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“You Are My Beloved Son”: The Foundations of a “Son of God” Christology in the Second Psalm

Christopher A. Maronde

That the authors of the New Testament received the Psalter as a book about Christ requires little argument. By one count, there are 196 different citations of the psalms in the New Testament, from 35 different psalms—a number which does not contain the numerous allusions to the Psalter.¹ While these citations include direct messianic prophecies which the New Testament authors applied to Jesus of Nazareth, the broader interpretation of the Psalter proved to be vital to the development of New Testament theology in general and Christology in particular. As Richard Bauckham asserts, “Early Christian theology, like other Jewish theology of the period, proceeded primarily by exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures.”² Central to the expressions of Christology found in the New Testament documents are two psalms in particular, Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Jesus himself uses Psalm 110 in the Gospels to argue for the divinity of the Messiah, who is David’s son according to the flesh, yet David’s Lord (Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42–43). This psalm is also utilized throughout the New Testament to assert Jesus’ divinity and particularly in Hebrews 5–7 to argue for his possession of the “priesthood of Melchizedek.”³ While never found on the lips of Jesus, Psalm 2 holds a similarly high place in the Christology of the New Testament, and in several texts, as discussed below, it is linked directly with Psalm 110. These two “royal” psalms are thus pillars of New Testament Christology.

There are four direct citations of Psalm 2 in the New Testament, found in both Acts (4:25–26; 13:32–33) and Hebrews (1:5; 5:5), and numerous allusions have been posited, both in the synoptic accounts of Jesus’ Baptism (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke

¹ William Lee Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 115.

² Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 21.

³ The definitive study of Psalm 110 in the New Testament remains David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1973).

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3:22) and transfiguration (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; 2 Pet 1:17), as well as in Revelation (2:27; 11:18; 12:5; 19:15). Each of these citations and allusions holds christological implications, but most notable in this regard is the presumed use of Psalm 2:7 as one of the texts in the background of the voice from heaven in the accounts of Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration. The next step for some is to connect the voice from heaven, Psalm 2:7, or both to the title "Son of God."⁴ If Psalm 2:7, through its use by the voice from heaven, is one of the primary sources of this vitally important title, then the place of Psalm 2 in the theology of the New Testament should not be understated.

What is that place? A number of scholars claim that the theological understanding of Christ's death and exaltation, and even the very narrative structure of the retelling of those events in the Gospels or in early Christian preaching, is dependent upon Psalm 2. Mary Huie-Jolly argues that the "divine warrior myth," as embodied in Psalm 2, where the king is enthroned in response to threats, is a major theme in early Christian preaching and perhaps even helps to form the structure of the Passion Narratives themselves.⁵ A number of authors similarly connect the "narrative" of Psalm 2 with the passion accounts of the Gospels.⁶ Steven Nash joins these ideas to a canonical argument, positing that the New Testament uses Psalm 2 conscious of its place as an introduction to the Psalter as a whole. Therefore, the New Testament authors use Psalm 2 to read the entire Psalter as messianic. More specifically, he asserts that New Testament authors desire us to view the Psalter's pattern of the rejected and suffering, yet enthroned, king as referring to Christ. Psalm 2, then, acts as a kind of "hermeneutical bridge" to the lament psalms.⁷ Neither Huie-Jolly nor Nash apply their theses directly to the Baptism or

⁴ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2016), 47–49; Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 103, 362.

⁵ Mary R. Huie-Jolly, "Threats Answered by Enthronement: Death/Resurrection and the Divine Warrior Myth in John 5.17–29, Psalm 2 and Daniel 7," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 193–194, 200.

⁶ To see this argument made with regard to Matthew, see Tucker Ferda, "Matthew's *Titulus* and Psalm 2's King on Mount Zion," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 3 (2014): 561–581; for a similar argument with regard to Luke, see Wilhelmus Weren, "Psalm 2 in Luke-Acts: An Intertextual Study," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1989), 189–203; for the same kind of argument made with regard to the extra-canonical *Gospel of Peter*, see John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁷ Steven B. Nash, "Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel," in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality, 2: Exegetical Studies*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 86, 102.

transfiguration of Jesus, as they each work with Johannine texts. Nash does, however, assert in a footnote that Psalm 2:7 is alluded to at Jesus' Baptism, "providing the literary and theological basis for the title 'Son of God' in the Synoptic Gospels."⁸

While the assertion that Psalm 2:7 (among other texts) stands in the background of declaration of the voice from heaven is nearly universal, the significance of a reference to Psalm 2 in this context has rarely been explored. The investigations cited above have hinted that the theological and "narrative" structure of Psalm 2 may be vitally important to the New Testament's proclamation of Jesus' death and exaltation. They have, however, limited their work to certain books. This current study intends to look more broadly, examining the explicit usage of Psalm 2 (allusions will be dealt with as well, but the focus will be on the more explicit citations) throughout the New Testament. If this psalm lies behind the declarations from heaven at Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration and thus the title "Son of God" (and both points need to be argued rather than simply asserted), then an understanding of how the entire psalm is used in the New Testament will help to understand the significance of this declaration *and* title. If Psalm 2 is the background for both the voice from heaven and the title "Son of God," what does this mean for the Christology of the New Testament? What does Psalm 2 specifically teach us about Christ? How does the New Testament's other uses of Psalm 2 shed light upon its use in the baptismal and transfiguration accounts?

This study argues that the divine voice from heaven at both Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration draws directly from Psalm 2:7, joining it to several other texts in a rich christological declaration. This is more than the use of a text with language convenient to indicate that the eschatological messianic king, who is thus identified with Jesus of Nazareth, is more than a mere human, but truly (according to substance and nature) God's Son. Psalm 2 provided more than a place to find a title. Instead, the evidence from the entirety of the New Testament's use of Psalm 2 indicates that the voice from heaven utilized the language of Psalm 2:7 because of the theology and "narrative" structure of the psalm as a whole. Connected to this, Psalm 2 had such importance because of its canonical place as the introduction to the Psalter's royal/messianic theology to interpret the enthronement of Jesus as coming only after opposition and suffering.⁹ This deeper theological matrix for understanding Jesus stands behind every citation and allusion to Psalm 2, particularly at Jesus' Baptism. Further, if the "Son of God" title is rooted in the declaration of the Father's voice from heaven, and if that declaration is rooted in

⁸ Nash, "Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel," 92n.

⁹ Nash, "Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel," 86.

Psalm 2, then this title is a royal title, indicating the Psalter's rejected but enthroned king, who passes through suffering and opposition to his glorification. Psalm 2 is thus the key which links together the "Son of God" with a royal Christology that particularly manifests itself at the cross. Portions of Psalm 2 are invoked to set a framework for understanding how the one declared at the river and on the mountain to be God's "Son" will be opposed, then exalted.

Nash provocatively asks, but only partially answers, this question: "Is it coincidental that [Psalm 2], which was arguably purposely placed at the beginning of the Psalter, is evoked near the beginning of all four Gospels, as it is at the beginning of Hebrews?"¹⁰ This study will assert that it is no coincidence, but an indication that the entirety of Psalm 2, not only certain verses, helps shape the New Testament's understanding and proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, declared by the voice from heaven to be God's beloved Son.

Psalm 2

In the ancient near East, the succession of a new king to the throne was often the opportunity for both vassal states and external enemies to attack a kingdom at a vulnerable time.¹¹ While the nations gather around YHWH's nation, YHWH himself installs his "anointed," who tells his enemies what was told to him, namely that he is God's "son." This king is given authority over the nations who opposed them, and the psalm concludes with a call for the enemies to render homage to YHWH's king. Scholars have long noted the connection between Psalm 2 and Nathan's prophecy to David in 2 Samuel 7:14.¹² In that text, the prophet Nathan delivers to David a promise concerning his son and successor.

(12) When your days are completed and you lie with your fathers, and your offspring arises after you which go out from your loins and I will establish his kingdom, (13) he will build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (14) I will be for him a father and he will be for me a son [ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν]; when he goes astray, I will discipline him with the rod [טַבַּתְּךָ] of men and with the blows of the sons of men. (15) My steadfast love will not depart from him like I departed from Saul whom I turned away from before you. (16) And your house and your

¹⁰ Nash, "Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel," 92.

¹¹ Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years*, 115.

¹² Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years*, 23. Holladay even theorizes, based on the linkage between the two texts, that Psalm 2 was sung by Nathan at David's own coronation.

kingdom will be established forever before you, your throne will be established forever.¹³

The father-son language applied to YHWH and David’s son, here specifically his son Solomon, is connected with Israel’s king in Psalm 2. Regardless of whether Psalm 2 was composed before 2 Samuel 7 or not, the presumption of the Psalter is the Davidic monarchy (Ps 89:3–4; 132:11–12), and thus this text, in its current canonical position, can be considered the application of the promise given to David by Nathan to every subsequent Davidic king, culminating with the eschatological Messiah.¹⁴

- (1) Why do the nations [גוֹיִם] conspire,
and the people plot vainly?
- (2) The kings of the earth stand
and the rulers take council together
against YHWH and against his Messiah [יְהוָה וְכַרְמֵל/χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ].
- (3) Let us burst their bonds
and let us send away from us their ropes.
- (4) The one dwelling in the heavens laughs
Adonai [κύριος] mocks them.
- (5) Then he will speak to them in his anger
and in his wrath he will terrify them.
- (6) And I have set/consecrated [יָרַדְתִּי/κατεστάθην] my king
upon Zion my holy mountain.
- (7) I will recount the decree [LXX adds κυρίου],
YHWH says to me, “My son you are [υἱός μου εἶ σύ], I this day beget you.”
- (8) Ask from me, and I will give the nations [גוֹיִם] your inheritance
and your property the ends of the earth.
- (9) You will smash [LXX ποιμανεῖς] them with a rod [בַּשֶּׁבֶט]¹⁵ of iron
like the vessel of the potter you will shatter them.
- (10) And now kings, be wise,

¹³ All Scripture quotations are the author’s translation.

¹⁴ Eric Mason briefly summarizes the position that Psalm 2 was used at the coronation of the Davidic monarchs or at an annual “enthronement ritual.” See Eric Farrel Mason, “Interpretation of Psalm 2 in 4QFlorilegium and in the New Testament,” in *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2009), 69.

¹⁵ The same Hebrew word for “rod,” בַּשֶּׁבֶט, is found in the messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17, where it is commonly understood as the king’s scepter (the LXX translates שבט in Ps 2:9 as ῥάβδος, in Num 24:17 as ἄνθρωπος), providing a link to the messianic theology of the Old Testament.

be instructed, judges of the earth.

(11) Serve YHWH in fear
and tremble in fright.

(12) Kiss the son [בֵּר / παιδείας],

lest he [LXX adds κύριος] will be angry and you perish on the way
because his anger burns quickly.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him!

Several points should be noted. First, there is a close connection throughout the text between YHWH and his king. Verse 2 links them together as the common enemy of the kings of the earth, and in verse 3, the bonds are “their” bonds. The use of the possessive pronoun also emphasizes that this king is “my” king, in other words, intimately tied up with YHWH. In Psalm 2, YHWH’s own reign cannot be separated from the reign of the anointed king.¹⁶ Second, there is in this psalm a convergence of three titles: “anointed one,” “king,” and “son.” However, in verse 12, there is not a repetition of υἱός, but instead παιδείας is found, a translation of the Hebrew בֵּר. The LXX thus reads, “seize discipline,” and the MT, “kiss the son.”¹⁷ Antecedents for the language of “son” have been sought in Egyptian enthronement rituals, but it more likely has its roots in the Old Testament itself.¹⁸ The nation is called God’s “son” (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Hos 11:1) as well as “angels” (Gen 6:2–4; cf. Ps 29:1). Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7:14 are the most significant texts where the king is called “son,” although the language of “firstborn” for the Davidic king in Psalm 89:26–27 can be directly tied to Psalm 2. Third, the “narrative structure” of Psalm 2 should be noted. The rulers of the earth are set in battle against both YHWH and his anointed king. YHWH responds by declaring that his king has been enthroned upon Zion. The king himself recounts what God has said of and to him—namely, his identity as YHWH’s “son” and his commission to rule over his enemies. Finally, those enemies are warned and exhorted to be obedient to that “son.” Thus, opposition to YHWH and his king leads to enthronement and the declaration that the king is God’s “son.” The anointed king is then given authority to rule over those same kings who had opposed him, and those rulers are called upon to give obedience to the “son.” The pattern is opposition by the enemies—enthronement of the “son”—subservience of the enemies.

¹⁶ Nash, “Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel,” 90.

¹⁷ For a discussion of this difficult verse and Luther’s own solution (following the MT against the LXX and the Vulgate), see Brian German, “Sola Scriptura in Luther’s Translations,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2018): 201–204.

¹⁸ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 103; Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 21–23.

The Function of Psalm 2 in the Psalter

In the wake of form criticism’s search for the (usually cultic) setting of each individual psalm¹⁹ has come a renewed interest in the structure of the Psalter as a whole.²⁰ Replacing the relation of individual psalms to one another on the basis of genre is a focus on seeing how the psalms relate to one another in their present canonical position.²¹ Where does Psalm 2 potentially fit in such a schema? Patrick Miller has noted that Psalm 2 appears to be joined together with Psalm 1 in an intimate way.²² First, Psalm 2 lacks a superscription. While the superscriptions are viewed with suspicion by many commentators as to their historical accuracy, their use in the editing of the Psalter is more universally accepted. The lack of a superscription between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 may indicate that they were to be understood as one unit. There is also a verbal *inclusio* that surrounds the two psalms in the use of the verb בִּשְׂאָה, “blessed.” This is the first word of the Psalter, and it begins the concluding phrase of Psalm 2. Finally, there is evidence in rabbinic sources that the first two psalms were combined together, a tradition perhaps reflected in the textual history of Acts 13:33.²³

The theological linkage between the two may be even more significant. If Psalm 1 asserts a theology, the theology of the “two ways,” then Psalm 2 introduces a figure, the king. He is explicitly identified as the “anointed one,” and we see him exalted yet challenged. YHWH asserts that his king has been set on the hill, yet enemies gather around him. In the midst of this opposition, the king reminds his enemies of the promise given to him, and the psalm concludes with a call to be obedient to the king, the son. This is the pattern of the lament psalms: the assertion of God’s promises is challenged by suffering, but the one praying clings to the word declared by God, and deliverance is promised. Thus, Psalm 2 already indicates opposition to the one who follows Psalm 1’s way of the righteous, a challenge with which the psalms of lament will wrestle. Psalm 2 also moves from the abstract theology of Psalm 1 to a much

¹⁹ The fountainhead of this effort was Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. Joachim Begrich (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Brevard Childs suggested this more canonical approach, but others carried it forward, applying it to the Psalter. See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 505–525; J. Clinton McCann, *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1993); Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985).

²¹ Nash, “Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel,” 90. Nash puts it well: “It can be argued that in the Psalter we have not only a collection of canonical psalms, but a canonical collection of psalms.”

²² Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 87.

²³ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 585. See below, p. 26.

more concrete “narrative,” and a figure, a character, who inhabits that narrative. Psalm 1 opens the Psalter with a beatitude for the one who follows the way of the righteous, while Psalm 2 closes with a beatitude for the one who takes refuge in God’s “son,” the anointed king. It is perhaps the voice of this king that we are to hear throughout the Psalter. Psalm 2 thus indicates that the Psalter’s righteous sufferer and enthroned king are the same figure, and that all who put their trust in him are “blessed,” unlike the opposing nations, which will be destroyed. Both figures are of course associated with David, and the New Testament associates both with Jesus.²⁴

Psalm 2 in Second-Temple Judaism

For many decades, biblical scholarship asserted that the language of “son” was not used for the eschatological Messiah in Jewish literature. Targumim could be cited that expended considerable effort to distance texts such as 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 from literal sonship, claiming that the designation was simply a figure of speech. As with many other assumptions in biblical scholarship, this one was challenged with the discoveries at Qumran.²⁵ Among the texts discovered in cave 4 was a fragment, 4Q174 (4QFlor).²⁶ This fragment is a midrash on 2 Samuel 7:14, followed by a broken-off midrash on Psalms 1–2. The connection between 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2 is thus strengthened in this fragment, although it is debated what relationship the author intended there to be between the two texts.²⁷ The text is concerned with interpreting Nathan’s promises to David as eschatological and messianic.

Fragments 1–2 and 21, Column 1

(11) “**I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.**” He (is) the Shoot of David who will arise with the interpreter of the Torah who

²⁴ As one example, see the use of Psalm 22 in Matthew 27:46 juxtaposed in the Passion Narrative with the ironic use of the title “king” in 27:11, 29, 37.

²⁵ For a brief recounting of this history of interpretation, see Donald H. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 78.

²⁶ For the background of 4QFlor, see James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 6B, Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 248–263. All translations of 4QFlor are from this volume.

²⁷ John J. Collins, “The Interpretation of Psalm 2,” in *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 49–66.

(12) [...] in Zi[on in the] latter days, as it is written, **And I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen.** He (is) the booth of

(13) David that is falle[n w]ho will arise to save Israel.²⁸

While the fragmentary nature of 4QFlor makes interpretation controversial, this text indicates that Nathan’s prophecy was interpreted as messianic before the New Testament and that the father-son imagery was similarly interpreted.²⁹ The “son” of 2 Samuel 7 is identified as the Shoot of David who will appear in the latter days to “save Israel.” However, whether this understanding of 2 Samuel 7 has any bearing on the interpretation of Psalm 2:7 is more tenuous.

Only Psalm 2:1–2 is cited in 4QFlor, and when the interpretation of that section is considered, it appears that the author has moved from an interpretation of the Messiah as an individual in his discussion of 2 Samuel 7 to the Messiah as a corporate reality in Psalm 2.

Fragments 1–2 and 21, Column 1

(18) [Why] do the nations [rag]e and the peoples plo[t in vain? Kings of the earth r]ise up [and r]egents intrigue together against Yahweh and against

(19) [his anointed. The in]terpretation of the passage[...nati]ons and the [...] the chosen ones of Israel in the latter days.³⁰

Fragments 1 and 3, Column 2

(1) This (is) the time of refining com[ing on the house of]Judah to perfect [...]

(2) Belial and a remnant of [the peo]ple of [Isra]el will remain and they will observe the entire Torah [...]

(3) Moses.³¹

It is clear that the declarations made to the messianic king as an individual in Psalm 2 are interpreted by the 4QFlor as collective, that is, as applying to the community as a whole.³² God’s people as a whole, not the Messiah as an individual, are those

²⁸ Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 253.

²⁹ Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 67–68.

³⁰ Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 253.

³¹ Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 255.

³² Mason, “Interpretation of Psalm 2 in 4QFlorilegium and in the New Testament,” 78–80; Tze-Ming Quek, “I Will Give Authority over the Nations’: Psalm 2.8–9 in Revelation 2.26–27,” in

who are opposed in the latter days. Despite this, John Collins still argues that the juxtaposition of the two texts in this fragment is no accident, especially with the common language of “son” in both, and that even if “Messiah” is interpreted collectively when discussing Psalm 2:1–2, the concept of the Messiah as God’s Son could be drawn from both texts.³³

Occasionally mentioned³⁴ but rarely discussed as an antecedent to the New Testament use of Psalm 2 (a contrast with the extensive use of 4QFlor³⁵) is the first-century BC document the *Psalms of Solomon*.³⁶ This collection, dated at the end of the first century BC, describes in vivid terms both the conquest of Judea by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BC (*Psalms of Solomon* 2 and 8) and the siege of Jerusalem by Herod the Great in 37 BC (*Psalms of Solomon* 17).³⁷ The seventeenth of these psalms contains a messianic theology shaped in part by Psalm 2, and is one of the most developed messianic texts prior to the New Testament.³⁸ This psalm declares first that YHWH is himself the king of his people, then discusses the political situation, which in the eyes of the author was quite dire. The non-Davidic Hasmonean kings are declared illegitimate and wicked, and therefore must be eliminated. To do so, God sends a foreigner, who slaughters the Hasmoneans but whose wickedness is evident. The author then pleads for God to send a legitimate Davidic king, and as part of this plea, utilizes the language of Psalm 2:

(21) Look, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, a son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time that you know, O God. (22) Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from the Gentiles who trample her down to destruction. (23) In wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance, **to smash** [ἐκτριψαί (Psalm 2:9 συντριψείς)] the arrogance of sinners **like a potter’s jar** [ὡς σκεύη

Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality, 2: Exegetical Studies, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 178–183.

³³ Collins, “The Interpretation of Psalm 2,” 66.

³⁴ Quek, “I Will Give Authority over the Nations,” 186; Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 128, 552, 585, 926.

³⁵ Joseph Trafton bemoans the lack of interest in the *Psalms of Solomon* and surmises that the discoveries at Qumran played a significant role in overshadowing this important document. See Joseph L. Trafton, “What Would David Do? Messianic Expectation and Surprise in Ps. Sol. 17,” in *The Psalms of Solomon: Language, History, Theology*, ed. Eberhard Bons and Patrick Pouchelle (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, 2015), 156–158.

³⁶ The translation of the *Psalms of Solomon* that will be utilized in this section is that of Robert B. Wright, *The Psalms of Solomon: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

³⁷ Wright, *The Psalms of Solomon*, 6.

³⁸ Wright, *The Psalms of Solomon*, 1.

(Psalm 2:9 *σκεῦος κεραμέως*); (24) to demolish [*συντριψαι*] all their resources with an iron rod [*ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ*]; to destroy the lawbreaking Gentiles with the word of his mouth; (25) to scatter the Gentiles from his presence at his threat; to condemn sinners by their own conscience.³⁹

This is not a direct citation, but a use of the language of Psalm 2:9 to describe the Davidic king’s actions against the enemies of God’s people (similar to what will be observed below with regard to the book of Revelation). Scholars have noted how the “rod of iron” of Psalm 2 has been combined with the “word of his mouth” from Isaiah 11:4 LXX. It should be noted that the MT of Isaiah 11:4 has instead the same word as Psalm 2:9, *טִבַּשׁ*, “rod.”⁴⁰ The Messiah will violently overthrow his enemies, destroying them both with the word of his mouth and the rod of iron.⁴¹

Psalms of Solomon 17 has a strong polemical edge against Herod the Great, calling the king “a man alien to our race” (17:7) and the “lawless one” (17:11).⁴² The legitimate king is both YHWH, whose ultimate kingship forms an antiphonal frame for the psalm (17:1, 46; see also 17:34), and the Davidic king. This individual is often called the “king,” and the “son of David,” but one of the more interesting titles given is “Lord Messiah [*χριστὸς κύριος*]” (17:32).⁴³ Other striking features of this figure include the assertion that “he himself will be free [*καθαρός*] from sin” (17:36), and that “God will make him powerful by a holy spirit [*ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ*]” (17:37). The Messiah of *Psalms of Solomon* 17 thus has several critical characteristics: he is descended from David, cleansed from sin, anointed by God, and given the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ He is intimately tied to YHWH, as the title “Lord Messiah” indicates, however it is interpreted. The entire psalm strikes a very militaristic and anti-Gentile tone, portraying the Messiah as one who will violently expel the enemies of God’s people.⁴⁵ The application of Psalm 2 is a vitally important part of this militaristic,

³⁹ Wright, *The Psalms of Solomon*, 187–189.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Atkinson, *An Intertextual Study of the Psalms of Solomon: Pseudepigrapha* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2001), 347–348.

⁴¹ Kenneth Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord: A Study of the Psalms of Solomon’s Historical Background and Social Setting* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2004), 142–143.

⁴² Wright, *The Psalms of Solomon*, 6. Contra Wright, Atkinson argues that Pompey is in view here. See Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 135–136.

⁴³ The interpretation of this phrase is a crux in *Psalms of Solomon* scholarship. Many believe that the title should be *χριστός κυρίου*, “the Messiah of the Lord,” and that the title found in every Greek manuscript is an error introduced by Christian scribes. For a summary of the state of the question, see Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 131–132. The possibility that the title could represent the application of the divine name to the Messiah seems to be dismissed out of hand.

⁴⁴ Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 140.

⁴⁵ Atkinson, *An Intertextual Study of the Psalms of Solomon*, 334.

violent portrayal of the Messiah.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the Messiah is described as bringing an end to war and even being merciful to Gentiles (17:33–34).

In the literature of Second Temple Judaism, the imagery of Psalm 2 and even the language of God's "son" from 2 Samuel 7 is clearly used to describe the coming of a messianic figure who will cast away the enemies of God's people. He is undeniably royal, associated with the Davidic dynasty, and *Psalms of Solomon* 17 may even indicate that this figure is more than a mere human. When the New Testament authors grapple with the identity and work of Jesus of Nazareth, it is probable that they, too, will turn to Psalm 2, carrying forth the same themes.

Psalm 2 in the New Testament

In the canonical structure of the New Testament, the first explicit quotation of Psalm 2 comes in Acts 4:

(25) Our father David your servant [*παῖδός σου*] through the mouth of the Holy Spirit was saying, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot vainly? (26) The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers gathered together upon it against the Lord and against his Christ." (27) For truly they gathered together in this city against your holy servant [*ἅγιον Παῖδά σου*] Jesus whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel.

Peter and John join with the believers in a prayer of thanksgiving following release from prison, and in their prayer they cite the first two verses of Psalm 2. In so doing, they give a particular christological interpretation of these words. The opposition that Jesus himself faced from Herod and Pilate (an opposition that Peter and John themselves experienced) was the very opposition to God's anointed king spoken of in Psalm 2. All the elements of Psalm 2:1–2 are there in chiastic order: the anointed Jesus is opposed by kings and rulers, namely Herod and Pilate. The nations who rage are the Gentiles and the peoples who plot vainly are the people of Israel.⁴⁷ Thus, the "peoples" (*עַמִּים* / *λαοί*) of Psalm 2:1 are surprisingly interpreted as the Jewish opponents of Jesus, who are linked with the Romans in their opposition to Jesus and his church.⁴⁸ This is a remarkably specific application of Psalm 2 to the passion of Jesus. By quoting a portion of Psalm 2, the apostles declare Jesus to be the enthroned Davidic king who was opposed by the nations. Moreover, as Christ was himself enthroned and vindicated (Ps 2:6–9), the people praying this psalm express

⁴⁶ Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 141–142.

⁴⁷ Weren, "Psalm 2 in Luke-Acts: An Intertextual Study," 197.

⁴⁸ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 269.

confidence that their opponents will not triumph. The “narrative” of the psalm declares that the opposition of the nations against God’s anointed is futile, at which God himself laughs in derision.⁴⁹ Acts 4 indicates that the early Christians saw the passion and exaltation of Jesus, and thus their own suffering and eventual victory, in terms of Psalm 2.⁵⁰

The introduction to the citation of Psalm 2:7 also contains significant clues. First, the psalm is attributed to David, when, as has been noted above,⁵¹ Psalm 2 contains no superscription. That the psalm is taken as written by David emphasizes that Psalm 2 is a psalm of the Davidic monarchy and Messiah. Moreover, David is called “your servant,” just as they call Jesus “your servant,” using the same term for David and Jesus as we find in Isaiah 42:1 (and 52:13), thus linking together the royal messianic tradition of the Psalter with the servant tradition of Isaiah. One further point can be made. Herod is mentioned in connection with Christ’s passion only in Luke and Acts, here in Acts 4 and when Jesus is brought before Herod during his Sanhedrin trial (Luke 23:7–12). While establishing a direct relationship is difficult, it must be noted that a document speaking of the Messiah in terms of Psalm 2 that also refers to Herod has already been discussed: the *Psalms of Solomon*. In that text as well, opposition to the Messiah comes from a Herod, namely Herod the Great.

In Acts 13, Paul preaches in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. After recounting the life and death of Jesus, Paul then gives scriptural evidence that Jesus (and particularly his resurrection) is the fulfillment of Scripture. The first text to which he turns is Psalm 2:7.

(32) And we proclaim to you good news which was the promise to the fathers,
 (33) because this [promise] he has fulfilled to their children, to us, raising Jesus
 as also in the second Psalm it has been written, “My son are you, I today have
 begotten you.”

Paul connects the enthronement words of Psalm 2:7 to the resurrection. Even though the wording matches the LXX exactly, several New Testament textual issues are worth noting. First, while the overwhelming external evidence points to the phrasing “second Psalm” in verse 33, there are minority traditions that take it as the “first Psalm” (codex D) or simply “the psalms” (P45). This most likely reflects the tradition, mentioned above,⁵² that linked the first two psalms together as an introduction to the Psalter. As it stands, this is the most specific reference to an Old

⁴⁹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 269.

⁵⁰ Huie-Jolly, “Threats Answered by Enthronement,” 206–207.

⁵¹ See discussion on 319 above.

⁵² See discussion on 319 above.

Testament passage found in the New Testament. This specific reference most likely intends to emphasize that the entire psalm is in view,⁵³ although referencing its canonical place may highlight Psalm 2's status as the introduction to the Psalter.⁵⁴ Also, in some manuscripts (again represented by codex D), Psalm 2:8 is also quoted.⁵⁵ Both of these text-critical issues indicate that when Psalm 2:7 is quoted here, the entire Psalm is in view. Particularly in this context, the enthronement and exaltation of Jesus, described both before and after the declaration that the king is God's "son," are implied.

The exalted Christology of the book of Hebrews draws heavily from two texts, Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Both are linked together in the christological arguments of chapter 1 and chapter 5. Already in the opening exordium that precedes the scriptural argument, there are allusions to the language of Psalm 2. "In these last days, he spoke to us by the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world" (Heb 1:2). The language of "Son," joined with the concept of inheritance, strongly hints at Psalm 2:7–8.⁵⁶ Thus, it is no surprise that Psalm 2 begins the chain of quotations that the author uses to bolster his case as to Christ's superiority to all powers and authorities, including the angels:

(5) For to which of the angels did [God] say ever, "My son are you, I today have begotten you"; and again, "I will be to him for a father, and he will be to me for a son."

Here Psalm 2:7 is linked to 2 Samuel 7:14, as the author of Hebrews interprets both texts as referring ultimately to Jesus. The link between the two texts has been discussed above,⁵⁷ and was also made in 4QFlor.⁵⁸ Both are cited as evidence of verse 3 and 4's assertion that "(3) Having made cleansing for sins, he sat on the right hand of the Majesty on high, (4) becoming as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs." This argument will culminate with the exaltation of Christ based on Psalm 110:1 (Heb 1:13). This exaltation of Christ, as fulfillment of the promises given to the Davidic dynasty, is connected with the "name" which Christ inherited. It is tempting, based on the above discussion, to

⁵³ Weren, "Psalm 2 in Luke-Acts: An Intertextual Study," 198.

⁵⁴ Nash, "Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel," 92.

⁵⁵ Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 584; Ronald H. Van der Bergh, "A Note on the Addition of Psalm 2,8 to Acts 13,33 in Codex Bezae," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 90, no. 3 (September 2014): 557–568.

⁵⁶ David Wallace, "The Use of Psalms in the Shaping of a Text: Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1," *Restoration Quarterly* 45, nos. 1–2 (2003): 45.

⁵⁷ See above, n. 12.

⁵⁸ Gert Jacobus Steyn, "Psalm 2 in Hebrews," *Neotestamentica* 37, no. 2 (2003): 263–264.

posit that this “name” is the title “Son of God”⁵⁹—but more likely in the theology of the New Testament as a whole, this name is the divine name YHWH.⁶⁰ It is nonetheless significant to see the Name tradition connected here with the exaltation of Jesus and the title “Son of God.” We must consider the possibility that the author to the Hebrews is referring to the Baptism or transfiguration of Jesus here—although more likely is that he, like Paul in Acts 13, refers to the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus.⁶¹ The use of “today” in this context appears disconnected from any precise moment in time, and could refer to all of these events at once.⁶²

In Hebrews chapter 5, Psalm 2 is brought into the argument for Jesus’ identification as high priest. Even though Psalm 2 has no priestly language, the author links the declaration of YHWH with Psalm 110:4, and uses this coronation text as an ordination text.⁶³

(5) Thus also Christ did not glorify himself to become high priest, but the one who said to him, “My son are you, I today have begotten you.” (6) Just as also in another place he says, “You are a priest into eternity according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Psalm 2 is joined with Psalm 110 and its portrayal of Melchizedek to make the connection between the Davidic Messiah and the high priest, already asserted in Psalm 110, even stronger. It also stresses the superiority of Christ’s priesthood precisely because of his divine origin. This high priest is begotten of God himself.⁶⁴ The eternal origins of the Son of God set the pattern that Melchizedek follows, as the author stresses in 7:3: “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.” Melchizedek follows the pattern of the eternal Son of God, who then became incarnate as an occupant of Melchizedek’s kingly priesthood.⁶⁵ Only from Psalm 2 can the author to the Hebrews emphasize that this

⁵⁹ Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 109; Wallace, “The Use of Psalms in the Shaping of a Text,” 46. Wallace argues that the prominence of Psalm 2:7 in the first chapter of Hebrews points to this conclusion.

⁶⁰ Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2017), 296–298; Charles A. Gieschen, “The Divine Name in Antenicene Christology,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 2 (2003): 142.

⁶¹ Wallace, “The Use of Psalms in the Shaping of a Text,” 50.

⁶² Michael Straus, “Psalm 2:7 and the Concept of Περὶχώρησις,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 2 (2014): 221.

⁶³ Steyn, “Psalm 2 in Hebrews,” 264–265. Steyn argues that based on a lack of precedent for linking the two texts in Jewish or other Christian literature, this was a unique exegetical move by the author to the Hebrews.

⁶⁴ Straus, “Psalm 2:7 and the Concept of Περὶχώρησις,” 220.

⁶⁵ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 309–311.

high priest is eternally God's Son. The use of Psalm 2 drives home the point that Melchizedek and thus Jesus is the priest-king. It also links all three titles together: Jesus is therefore not only Son and king, but also priest. From Psalm 2 comes the language of son and king (as well as *χριστός*), from Psalm 110 the language of king and priest (as well as *κύριος*). This linkage of Psalm 2 with Psalm 110 shows how they complement each other,⁶⁶ and it joins together the unique content of both in a powerful christological confession.

In its depiction of the exalted, victorious Christ, the book of Revelation draws on the language of Psalm 2, particularly one poignant image:

(2:26) And the one who overcomes and who keeps until the end my works, I will give to him authority over the nations (2:27) and he will shepherd them with an iron rod [*ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ*] as the earthen pots are broken in pieces [*ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται*], (2:28) as also I received from my Father, and I will give to him the morning star.

(12:5) And she bore a male child who is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod [*ποιμαίνει πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ*]. And her child was taken to God and to his throne.

(19:15) And from his mouth will come out a sharp sword, in order that he might rule the nations, and he will shepherd them with an iron rod [*ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ*], and he will tread the winepress of the wrath of the anger of God the Almighty.

(Psalm 2:9) You will shepherd them with a rod of iron [*ποιμανεῖς αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ*] as a vessel of a potter you will dash them [*ὡς σκεῦος κεραμέως συντρίψεις αὐτούς*].

The language of Psalm 2:9, with striking verbal parallels, is used to describe the reign of the enthroned Christ, as he fulfills what was promised to the Davidic Messiah. The imagery of chapter 12 seems especially reminiscent of the pattern or “narrative” of Psalm 2, especially as it is used in the *Psalms of Solomon*. The child is born who will shepherd/rule the nations with an iron rod, and he is placed on the throne after having been threatened by the dragon. The primary difference is that this throne is not Zion but the throne of God himself. The letter to Thyatira in chapter 2 requires further comment. Each of the seven letters begins with an appellation of Jesus that is a reference to the opening vision from chapter 1. The letter to Thyatira begins similarly, but with one addition: the title “Son of God.” Thus, this title appears in a text where Psalm 2:9 is explicitly referenced. In addition, some see an allusion to

⁶⁶ Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, 82.

Psalm 2:7 in the language of authority given to Jesus and then to those who overcome. Therefore, here the title “Son of God” is used in a letter suffused with the imagery of Psalm 2.⁶⁷ There is a significant difference from the original context of Psalm 2, however. In the letter to the church at Thyatira, there is a collective sense. The text clearly indicates that those who overcome will have the kind of rule envisioned in Psalm 2 and thus given to Christ. They will rule as he did. We have already observed this collective interpretation of Psalm 2 in 4QFlor.⁶⁸

Revelation also possibly uses the language of Psalm 2:1 to describe the opposition of the nations of the earth to Christ.

(11:18) And the nations raged and your wrath came

The imagery of the nations’ opposition to the Father and the Son throughout Revelation is certainly reminiscent of Psalm 2, but 11:18 uses a different verb for anger (*ὠργίσθησαν*) than Psalm 2:1 LXX (*ἐφρούραξαν*). Whether or not this is a direct allusion to Psalm 2, the book of Revelation understands the rule of the glorified Christ in terms of Psalm 2, particularly as Psalm 2 was interpreted by the *Psalms of Solomon*, as the warrior-king conquering his enemies. The portrayal of the victorious Christ is the very image and pattern that Psalm 2 has set: the opposed king now enthroned, ruling over his enemies. The nations are portrayed as coming to the Son and offering him homage in exactly the way that Psalm 2 describes.

In Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation, selected portions of Psalm 2 are used in ways that evoke the whole, particularly the “narrative structure” of the psalm. This is set up by the prayer of the believers in Acts 4, where opposition to YHWH and his anointed king are interpreted as the opposition against Jesus that led to his death. But, as the entirety of Psalm 2 indicates, the opposition of the king’s enemies will prove futile. This is borne out in the other citations of Psalm 2 in the New Testament. In Acts 13, Paul cites Psalm 2:7 as a reference to Jesus’ resurrection and subsequent glorification, and in Hebrews 1 and 5, Jesus is described as the glorified Son, who bears both the divine name and the priesthood of Melchizedek. The exaltation of Psalm 2:5–8 is thus applied directly to Jesus. The book of Revelation takes the final step, applying Psalm 2:9 to Jesus, in a way similar to *Psalms of Solomon* 17, as triumphant over the enemies who once opposed him. The concluding beatitude of Psalm 2 is thus implied: “Blessed are all who take refuge in him!” Psalm 2 thus plays a significant role in the framework of the New Testament. How does this inform our reading of the other texts often associated with Psalm 2, namely Jesus’ Baptism and transfiguration? If Psalm 2:7 is the text quoted by the voice from heaven, how does

⁶⁷ Quek, “I Will Give Authority over the Nations,” 185.

⁶⁸ Quek, “I Will Give Authority over the Nations,” 186–187.

the larger usage of Psalm 2 in the New Testament inform those heavenly declarations? Does the Father also use the part to evoke the whole?

The Voice from Heaven

There are only three incidents recounted in the Gospels where the voice of the Father is heard. In all three, the Father is speaking to or about Jesus, disclosing his identity to the crowd, to the disciples, or to the hearers/readers of the Gospels. The third of these is unique to John.⁶⁹ The other two times that a voice from heaven sounds forth, testifying to Jesus, are at events recounted in all three Synoptic Gospels and even in an epistle: namely, the Baptism of Jesus and his transfiguration.

Matthew

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα (3:17, Baptism)

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα· ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ (17:5, transfiguration)

Mark

Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα (1:11, Baptism)

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ (9:7, transfiguration)

Luke

Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα (3:22, Baptism)

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος, αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε (9:35, transfiguration)

2 Peter

Ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός μου οὗτός ἐστιν, εἰς ὃν ἐγὼ εὐδόκησα (1:17, transfiguration)

⁶⁹ Because the context of this occurrence of the voice from heaven is different than the other texts, it will be given in full here: “Now my soul has been troubled, and what do I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But because of this I came into this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Therefore a voice came from heaven, ‘Also I have glorified and again I will glorify.’ Therefore the crowd who was standing and hearing was saying that thunder had happened, others were saying, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered and said, ‘Not because of me has this voice come but because of you. Now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler of this world will be cast outside. And I, whenever I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself’” (John 12:27–32).

John

καὶ γὰρ ἐώρακα, καὶ μεμαρτύρηκα ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (1:34, words of John the Baptist)

Καὶ ἐδόξασα καὶ πάλιν δοξάσω (12:28, words of the Father)

Several observations can initially be made. First, the contribution of John’s account is significant. It cannot be ruled out that the voice from heaven in John 12 is meant to reference or refer back to the Baptism and the transfiguration (while of course pointing forward to the cross). Indeed, the voice from heaven here serves the same function as the voice from heaven at the transfiguration: in a sense, this is the “transfiguration according to John,” apart from the visible glory of Jesus. The glorifying of the Father’s name is, as the context indicates, to happen in Jesus’ being lifted up on the cross. The Baptist’s statement in John 1 clearly references his own hearing of the voice at Jesus’ Baptism, as the verbal parallels indicate. Second, it is remarkable how consistent the language is between the various accounts. Two differences stand out. In Mark and Luke’s baptismal account, the voice from heaven speaks directly to Jesus, while in Matthew, the address is directed more toward the crowd and the hearers/readers of the Gospel. At the transfiguration, this ambiguity is removed, and in every text, the voice is addressing the audience. Finally, there is some variation in the descriptions given. In Luke’s transfiguration account, the language of “chosen” (ἐκλεγμένος) is used. Mark omits εὐδόκησα in both his baptismal and transfiguration account.

What is the background of this statement by the Father? Even though some scholars call this a “citation” of Psalm 2:7,⁷⁰ most assert that a number of Old Testament texts form the background of these declarations. Oscar Cullmann points to Isaiah 42:1 and the concept of the Servant of the Lord as the source of these words.⁷¹ Richard Hays does assert that Psalm 2:7 stands behind this declaration in Mark, and that “echoes” of that text and Isaiah 42:1 stand behind the other accounts. However, in his discussion of Matthew and Luke’s baptismal and transfiguration accounts, he posits that the background is actually Genesis 22 and the designation of Isaac as the “beloved son” (22:2, 12).⁷²

⁷⁰ Among others, see Huie-Jolly, “Threats Answered by Enthronement,” 206; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 180.

⁷¹ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 276. Cullmann makes no reference to Psalm 2, but asserts that at the Baptism of Jesus, the concept of the Son is linked with the concept of the Servant, and thus with Jesus’ death.

⁷² Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 140, 245.

Contrary to most scholars, Jeffrey Gibbs argues that this statement makes no allusion to Psalm 2:7, at least in Matthew.⁷³ In keeping with his interpretation of the entirety of the first chapters of Matthew, where he posits a Jesus-Israel typology, Gibbs sees here Jesus as Israel reduced to one, and in that sense God's beloved Son. Against Psalm 2:7 he argues that there is no royal Christology in Matthew chapter 3, and that the addition of "beloved" is a critical difference. Finally, he makes the theological argument that the language of "today I have begotten you" in Psalm 2 could suggest adoptionism if it is the basis of the words from heaven. He instead points to Jeremiah 31:20 as the source: "Is Ephraim my dear son?" There are thus four texts primarily put forward as the source of words spoken from heaven at both Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration.

Mark 1:11 Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα

Matthew 17:5 Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα· ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ

Psalm 2:7 LXX υἱός μου εἶ σύ ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε

Isaiah 42:1 LXX Ἰακωβ ὁ παῖς μου ἀντιλήμψομαι αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ἢ ψυχὴ μου ἔδωκα τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν

Matthew 12:18 Ἴδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου <εἰς> ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἢ ψυχὴ μου· θήσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν

Jeremiah 38:20 LXX [31:20 MT] υἱὸς ἀγαπητὸς Ἐφραϊμ ἐμοί

Genesis 22:2 λαβὲ τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν

Genesis 22:12 τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ

Gibbs notes that Jeremiah 38:20 LXX and Genesis 22 LXX are the only places where the adjective *ἀγαπητός* modifies *υἱός*.⁷⁴ No doubt Jesus-Isaac and Jesus-Israel typology is present in the New Testament,⁷⁵ but the verbal connection between these texts and the voice from heaven is limited to these two words. Certainly Isaiah 42:1, which announces and presents the servant figure who will dominate the chapters to come, has affinity in content with the New Testament texts. The bestowal of the Spirit in the second half of the verse is particularly reminiscent of the baptismal accounts: "I have put my Spirit upon him." This language is also reminiscent of *Psalms of Solomon* 17:37, where "God will make him powerful by a holy spirit." The LXX of Isaiah 42:1, however, has almost no verbal parallels. The citation of Isaiah 42:1 in Matthew 12:18, on the other hand, has strong verbal parallels with the

⁷³ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 183.

⁷⁴ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 183.

⁷⁵ Hays mentions the designation of Jesus as "son of Abraham" in Matthew 1:1 and the stress on his obedience as supporting evidence of a Jesus-Isaac typology at the Baptism and transfiguration. See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 140.

language of both the Baptism and the transfiguration, supplying the descriptors ἀγαπητός and ὃν εὐδόκησεν.⁷⁶ This translation by Matthew certainly would strengthen the argument that he sees Isaiah 42:1 as lying behind the Father’s words. Matthew may have provided his own translation to accord with the voice from heaven. Understanding clearly that the voice from heaven wished to echo Isaiah 42:1, Matthew was compelled to abandon the LXX when it came time for him to cite that same text.⁷⁷ It also must be noted that the descriptor “chosen” (ἐκλελεγμένος), found in Luke’s transfiguration account, may have its background in the LXX of Isaiah 42:1, where Israel is called “my chosen one” (ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου).⁷⁸ Certainly, the language of Isaac and Israel as beloved sons is also an important background, but not as pivotal as Isaiah 42:1.

If Matthew intends us to see Isaiah 42:1 as the source of the descriptors, what about the direct address? The closest verbal parallel, as demonstrated in the chart above, is the text most often proposed, Psalm 2:7. How can the objections of Gibbs be addressed? First, there may not be an explicit royal theme in Matthew 3, but there certainly is in Matthew 2. In the account of the magi, Jesus is called the “king of the Jews” (2:2), and the quotation from Micah calls him a “ruler” (ἡγούμενος; 2:6). In that same quotation from Micah, the verb used for the rule of the anointed king in Psalm 2:9, ποιμανεῖ, is also used, indicating a faint link with Psalm 2. Moreover, as Oscar Cullmann points out, there is not a distinction, but rather an intimate connection between the people of Israel as “son” and the king of Israel as “son.”⁷⁹ The language of Isaac as the beloved son and the language of “son” or “firstborn son” applied to Israel in texts such as Jeremiah 38:20 LXX and others (e.g., Exod 4:22–23; Hos 11:1) therefore most likely stands behind the designation of the king as “son” in Psalm 2:7. We have already observed the linkage between the corporate people Israel and the anointed king hinted at in 4QFlor, and Isaiah 40–55 also demonstrates an interplay between the servant as individual and the servant as the nation.

⁷⁶ CNTOT summarizes the scholarly discussion concerning this quotation. See Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 43. While Matthew does have several key words from the LXX, instead it appears that he has made his own translation of the MT, using “the most natural Greek words that anyone would use to translate the Hebrew.”

⁷⁷ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2–20:34* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 627. Gibbs also sees Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 42:1 as a direct translation from the MT and influenced by the words from heaven at Jesus’ Baptism. However, he does not see this phenomenon working in the other direction (i.e., he does not see Isa 42:1 as the likely provenance of the descriptions of Jesus’ Baptism and transfiguration).

⁷⁸ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 245.

⁷⁹ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 273–274. “The king is son because the nation is.”

To the theological point, there are two responses. First, the voice from heaven deliberately avoids any adoptionism by omitting the phrase, “today I have begotten you.”⁸⁰ There is no hint that the Baptism or transfiguration of Jesus was when he became God’s Son, but instead it is a public declaration of that reality. The Baptism and transfiguration of Jesus is not an enthronement like any other king, but a declaration of divine identity in the messianic language of the Old Testament.⁸¹ Second, as has already been demonstrated, other citations of Psalm 2 in the New Testament have no issue with those words, quoting verse 7 in full, particularly in connection with his resurrection. Those texts use Psalm 2:7 in its entirety to declare emphatically Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father. There is no hint in those latter texts that the resurrection is when Jesus becomes God’s Son. In any case, whether the remainder of Psalm 2:7 is quoted or not, the New Testament evidences no embarrassment about them, as if they promote an adoptionistic Christology. An additional piece of evidence, at least as a witness to the early church’s understanding of this passage, is seen in its transmission. There is a minor textual tradition, found in the fifth century codex D, that replaces the words at Jesus’ Baptism in Luke with the LXX of Psalm 2:7. Codex D also changes Οὐτός to σὺ in Matthew 3:17, another change to bring Matthew’s text into conformity with Psalm 2.⁸² Finally, our study has demonstrated that Psalm 2 plays a significant role in the Christology of the New Testament, much more prominent than Jeremiah 38:20 LXX or even Genesis 22. In particular, the link between Psalm 2 and the servant language of Isaiah 40–55 was made by the praying believers in Acts 4, as has been demonstrated above.⁸³ The language of Jesus as God’s “son” via Psalm 2:7 has been observed in Acts 13, Hebrews 1 and 5, and Revelation.

The perspective is important in the baptismal and transfiguration accounts as well as in Psalm 2. In Psalm 2, the “anointed one” is telling his audience (presumably his enemies gathered against him) that YHWH (κύριος) said to him, “You are my son.” This language is echoed in Mark and Luke’s accounts, where the voice of the Father speaks to Jesus, with the hearers/readers of the Gospel listening in, but not

⁸⁰ Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 181; Samuel E. Balentine, “The Royal Psalms and the New Testament: From ‘messiah’ to ‘Messiah,’” *The Theological Educator* 29 (1984): 60.

⁸¹ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 247. “The acclamation of Jesus as God’s Son includes this kingly role, but something still greater is here. For Jesus’ origins are mysteriously divine, and his personal identity is closely bound with God’s own being in a way that transcends the God-relation of any of Israel’s past kings or prophets.”

⁸² See discussion in Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 280. Several scholars have actually preferred this Western reading, but CNTOT rejects it on the basis of a lack of external evidence and evidence of harmonization with the LXX elsewhere in the Western text. The textual issues with Acts 13 mentioned above also involve codex D.

⁸³ See above, p. 23.

necessarily those gathered at the Jordan that day. However, if the voice directly addressed the audience, the phrasing would obviously be, “This is my son,” and that is the import of the address with regard to the enemies gathering against the anointed one. That is exactly what we see in the transfiguration accounts, as well as Matthew’s baptismal narrative. The grammatical construction is the same as in Psalm 2, only the perspective has changed, and thus the language has to shift slightly.

The background for the declaration of the voice from heaven, recounted four times each for the Baptism of Jesus and his transfiguration, cannot be sought in a single Old Testament text. In pointing to Jesus at the river and upon the mountain, the Father combines the direct address to the Davidic anointed king of Psalm 2 with the descriptors of the servant found in Isaiah 42:1. Standing in the background of those texts is the designation of Isaac and Israel as God’s beloved “sons.” This is therefore a declaration of incredible theological depth, carrying the full weight of Psalm 2:7’s language of the “son,” with all of its royal connotations, and combining it with the servant language of Isaiah 40–55. In this declaration, Jesus is proclaimed to be the Davidic anointed king of the Psalter and YHWH’s servant of Isaiah. One further step can be taken. Does the title “Son of God,” found throughout the New Testament as a fundamental Christian confession, have its roots in the declaration of the voice from heaven, and thus, Psalm 2:7? If so, how does this title fit into the larger matrix of the New Testament’s use of Psalm 2?

The Son of God

While the Baptism of Jesus is not the first time the title “Son of God”⁸⁴ is used in Luke or Mark,⁸⁵ and the language of “son” is already found in Matthew 2:15,⁸⁶ there are significant indications that the use of this title in the Gospels is rooted in that incident. First, in all three Synoptic Gospels, the Baptism of Jesus is immediately followed by his temptation. In Matthew and Luke, Satan prefaces his temptation with the words, “If you are the Son of God” (Matt 4:3; Luke 4:3).⁸⁷ This use of the title “Son of God” is thus linked to the immediately preceding incident. The voice from heaven calls Jesus “my son,” and Satan responds with “if you are the Son of God.” Similarly, while in Mark’s brief temptation account Satan’s words are not

⁸⁴ The two most influential studies of the title “Son of God” remain Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 270–305, and Hengel, *The Son of God*.

⁸⁵ Most manuscripts of Mark have “Son of God” as the conclusion of 1:1, linked, as in Psalm 2, with the title *Χριστός*. In Luke, Gabriel says that due to his conception by the Holy Spirit, “therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

⁸⁶ Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, “out of Egypt I called my son,” to interpret the flight of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to Egypt.

⁸⁷ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 284.

recounted, the demons address Jesus as “Son of God” later in the narrative (Mark 3:11; 5:7). The only human being to address Jesus as “Son of God” in Mark’s narrative is the centurion at the cross (Mark 15:39).⁸⁸ The title thus forms an *inclusio* over the entire narrative, and is strongly tied to the death of Jesus.

As already indicated, in the Gospel of John, the Baptist recounts the Baptism of Jesus and gives his own confession as a witness of that event: “And I have seen and have witnessed that this one is the Son of God” (1:34). Here the title is directly tied with the Baptism of Jesus. Furthermore, later in John’s first chapter, the earliest confessions of Jesus’ initial disciples contain the three titles found in Psalm 2. First, Andrew tells Peter, “We have found the Messiah” (1:41), then Nathanael exclaims, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!” (1:49). Here, in the aftermath of John’s recounting of Jesus’ Baptism, we find all three titles for the individual in Psalm 2, including, prominently, the title “Son of God.”⁸⁹ Moreover, Nathanael, in the fashion of Psalm 2, combines the language of sonship with royal language, forming an important background in John’s Gospel (as in the Synoptics) for that title.⁹⁰ Finally the evangelist, in a way similar to Mark, uses this confession to frame his narrative witness to Jesus with the title “Son of God”: “But these things have been written in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in order that believing you might have life in his name” (John 20:31). Here “Christ” and the “Son of God” are linked together, again two titles found in Psalm 2 (and Mark 1:1). Despite the prominent place thus afforded to the title “Son of God,” in John’s Gospel, Jesus often refers to himself simply as the “Son” (e.g., 5:19–27; 17:1–3).⁹¹ The simpler self-designation of Jesus as “Son” expresses the intimacy of the relationship between Jesus and the Father, an intimacy that he expresses in these more informal terms, but on which others reflect using the formal title. This is perhaps the very pattern that we observe with Psalm 2 and the declarations from heaven. The Father calls Jesus “my Son,” which others confess as the title “Son of God.”

In the Gospels, this title is particularly associated with opposition to Jesus, in other words, with his suffering. It is the title thrown in Jesus’ face at his trial (Matt 26:63; Luke 22:70; John 19:7) and at the cross (Matt 27:40, 43). As already mentioned, it is the title declared by the centurion after Jesus’ death (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39). If the giving of the title is to be associated with Psalm 2, then it is also

⁸⁸ Hays points out that this declaration points back to Jesus’ Baptism and thus echoes the wording of Psalm 2:7, where the futility of the nations setting themselves against the Lord’s anointed king is proclaimed. See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 96.

⁸⁹ Nash, “Psalm 2 and the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel,” 95–97.

⁹⁰ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 362.

⁹¹ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 363.

a royal moniker, and the royal Christology comes to no greater expression than at the cross, particularly with the *titulus* (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). It was asserted by some in the early church that the *titulus* was a fulfillment of Psalm 2:6, “And I have set/consecrated my king upon Zion my holy mountain.”⁹² The title itself indicates obedience, submission to the Father’s will and the task to which Jesus has been assigned.⁹³

It must be noted that the title is most often not a self-designation, but a confession, particularly in the Epistles (e.g., Rom 1:4; 1 John 5:5, 9–13). In the Synoptics, Jesus never uses the title himself, although there are three texts in John (and a possible fourth, 3:18, which may also be the voice of the evangelist), where Jesus does refer to himself as the “Son of God” (5:25; 10:36; 11:4). Above all, the stress of the title is on his unique relationship with the Father, connecting him with God.⁹⁴ Calling Jesus “Son of God” is no mere honorific title, as it was for Israel’s kings. It indicates that Jesus truly is God.⁹⁵ Paul in Romans 1 stresses that the resurrection declares Jesus to be the “Son of God”:

(2) Who was announced beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures (3) about his Son, who was begotten from the seed of David according to the flesh, (4) who was designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness from the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:2–4)

In this text, the human descent of Jesus from the royal line of David is juxtaposed with the declaration of Jesus as the “Son of God” by his resurrection. The latter part of this argument is very similar to Paul’s sermon in Acts 13, which explicitly cites Psalm 2:7.⁹⁶ Similar in some respects is 1 John 5:10, where explicit reference is made to the witness that God bore concerning his Son:

⁹² Ferda, “Matthew’s *Titulus* and Psalm 2’s King on Mount Zion,” 563.

⁹³ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 279.

⁹⁴ Hengel, *The Son of God*, 63.

⁹⁵ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 247, 324. The assertion that the title “Son of God” is a divine title has often been challenged. For a summary of the situation at his time, including the accusation that Paul took an honorific title and made it an ontological reality, or the assertion that the concept of the “Son of God” is a Hellenistic influence on the New Testament, see Hengel, *The Son of God*, 3–6. For a more recent protest, see J. R. Daniel Kirk, *A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016).

⁹⁶ Hengel asserts that 2 Samuel 7, which is then linked with Psalm 2:7, lies behind these words of Paul. See Hengel, *The Son of God*, 64.

Whoever believes in the Son of God has this witness in him; whoever does not believe in God has made him a liar, because he has not believed the witness which God has witnessed about his Son.

Again, based on the evidence discussed throughout this study, it is apparent that the witness of God concerning his Son is rooted in Psalm 2:7, applied to Jesus at his Baptism and transfiguration, and confirmed at his resurrection. The title indicates two realities: the oneness of Jesus with the Father, proclaimed at the river, on the mountain, and then by means of the resurrection, and his divine commission which culminates at the cross.⁹⁷

There is thus significant evidence that the title “Son of God,” or even Jesus’ self-designation in John’s Gospel as the “Son,” is rooted in both the declaration of the voice from heaven and Psalm 2:7. Jesus is acclaimed as the Son of God because the Father said of him, “This is/You are my son” using Psalm 2. This title is thus royal and linked with “Christ,” a title that also possesses royal roots. Moreover, the usage of the title “Son of God” follows the larger narrative pattern of Psalm 2. It is particularly associated with the opposition to Jesus, and it is the accusation of his trial that results in the capital charge of blasphemy. The “Son of God” is the Psalter’s rejected yet enthroned king.

Conclusion

The authors of the New Testament did not consider Psalm 2:7 to be simply a place to find a convenient title. They instead heard Psalm 2:7 in the voice from heaven, and used it in their own exegesis, as part of a whole. The Psalter’s call in Psalm 2 to trust in a figure, a person, an anointed king called God’s “son,” was directly applied to Jesus, with all the content of the psalm as a whole packed into that title. Certainly, the author’s found Psalm 2 to be a significant text declaring Jesus’ unique relationship with the Father. Unlike the Davidic kings, who were God’s “sons” in an adopted sense, the voice from heaven, quoting Psalm 2:7, declared that Jesus is the Son of God according to substance and nature—that is, the messianic king was God’s Son in a way that no other “son of David” ever had been. Indeed, the New Testament assumes this was what Psalm 2 was always about. The figure of Psalm 2, of whom it is said, “Blessed are all who take refuge in him,” is the Davidic Messiah, who is truly God’s Son. The authors of the New Testament take up the strong identification between YHWH and his king in this text and tie him more closely to YHWH himself than any other heir of David.

⁹⁷ Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 284.

But the usage of Psalm 2 did not end with an argument about Jesus' identity. When the Father's voice quoted Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 at the Baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, the New Testament considered him to evoke the whole by quoting a part. In saying, "This is/You are my son," the Father brought to mind the entire "narrative" of Psalm 2, where the kings of the earth gathered against his anointed king to destroy him. But as in the psalm, the Father laughs at their futile rebellion, and sets up his Son on a high hill. The Son will be enthroned, but only after having been opposed. God would set his Son, the anointed king, upon a high hill, and there the nations would attempt to overcome him, but would themselves be overcome, and finally ruled by his rod of iron. The New Testament, in broad strokes, follows this pattern, the "narrative" of Psalm 2, rooted in the Father's use of Psalm 2:7 at Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration. The quotation of Psalm 2 by the voice from heaven anticipates the opposition that this Son of God will face, and looking back, the earliest Christians see that opposition at the cross (Acts 4). It is especially the use of Psalm 2 in Acts 4 that indicates the connection between this psalm and Christ's passion, a link that has been observed also in the other Gospels. Paul in Acts 13 then hears the voice from heaven quoting Psalm 2:7 at Jesus' resurrection, and the book of Hebrews sees the exalted and enthroned Christ in glory and splendor also in terms of Psalm 2:7. As the New Testament comes to a close, the book of Revelation sees the triumph of Jesus, the anointed king of Psalm 2, over all of his foes, and he will rule over them with his rod of iron. This was anticipated by *Psalms of Solomon* 17 and follows the trajectory set at Jesus' Baptism and transfiguration. The New Testament, following the voice of the Father, declares that Jesus is the Psalter's rejected yet enthroned king, God's Son in a way that no other Davidic king ever was. Psalm 2 is a psalm of divine identity, but also a psalm of the passion and subsequent exaltation of Christ. In every use of Psalm 2 in the New Testament—from the Father's voice to the picture of the triumphant warrior-king Christ in Revelation—there is the implied but never quoted declaration of Psalm 2:12: "Blessed are all who take refuge in him!"