse 3 and then again in verse 4. The Gospel is “from” and “about God” (εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ) but it is further marked off as the εὐαγγέλιον which God himself promised in the Holy Scriptures (ἐν γραφαῖς ἀβραάμ). Moreover, the Good News is centered

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<sup>19</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

on God's υἱός (v. 3). As Douglas Moo observes, this assertion in verse 3—that God's son “has come” or “was born” [τοῦ γενομένου])—assumes the pre-existence of the Son.<sup>21</sup> There are other passages from Romans (8:2, 32) and in the New Testament that also refer to the mystery of Jesus' pre-incarnate life as the Son of the Father (Heb. 1:2; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6ff.; Col. 1:13, 16-17; John 3:17; 1 John 4:10). It was fitting for him to become the incarnate Son because he was (or is) the eternal Son/Image of the Father.<sup>22</sup> John chapter 1 describes the coming of the Word into the world as the manifestation of the glory of eternal Son of the Father (John 1:14), the “only begotten” or “unique” God who is in the bosom of the Father. John evidently understands Jesus' Sonship to imply a state of existence that refers beyond temporality (John 8:58; 12:41).

Even so, fourthly, in the passage we have been discussing, there is evidence of an historical or linear movement: the eternal Son becomes a descendent of David according to the flesh and then subsequently, upon his resurrection, is appointed as the Son of God with power. Apparently, then, he was ontologically the Son of God even before he became man in the economy of salvation. The “sending” spoken of in John 3:17 and Gal. 4:4 and implied in Rom. 1:3 cannot merely refer to a “prophetic sending” as some have argued,<sup>23</sup> but presuppose pre-existence as the starting point of Jesus' mission.<sup>24</sup> If, as we will argue, “Son of God” has a

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<sup>21</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 213-223.

<sup>23</sup> F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (New York: World Publishing, 1969 [German, 1963]), p. 304-5.

<sup>24</sup> After citing these and other passages from Paul, Herman N. Ridderbos notes:

This pre-existence of Christ with the Father so emphatically declared by Paul underlies his whole Christology and makes it impossible to conceive of all the divine attributes and power that he ascribes to Christ exclusively as the consequence of his exaltation. It is true that he often speaks in this sense of the Kyrios exalted by God. . . . But this “exaltation Christology” is at the same time not for a moment to be divorced from the significance of Christ's person as such. For this reason, too, we cannot accept Cullman's thesis that “it is only meaningful to speak of the Son in view of God's

“theocratic” meaning in verse 4, then Paul *adds something* to his earlier use of υἱός. Just as the assertion that the Son “became of the seed of David” implies that the Son came into a new mode of existence, so to speak, κατὰ σάρκα, so also with the resurrection, the eternal Son *as man* has been appointed the “Son of God with power” according to the Spirit of holiness. This comparison between the Son’s existence κατὰ σάρκα and κατὰ πνεῦμα does not contrast his outward or external physical life with his internal, Spirit-perfected vitality, which then qualifies him to be the Son of God in power.<sup>25</sup> Nor, as we have seen, does the contrast distinguish between the human and divine natures of Jesus. Rather, the contrast between σάρξ and πνεῦμα “is part of Paul’s larger salvation-historical framework, in which two “aeon’s” or eras are set over against one another: the old era dominated by sin, death, and the flesh, and the new era, characterized by righteousness, life, and the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>26</sup>

This essay is not the place for an extended discussion of Paul’s eschatological use of the σάρξ–πνεῦμα contrast.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as a redemptive *historical* contrast it supports the interpretation that we have been arguing for here—that Jesus was appointed by the Father as the Son of God with power upon his resurrection from the dead.

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revelatory action, not in view of his being” [Christology, p. 293]. However true it is that the name Son of God again and again denotes the entirely unique relationship of Christ to the Father in the divine redemptive work revealed him him, one cannot, precisely because of this pre-existence (that is, the existing prior to the revelation) of the Son, permit the being of the Son to be lost in his revelation as the Son of God. God sent his Son (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4), and this sending does not create Sonship, but presupposes it (*Paul: An Outline of his Theology*, trans. John R. DeWitt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 68-9).

See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 368-372.

<sup>25</sup> James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus—Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Romans 1:3-4,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973): 40-68.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 50.

<sup>27</sup>See Geerhardus Vos, “Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. by

Fifth, Paul says that the incarnate Son has been “appointed Son-of-God-with-power” or possibly “Son-of-God-in-power.” I understand ἐν δυνάμει to modify υἱοῦ θεοῦ (RSV) and not the verb ὀρίζω (NASB; NIV). What we have here, then, is a clear distinction between the eternal Son’s assumption of human nature (τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, v. 3), indeed his entrance into the “old age” of dominated by sin and death, and his post-resurrection appointment as “Son of God with power” Douglas Moo explains:

What Paul is claiming, then, is that the preexistent Son, who entered into human experience as the promised Messiah, was appointed on the basis of (or, perhaps, at the time of) the resurrection to a new and more powerful position in relation to the world. By virtue of his obedience to the will of the Father (cf. Phi. 2:6-11) and because of the eschatological revelation of God’s saving power in the gospel (1:1, 16), the Son attains a new, exalted status as “Lord” (cf. V. 4b). Son of God from eternity, he becomes Son of God “in power” . . . the transition from v. 3 to v. 4, then, is not a transition from a human messiah to a divine Son of God (adoptionism) but from the Son as Messiah to the Son as both Messiah *and* powerful, reigning Lord.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Old Testament Background**

Having attended to the immediate context of Rom. 1:4, we have only arrived at a very sketchy understanding of what Paul meant by Jesus’ post-resurrection appointment as the Son of God with power. Any explanation of the significance of the title “Son of God” in Rom. 1:4 cannot possibly be complete without a discussion of the Old Testament prophetic/typological foundation. The Gospel of God that Paul has summarized here in Rom. 1:3-4 is “the Gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (ὃ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἀβραάμ). “Through his prophets” ought not to be limited to a particular section of the Old Testament, as if Paul was simply referring to the writing prophets of the latter monarchy, but doubtless designates the entire Old Testament corpus as

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Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), pp. 91-25; Gaffin, *The Centrality*, pp. 107-11; Ridderbos, *Paul*, pp. 64-68.

<sup>28</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 48-49.

penned by “prophets” (see Paul’s use of the ὁ νόμος as prophetic of the Gospel in Rom. 3:21, 31; 8:4; cf. Heb. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:10). Furthermore, by describing the Son’s coming into the world as τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ, Paul invites us to consider the typological /prophetic links between the Davidic kingship and Jesus’ appointment as Son of God with power. And finally, by concluding with the words Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν, which follow immediately after Jesus’ designation as the Son of God with power, and seem to be placed in apposition to that royal title, Paul concludes his explication of the Gospel by alluding to the common confession of the apostolic church—a confession in which each word savors of profound Old Covenant associations. The Son of God is the Greater Joshua, the Anointed One who now reigns as Lord for us.

Sonship is not a discrete concept or relation in the Scriptures. It is connected with other similar ideas, names, relations, and actions such as father, image, inheritance, maturity, firstborn, paternal intimacy and love, blessing, right hand, house-building, ruling, kingship, Lordship, anointing, Spirit, temple/palace, priest, throne, authority, power, vindication, victory, wisdom, servant, service, and more. As one moves further from the center of the web, the connections attenuate somewhat. Nevertheless, the web will not hold together without these systemic conceptual dependencies. More specifically, one will not understand the concept or relation of sonship without the help of these other attendant concepts. Even though each separate image is profoundly related to the others, we will have to start somewhere and move through these Old Testament images and concepts one by one. It will be best to move from the more obvious to the not so obvious and provocative.

First, there is no evidence that either the singular “son of God” (בְּנֵי-אֱלֹהִים) or the plural “sons of God” (בְּנֵי-הָאֱלֹהִים, בְּנֵי-אֱלֹהִים) or “my son” (בְּנִי, when the possessive refers to God) are used in the Old Testament with anything like technical precision. Sometimes angels are



called “sons of Elohim” (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps. 89:6; Deut. 32:8<sup>29</sup>; Daniel 3:25), a designation which is probably evidence of the connection between the concept of sonship and ruling. The angels in Job are God’s advisors and governors. The “heavenly beings” called “sons of God” in Psalm 89:6 are rulers like, but lower than, Yahweh. They anticipate Psalm 89:27 where David cries out to Yahweh as Father, and Yahweh in turn will “make” or “appoint” him (נִתֵּן, cf. 1 Sam. 12:13; 1 Kg. 1:48; 1 Chron. 12:9)<sup>30</sup> “the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.” One should notice here the links between sonship, ruling, and firstborn status, conceptual connections that are important for understanding the Davidic covenant and Jesus’ appointment as the Son of God (Rom. 1:4) and Firstborn Ruler over the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). But I digress.

The phrase “sons of God” may also apply to the people of God, and there are good reasons for thinking that this is the meaning in Genesis 6:2 and 4 (the godly line of Seth as opposed to the apostate line of Cain).<sup>31</sup> This usage may be in the background when the appellation “my son” is given to the nation of Israel by Yahweh (Ex. 4:22-23). Although the favor and love of Yahweh as Father may be dominant in these cases, here again we might detect a connection between the privilege of firstborn status and Israel’s sonship, which implies the right to rule and not be enslaved in Egypt. The term primarily designates that Israel has been graced with a special, close filial relation to Yahweh (Deut. 14:1; 32:6, 18; Jer. 31:9, 19; Hos. 11:1, 10). Some commentators have applied this usage to Rom. 1:4, seeing in God’s

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<sup>29</sup> The LXX (αγγέλων Θεοῦ) and a fragment from cave four of the Qumram manuscripts provide strong evidence against the MT reading (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). What was likely the original reading (בְּנֵי-אֱלֹהִים or בְּנֵי-אֵל) seems to have been altered for some reason.

<sup>30</sup> F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 680, s.v. נִתֵּן, 2c [Hereafter *BDB*].

<sup>31</sup> This is cogently argued by Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), pp. 48-51; see also Gaffin, *The Centrality*, pp. 68-70, 89,

appointment of Jesus as the Son of God evidence that he is now the true Israel, the eschatological fulfillment of Old Covenant Israel's typological significance.<sup>32</sup>

Second, as is evident from the brief survey above, although sonship as a distinctive concept and relation does not originate at the inauguration of the Davidic covenant, it arguably does attain its most prominent place in Old Covenant redemptive history in the revelation associated with David and the era of the kingdom. The Davidic son has both the favor and authority of his divine Father. As we discovered in our analysis of Romans 1:1-4, Paul himself makes the Davidic connection with his reference to the Son being born "a descendent of David" (Rom. 1:3). In other New Testament passages Paul (especially the Lukan account of Paul's preaching, Acts 13:22-23; 32-34; but see also 2 Tim. 2:8) and others link Jesus as exalted Son of God with certain key Old Testament passages pertaining to the Davidic covenant (Matt. 1:1; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4; 3:23-41; Acts 2:30; Heb. 1:5; Rev. 5:5; 22:16). Therefore, the Davidic covenant seems like an appropriate place to begin our discussion of sonship in the Old Covenant.

### **The Davidic Seed as Royal Son**

*1 Sam. 7:13-16.* We have already noted in our brief survey above a connection between ruling and sonship (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps. 89:26-27). The Davidic Covenant makes that association explicit. The relevant passages are 2 Sam. 7:13-16, Ps. 2:1-12, Psalm 89:26-27. 2 Samuel 7 begins with the historical assessment that the king (David) dwelt securely in his house/palace (יָהִי כִּי־יָשֵׁב הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּבַיְתוֹ) because the Yahweh had given him rest from all his enemies. David, however, feels uneasy about this and tells Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house /palace of cedar [בְּבַיִת אֲרָזִים], but the ark of God dwells in a tent" (7:2). Nathan advises David to do all that is in his heart since Yahweh is with him. But the word of Yahweh comes to David

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p. 45.

in a dream instructing David that he is not the one to build the house. Rather, Yahweh will build David a house/palace (בַּיִת) through his seed (זָרַע, 7:12), which is explained as “I will establish his kingdom” (וְהָבִינֵתִי אֶת־מִמְלַכְתּוֹ). Furthermore, it will be the seed/son of David who will build the house/palace for the Name of Yahweh (v. 13) and Yahweh will thereby establish “the throne of his kingdom forever” (7:13b). All of this house-building and kingdom/throne-establishing for the “seed” of David is then summarized as “I will be his father, and he will be my son” (7:14a; cf. Heb. 1:8, “about the Son he says, ‘Your throne. . .’; 3:6, “But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house.”). Thus, it is the *seed* as *son* whose throne<sup>33</sup> and house/kingdom will be established forever (עַד־עוֹלָם, 7:16). Significantly, since earlier in Yahweh’s recounting of the history of his presence with Israel (7:5-11a), his central concern seems to have been to remind David that he has indeed “dwelt” and been “with” his people (7:9) even if it was by means of a mobile tabernacle (7:7) and rotating judges (7:11), from now on, however, his Name and presence will be mediated through the throne of his newly established “house” of David’s son. This is why, even though it is occupied by human rulers, the Davidic throne can be identified with the royal throne of Yahweh himself (1 Chron. 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chron. 9:8). When the son of David rules on earth, the reign of Yahweh is properly on earth.

There are many interesting details related to the interpretation of 1 Sam. 7:1-16 that we cannot pursue here. What we should note for our purposes is that many of the motifs that are central to Old Testament redemptive history—those dealing with kingship, kingdom, throne, house, house-building, seed, rest from enemies, and the covenantal promise that Yahweh will “be with” his people—these are all correlated here to the prophetic promise to David that his “seed” would be given the full rights of Sonship by Yahweh his Father. Which means that Yahweh promised to elevate David’s seed to reign upon the throne as son, thereby establishing

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<sup>33</sup> Where does the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews pick up the strong connection between sonship and the throne if not here in 1 Sam. 7? Quoting Psalm 45: 6-7 he says that

both his and David's house and kingdom forever. Even though provision is made by Yahweh for sinful human "sons" of David who would need to be "punished with the rod" when they misuse their new exalted status (7:14b), clearly the reader's expectations are heightened by Yahweh's use of front-end loaded words like "seed" and "kingdom" that hearken back to central covenantal promises of the past (Gen. 3:15; 9:9; 12:7; 13:15-16; 17:7-12; 22:17-18) as well language that cannot but point toward some definitive future fulfillment. The same can be said for certain passages from the prophets, such as Isaiah 9, which is connected with the promise of 2 Sam. 7:12-16 that David's offspring/son will reign on his throne and establish his kingdom: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'" (Isa. 9:6)

There is no reason to think that an Israelite reading these passages before there was access to the Holy Spirit-inspired apostolic interpretation would be able to decipher precisely how this would all work out (1 Pet. 1:10-12), but he surely would be encouraged that somehow, sometime in the future, one of David's sons, a seed from his own body (7:12), would establish Yahweh's kingdom forever.<sup>34</sup> We, of course, who have the benefit of hind-sight and the infallible apostolic witness know that these promises were indeed fulfilled when God raised up Jesus, the seed of David, to reign over a new house and kingdom forever (Acts 2:29-36; 13:32-41; 15:16; Rom. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 1:2, 5, 8; 2: 6:3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; Rev. 3:7; 5:5; 22:16; etc.).

*Psalm 2: 6-9.* In Psalm 2 we not only discover many of the same images from 2 Sam. 7, but the vision is greatly enriched. The Psalm is explicitly tied to 2 Samuel 7 by the Psalmist's

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Yahweh is speaking to the Son: "But of the Son he says, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom'" (Heb. 1:6).

<sup>34</sup> The LXX of 1 Sam. 7:12 might even be understood to link (lexically, at the very least) David's seed (σπέρμα) with the resurrection (ἀνίστημι): ἀναστήσω τὸ σπέρμα σου μετὰ σέ ὃς ἔσται ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας σου καὶ ἐτοιμάσω τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ.

description of the decree of Yahweh (חֹק יְהוָה) in v. 7. A comparison of 2 Sam. 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 reveals striking similarities:

בְּנֵי אֲתָהָ אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יְלִדְתִּיךָ (Psalm 2:7)

אֲנִי אֶדְבָּרְהֶם לְךָ לְאָב וְהוּא יְהַלְלֵנִי לְבֵן (2 Sam. 7:14)

The author of Hebrews makes the connection explicit, quoting both passages side by side: “For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’? And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son’? (Heb. 1:5). What we see, therefore in Psalm 2 is the conceptual connections we noted earlier in 2 Sam. 7 made explicit and even enlarged. “My Son” is “My king” (Ps. 2:6). Sonship entitles one to rule (Ps. 2:9). The establishment of Yahweh’s rule will be accomplished by means of the Son’s quelling of his enemies’ rebellious uprising (2:1-3), either by the exercise of his wrath or by the humble submission of the enemies (2:10-12). And again, we have the reign of Yahweh coordinated and implemented by the Son, so that by serving the Son one serves Yahweh (2:11-12). Yahweh is enthroned in heaven (2:4), but he mediates his rule by means of his Son, who is installed “on Zion, my holy hill” (2:6).<sup>35</sup> When the Son of David rules on Zion, the reign of Yahweh is properly on earth (1 Chron. 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chron. 9:8).

The Psalmists mention of Zion and Yahweh’s holy mountain is one example of the way he enlarges upon, or better, unpacks the relational/symbolic connections associated with the Davidic Son. Now we learn that the Son as King is installed on Zion, Yahweh’s holy mountain (עַל-צִיּוֹן הַר-קֹדֶשׁ). Of course, we knew from 1 Kings 7:1 and 9:10 that David’s son, Solomon, not only constructed a house/palace (בַּיִת/הַיְכָל) for Yahweh, but he also built a palace for himself adjacent to the Yahweh’s temple. These are often mentioned in tandem (e.g. 2 Kings

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<sup>35</sup> See excursus on “Psalm 2:6 and the time of the Son’s Installation”

23:14), because they were built side by side. The temple of Yahweh contained the ark of God which was his “footstool” (כִּסֵּאֵי יְהוָה, 1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; Lam. 2:1). He reigns from heaven but his presence or “dwelling place” is situated at his footstool, the ark in the temple (Ps. 132:7; Acts 7:49). Solomon’s house/palace also had a throne with a “golden” footstool (remember ark was covered with gold, 1 Chron. 28:18; Heb. 9:4) as well as two guardian lions which were poised over the footstool on the arm rests (2 Chron. 9:18), calling to mind the two Cherubim guardians covering the ark. All of this not only suggests once again the close connection between Yahweh’s house/throne and the Royal son of David’s, but the architectural imagery was no doubt striking in its symbolism. Yahweh’s heavenly throne’s footstool terminated in his earthly temple on Mt. Zion and right next to it on that same holy mountain was his son’s palace and throne. Architecturally, then, the son reigned at the right hand of Yahweh. Thus, when the old Mosaic symbolic world of the tabernacle was transfigured into the Davidic covenantal arrangement with the permanent, stone temple at its center, the new covenantal polity was made visible in the symbolic architecture of Yahweh’s temple and beside it the palace of the Davidic king.

The son of David, then, is the son of Yahweh’s right hand, and as such he is ruler (see Psalm 80:14, 17, where the “son” is the man at God’s right hand, who has been “strengthened” or “raised up” [piel of יָדָה]; cf. Jer. 22:24). The right hand is the position of power and rule (Ex. 15:6, 12; Ps. 20:6, and the many references in the Psalms to the security and deliverance found in the “right hand” of Yahweh). We might understand better now why Psalm 110 is associated with Psalm 2 in the minds of the Apostles as prophetic of the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus (Mark 16:19; Acts 22:33, 34; 5:33; 7:55; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22), and why even Jesus himself understood his coming exaltation as being a positioning at the right hand of his Father (Matt. 26:64; Mk. 14:62; Luke 22:26).

Moreover, the son at God’s right hand, is the son that will inherit the Father’s blessing (Gen. 48:13, 14, 17, 18, “And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father; for this one is the

first-born; put your right hand upon his head”). Which means that the Davidic son is also *inheritor*, according to Ps. 2:8 (“Ask of me, and I will give you the nations your inheritance [הַלְקָחַי], the ends of the earth your possession [הַיְקָחַי]”). Both of these Hebrew words are associated with “inheritance” — הַיְקָחַי typically with land and הַלְקָחַי also with land, but sometimes with persons (eg. Ps. 37:18; 74:2; 79:1; Isa. 19:25; Ez. 36:12; 44:28; Micah 7:14, 18) and other more intangible “possessions” like blessings, the family or tribal name, etc (Gen. 31:14; Num. 18:21-26; Ps. 127:3). In Psalm 2 the son is promised “the nations” and “the ends of the earth” for his inherited possession. Furthermore, in context these are the foreign powers aligned against Yahweh and his “anointed one” (Ps. 2:1-5). A more comprehensive vision can hardly be conceived. The Royal son gets all the nations and every square inch of land on earth. Such a conception of world dominion (Ps. 18:43-47; 72:8-11; 89:25), although not fully achieved by any Judahite king, is nevertheless not simply exaggeration, but remained “hidden” and prophetic of the reign of the Greater Son of David.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, Paul references the mission of the appointed Son of God as bringing about “the obedience of faith among all the nations/Gentiles” (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, Rom. 1:5), precisely what is said to be promised to the Son as his inheritance upon his enthronement in Psalm 2:8 (“the nations [גוֹיִם / LXX, ἔθνος] for your inheritance”). In the New Testament, the Son/Image of God is one who has the rights and inheritance of the Firstborn (Ex. 4:22; Ps. 89:27; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 1:5).<sup>37</sup>

Mention of the world-wide extent of the son of David’s rule also ties in with the original mandate and promise given to Adam, the son of God. Whatever else Adam’s being made in the “image and likeness” of God entailed, according to the context of Genesis 1:26, it involved “ruling” (הִרְבִּי) over all the earth. It is given to Adam as a mandate: “Let us make man in our

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<sup>36</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Continental Commentary*, trans. by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993 [German, 1978]), pp. 127-128.

image and let them rule [qal impf] over the . . . earth ” (1:26) and “Rule [qal imper.,] over the fish. . .” (1:28). In addition, we learn from Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 that being an image-bearer is linked to sonship. Man as the image of God means man is a son of God. The New Testament makes this clear when it brings the terms “son” and “image” together when it describes Christ.<sup>38</sup> And as we have seen, one function of being a son/image of God was dominion or ruling. Adam was created to rule over the entire earth as God’s son, his vicegerent. This was not to happen. Man fell.<sup>39</sup> What does this have to do with the Son of David? The two are connected by the phrases “the knowledge of good and evil” (הַדְּרֵעַת טוֹב וְרָע, Gen. 2:9, 17; 3:5) and “knowing good and evil” (יָדָעַי טוֹב וְרָע, Gen. 3:5). The phrase is not used very often in the Old Testament. In Deut. 1:39, 2 Sam. 19:35, and Isa. 7:15, 16 when one lacks the knowledge of good and evil it is evidence of childhood and immaturity, of the lack of discernment and inability to govern wisely. In 2 Sam. 19:35 Samuel complains that because he is 80 years old he can no longer “know good and evil [הָאֲדָרַע בֵּין־טוֹב לְרָע].” Old age makes one unfit for the discernment required for governing. All these references so far have concerned the ability to adjudicate and discern right from wrong, something essential for those who rule. The phrase, then, refers to what is foundational to governing, the competence to “judge between good and evil.” This would suggest that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was associated with mature judgment and rule. Satan’s challenge to Adam and Eve—that they upon eating from the tree they would be “like gods” (כְּאֱלֹהִים) is not entirely inaccurate since the title is often used in the Old Testament to refer to human rulers/judges (Ex. 21:6; 22:8, 9, 28; Ps.

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<sup>37</sup> See Hughs, *The True Image*, pp. 35-40.

<sup>38</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 24-35.

<sup>39</sup> See James B. Jordan’s insightful explanation of Adam’s mandate and fall in *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, NT: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, 1988), pp. 133-163.



58:1; Ps. 82: 6-7; cf. Jn. 10:34).<sup>40</sup> This is what a son needs to rule. According to 1 Kings 3:9 it is precisely what David’s son, Solomon, asks for when given the chance to request anything of Yahweh:

וְנָתַתָּ לְעִבְדְּךָ לֵב שֹׁמֵעַ לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת-עַמּוֹךְ  
 לְהִבְיִן בֵּין-טוֹב לְרָע כִּי מִי יוֹכַל לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת-עַמּוֹךְ

Solomon does not assume that he already possesses this discernment, but ask Yahweh to gift him with it. Once God grants Solomon’s appropriate, kingly request we immediately see him exercise his judicial wisdom (3:28). Solomon has been gifted with what Adam impatiently grasped for in Genesis 3. As the new son/image of Yahweh, he has been granted the wise discernment (“the knowledge of good and evil”) necessary to rule over men.

Furthermore, Solomon is presented as an Adamic king in the Bible. Just as Adam named the animals (Gen. 2:19-20) so also Solomon gained wisdom as he investigated the creation. “Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish” (1 Kings 4:33). The kingship of Solomon, in other words, was a fulfilment not only of the promises made to Abraham and Israel, but of God’s commission to Adam as well. Just so, Solomon, the son of David—indeed, as we have seen, son of Yahweh’s—becomes the typological model for the Greater Son of David’s rule as the Second Adam. Jesus is appointed Son of God with power when he is gifted with ruling over all of creation as man. “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation” (Col. 1:15). In fact, the scope of Jesus dominion is much greater than Solomon’s. It embraces the entire creation. Another reference to Jesus as the resurrected Lord who rules over all as the “second man” or Adam is 1 Cor. 15:20-57.<sup>41</sup> This passage, of

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<sup>40</sup> BDB, s.v. אֱלֹהִים, 1a.

<sup>41</sup> N. T. Wright, “Adam, Israel, and the Messiah,” in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), pp. 18-40.

course, has christological and soteriological significance that goes well beyond our narrow concerns here; nevertheless, royal sonship imagery is not peripheral to Paul's purpose (note the references to Christ's kingdom, 1 Cor. 15:24; his reign, 15:25; the vanquishing of his enemies, 15:27 [Ps. 110:1]; and the references to Jesus as the "last Adam," 15:45-49, whose "image" we shall all bear when we are "raised in power" like he has been, 15:43, 49).<sup>42</sup>

### **Conclusion**

What is new about the kingdom in the New Testament? When John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was "at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17), what did they mean? In what way was it only then "at hand"? What is the content of the Good News as it relates the kingdom of God? It is surely not simply that God rules. He has always ruled over his creation. The Old Testament proclaims that God is already king, not only of Israel (Judges 8:23; 1 Sam. 8:6; Ps. 99), but also of the whole earth (Ps. 22:28, 103:19; etc.). The preaching of the kingdom of God in the New Testament is not merely that God as God is King. There's nothing new about such a assertion. Rather, the newness of the kingdom in the New Testament has to do with the fact that now, since his resurrection and ascension the *man* Christ Jesus has become Lord . This is how the reign of God has arrived, according to the apostolic kerygma. The originally intended divine order for earth, with *man* properly situated as ruler at God's right hand has been accomplished in the installation of Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>43</sup> An examination of the Apostolic preaching bears this out. They did not simply proclaim Jesus to be the divine Son of God, but the *incarnate* Son of God, resurrected and exalted to the right hand of the Father *as man* for us. In every recorded sermon given to us by Luke in Acts, the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus as Lord occupies the

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<sup>42</sup> For an extended exposition of Jesus as the Last Adam see Peter Leithart, *The Kingdom and The Power: Recovering the Centrality of the Church* (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993), pp. 41-63.

<sup>43</sup> Dan G. McCartney, "Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 2. McCartney qualifies this

apex of Gospel's content (Acts 2: 21, 24, 32; 3:15, 22, 26; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30; 10:40; 13: 22, 30, 34, 37; 17:18, 32; 23:6; 24:21).

All of these typological/symbolic images (son, image, right hand, firstborn, kingdom, ruler, house-builder, etc.) coalesce in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the one appointed Son of God with power. Jesus has ascended to his throne as both the Son of David and the Last Adam. He fulfilled not only the prophetic promises about a Davidic king, but also God's plan for both Adam and Israel. He embodies, as the God-man, the Lord God's intentions for both Israel and mankind in general. "For all the promises of God are Yes! and Amen! in him" (2 Cor. 1:20).

Although it is true that Jesus is called "my Son" by God the Father at a number of points in his life and "son of God" by others (at his conception/birth [Luke 1:32, 35; 3:35, 38]; baptism [Mt. 3:17; Lk. 3:22]; transfiguration [Mk. 9:7; Luke 9:35]; crucifixion [Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39]; and with reference to his resurrection [Acts 13:33-34; Rom. 1:4]), nevertheless, it is not accurate to say, as Craige does, that "the coronation of Jesus took place throughout his ministry."<sup>44</sup> Such a mistake appears to be based once again on the error of thinking that "Son of God" is a technical term. This time, however, unlike the systematic theologians mentioned earlier who cannot but seem to read "son of God" without thinking "second person of the Trinity," Craige assumes that it always refers to Jesus Davidic kingship.

There are different senses, therefore, in which Jesus is called Son. He is the Son from eternity (Jn. 1:18), the Son from his conception and assumption our human nature (the Last Adam, Luke 1:35; 3:38), the Son at his baptism as he is anointed as Messiah and commissioned as the one who will first serve (Isa. 42:1), which service is consummated at his self-sacrificial death (Mk. 15:39), and finally, the Son of God with power at his resurrection, ascension, and enthronement when he is publicly invested with the fullness of Messianic authority (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:33-34; Rom. 1:4). By assigning the title "Son of God with power" to Jesus in Rom. 1:4 Paul

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by noting that Jesus enthronement "is not just a reinstatement of the original prelapsarian order, but the original order brought to fulfillment. It is an advance over the Adamic state" (p. 2, n.5).

designates him as the fulfillment and current bearer of Israel's servant-king role in the world. Although Israel was once gifted with all of the privileges and responsibilities of God's son(s) (Ex. 4:22, 23; Deut. 14:1; 32:6, 18; Jer. 31:9, 19; Hos. 11:1) and in her Davidic kings this royal status was individually embodied, nevertheless, all such filial arrangements are now, with the resurrection of Christ, shown to be provisional and typological.<sup>45</sup> Jesus has been appointed or installed as the "Son of God with power."

What is even more astonishing is that Jesus does not, so to speak, hold on to his Sonship for himself. The Spirit of the "Son" is the Spirit of adoption (Gal. 4:5), so that together with the Son as the "firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29) are the sons, who are "called to belong to him" and thereby "loved by God" (Rom. 1: 6-7; Gal. 4:7) and as such are "heirs" in union with him (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7). We are gifted with the privilege of sonship by grace only in union with the incarnate Son. The word υἱός is used 12 times in Romans (1:3, 4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 14, 19, 29, 32; 9:9, 26, 27), which is by far the largest number of references to Jesus sonship in any of Paul's epistles. Moreover, the distribution of references to sonship, both Jesus' and the Christian's, reveal two clusters—one in Paul's introduction, where he summarizes the basic kerygmatic content of the Gospel (Rom. 1:1-17) and the other in Romans 8 (vss. 3, 14, 19, 29, 32), where our sonship is particularly in view.

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<sup>44</sup> Craige, *Psalms 1-50*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 69.

<sup>45</sup> ". . . Paul syntax in all these references communicates a sui generis status for Jesus, distinguishing him from any others to whom divine-sonship language might be applied (e.g., the pious Israelites generally, angels, holy men). In the biblical and Jewish traditions of the time (the revered traditions Paul drew upon and refashioned in his ministry), sonship to God means God's favor and approval (upon the pious/Israel), and/or God's authority (e.g., upon the Davidic king as in Ps. 2). Thus the force of Paul's phrasing seems to claim for Jesus a unique favor, approval, and authority. . . . The 'Son' here is God's unique agent, whose significance is set within the context of God's purposes" (Hurtado, "Jesus' Divine Sonship," p. 225).

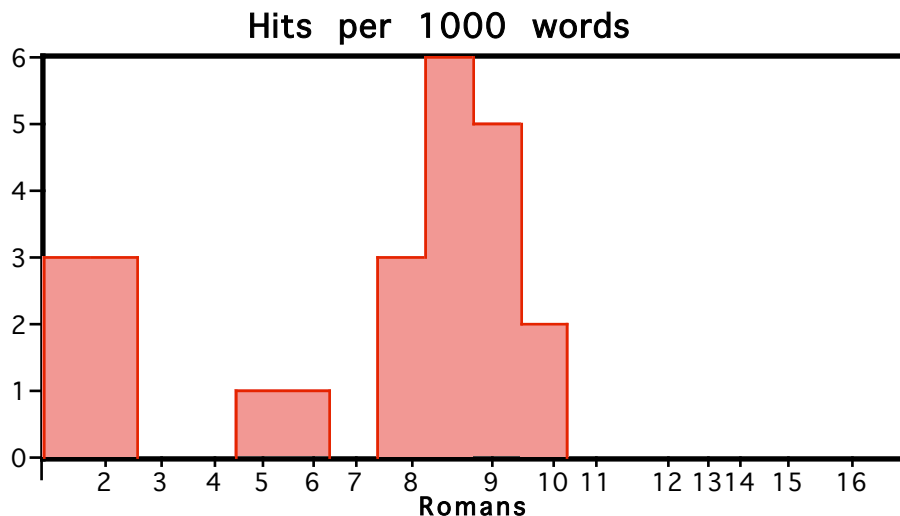


Chart #1 Frequency & Occurrence of Υἱός in Romans.

Understanding the content of these two sections of Romans, will lead to the conclusion that Jesus is now, since his resurrection and ascension, the incarnate Son of God with power and that he has been invested with this status and title, not simply for himself, but for his people. This is already anticipated in Rom. 1:6-7, where those who have been called to the “obedience of faith” are correspondingly called “to belong to Jesus Christ” (1:6) and are thereby “loved by God [the Father]” (1:7). But it is filled out significantly in Romans 8 as believers, both Jews and Gentiles, are described as “sons of God” (8:14, 19), indeed, they have “been predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn [πρωτότοκος] among many brethren” (8:29).<sup>46</sup> This firstborn status constitutes them as “heirs”(κληρονόμοι) even “heirs of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ” (8:17). All of the benefits of sonship belong to

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<sup>46</sup> According to Revelation 2:25-27, believers participate in more than just the “ordinary” benefits of being firstborn inheritors; they also reign with Christ in a striking way. What is truly astonishing is that Jesus himself promises what might be thought to apply exclusively to himself (ruling the nations with “a rod of iron,” Ps. 2:9) to the believer that overcomes: “But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ —as I also have received from My Father” (Rev. 2:25-27).

Christians in union with Christ. Thus, what Jesus has attained as the “Son of God with power” has been accomplished *pro nobis*.

## Excursus

### Psalm 2:6-7 and the Time of the Son's Installation

When does the Psalmist envision this “installation” (תִּקְּוֶה) and to occur (Ps. 2:6)? In the light of traditional interpretations of this passage, at least since Augustine, we might better ask if the Psalmist envisioned a “when” at all. Augustine understood “You are my son, this day I have begotten you” (Ps. 2:7b) as a reference to eternal generation:

It is possible to see in the word *today* a prophecy of the day on which Jesus Christ was born in his human nature. Yet as the word *today* denotes the actual present, and as in eternity nothing is past as if it had ceased to be, nor future as if it had not yet come to pass, but all is simply present, since whatever is eternal is ever in being, the words *Today I have begotten thee* are to be understood of the divine generation. In this phrase, orthodox Catholic belief proclaims the eternal generation of the Power and Wisdom of God who is the only begotten Son.<sup>47</sup>

Augustine's thought appears to be constrained by polemical and systematic theological concerns. Apparently, he cannot abide the possibility that Jesus might *become* the Son of God in any sense at a given point in history. The “today” of Ps. 2:7b must be a figure for eternity if the orthodox Catholic faith is to be defended. Although he mentions the possibility that “today” might be prophetic of Jesus birth, it never entered his mind to consider the linkage between the promise of kingship and rule in this passage and the historical event of the resurrection and ascension of the seed of David, Jesus Christ, to his heavenly throne as Lord. At his birth Jesus did not yet sit on the throne of his father David (“He *will be* great, and *will be* called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God *will give* Him the throne of His father David” [Luke 1:32]). And Peter preaching on the text of Psalm 16, announces that Jesus sat down on this throne at a particular point in time (“Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit

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<sup>47</sup> *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, trans. and annotated by Dame Scholastica Hebgin and Dame Felicitas Corrigan, vol. 1, Psalms 1-29 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1960), p. 27.

on his throne” [Acts. 2:30]). Augustine’s motivations are noble, but he fails to consider the elevation of the Jesus *as man* to reign as Lord over all as the event prophesied in Psalm 2:6-7.

The popular scholarly controversy concerning what role, if any, Psalm 2 played in the coronation ceremonies of particular Davidic kings in the history of Israel is not directly relevant to our purpose in this essay. As far as the New Testament is concerned, whatever sense the various historical kings in the line of David were considered “sons” and whether they were called such at their individual coronation ceremonies (if there were such) is transcended by the installation of the last and definitive Son of David’s appointment as the Son of God with power. Whether this Psalm was used as part of a coronation liturgy in the Temple (as Craige and others suggest) makes no great difference to the substance of my thesis. If it was, then the repetition of the ritual would simply have embodied the typological-prophetic element in Judah’s liturgical texts. Even if one believes that these “enthronement Psalms” were used in the liturgy of the installation of the successive kings in David’s dynasty, one need not follow Mowinckel’s eradication of any eschatological element in them, seeing that his denial rests on a faulty *religionsgeschichtliche* reconstruction of the evolutionary development of Israel’s religion.<sup>48</sup>

Interestingly, in addition to Psalm 2:6, Prov. 8:23 is the only other place in the Old Testament where the verb **נָדַב** appears to mean “install” and not “pour out” (over 70 times) or “weave” (Isa. 25:7). This might suggest a connection between the two passages, especially since both have a long history of being interpreted christologically—Psalm 2 in the New Testament Scriptures and Proverbs 8 by the post-Apostolic early church in her controversies over Arianism. Whether one believes that Proverbs 8:23 impacts on what is referred to in Psalm 2:6-7 will depend upon one’s interpretation of Proverbs 8:22-23, specifically, whether “wisdom” refers to Second person of the Godhead, the eternal Son of God. If one follows “early Church orthodoxy” and understands Proverbs 8:22-31 as describing the “eternal generation” of the Son as the

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<sup>48</sup> See the helpful discussion by Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), pp. 440-447.



Wisdom of God the Father, then one might be tempted to read the “installation” and “decree” of “my son” in Psalm 2:6-7 as ontological statements about the Son’s eternal relations with the Father.

Moreover, because of the highly charged nature of these trinitarian and christological debates, those who argue that Psalm 2 refers to a defining historical event in the life of the Messiah (that is, the resurrection/ascension of the Son as man) are likely to have their orthodox credentials questioned. This need not be. First, the eternal filial relation of the Son to the Father does not rest upon either of these OT passages. In fact, it need not be positively presented in the OT at all. As I have already argued, sufficient warrant exists in many NT passages for the orthodox doctrine of the “eternal generation” or “eternal sonship” of the Son in relation to God the Father. Furthermore, I don’t believe that Prov. 8:22-33 has much, if anything, to say about the Son’s eternal relations with the Father. Wisdom is a *lady* in Proverbs. This much is clear from the context immediately preceding Prov. 8:22-23: “Does not wisdom cry out, And understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, Beside the way, where the paths meet” (Prov. 8:1-2). And Prov. 9:1 continues with “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars.” Indeed, even in the extended poetic description of wisdom’s role in, and relation to, Yahweh’s creative activity, the feminine metaphor is not absent. In Prov. 8:30-31 wisdom says

Then I was at his side as a master craftsman;  
And I was daily his delight,  
Rejoicing always before him,  
Rejoicing in his inhabited world,  
And my delight was with the sons of men (Prov. 8:30-31).

That wisdom would be at Yahweh’s “side” (יְצַדֵּק) as he created, helping and advising, is exactly the role of the wise woman/wife beside her husband . Eve is built up out of the side (צַדָּע, Gen. 2:21) of Adam and then brought back along side of him as a “suitable helper.” Adam

was to have delighted in her wise counsel as his queen (Esth. 5:2; Ps. 45:9). The fact that she advised him foolishly in Genesis 3 only illustrates the disorder and confusion brought about by the fall. These, then, are a few of the reasons that I don't believe Prov. 8:22-23 helps us interpret the "timing" of the installation of the Son in Psalm 2:6.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "If one remembers, moreover, that Wisdom in the passages quoted is a personification, while Christ is the divine person himself, not the means or the Mediator God employs, and that no connection between Wisdom on the one hand and the Messiah on the other can be shown either in the Jews or in Paul, then it is surely evident that Col. 1:15ff. very definitely cannot be understood as a christological interpretation of Wisdom." (Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 79).