SON OF GOD, SEED OF DAVID:
PAUL'S MESSIANIC EXEGESIS IN ROMANS 2:3–4

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The opening of Paul's letter to Rome broadly follows the traditional Greco-Roman letter format: sender to receiver, χαίρετος; but within this framework, Paul inserts an unusual elaboration of the gospel under his self-characterization as the letter's author. Martin Hengel observed in 1975: "more has been written about [Rom 1:3–4] than about any other New Testament text." Even if Hengel's statement no longer holds true statistically, this confessional fragment in Paul's letter to Rome continues to command and deserve scholarly attention.

The state and terms of twentieth-century discussion of Rom 1:3–4 were canonically formulated by Rudolf Bultmann:

...though the title [Son of David] is of no importance to [Paul], he refers to it in Rom 1:3, a sentence which is evidently due to a handed-down formula; he desires thereby to accredit himself to the unknown Roman Church as an apostle who advocates right doctrine.²

Nearly all modern interpreters have concurred with the essentials of Bultmann's judgment. I hope to demonstrate that rather than woefully citing a proto-creed, Paul in Rom 1:3–4 makes his own conscious and distinctive use of an early conventional exegesis of 2 Sam 7 and Ps 2. Other portions of Romans, especially Paul's use of Isa 11:10 in Rom 15:12, indicate that he alludes to these

I would like to thank Richard B. Hays for his support in producing this article; his influence will be apparent in many footnotes. Thanks are also due to the members of Prof. Hays's seminar on Romans at Duke Divinity School, in and during which I worked out many of the ideas below. The essay's remaining faults are due to my own obstinacy in the face of much helpful criticism from the anonymous readers.

scripts with full awareness of their origin and import. Paul joins these two conspicuous christological prophecies by their common theme of divine sonship and interprets them as mirroring his own twofold confession of Christ as the instrument of God’s faithfulness to Israel and mercy to Gentiles.

I will first briefly review the data that have led interpreters to view this passage as traditional and outline the debate that has developed around this consensus. Then I will turn to the end of the argumentative body of Romans, 15:7–13, to offer a reading of this summary pericope that relates Jesus’ Davideic heritage to Paul’s defense of the faithfulness of God vis-à-vis Israel. Romans 15:12/Isa 11:10, the only reference in Paul’s letters to Jesus’ Davideic heritage other than Rom 1:3, will be seen to offer clues for reading 1:3–4 as Paul’s own exegetical work.

I. Interpretation of Romans 1:3–4 as a Pre-Pauline Tradition

1c εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ
2 δ ο προηγεγέγεντο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφοῖς ἀγίασις
3a περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ
b τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυίδ κατὰ σάρκα
4a τοῦ ὑποδηντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης
b εἰς ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν
c Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν

The reasons Rom 1:3–4a is viewed as a fragment of pre-Pauline tradition are frequently rehearsed. Internal factors include the formulation of the verses in parallel participial clauses; the dichotomy of σάρξ and πνεῦμα with a sense that differs from Paul’s typical usage; the mention of Jesus’ Davideic descent, in which Paul is not thought to be interested; the “adoptionist” Christology spelled out in ὑποδηντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ . . . εἰς ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν; the absence of Christ’s crucifixion, which Paul might be expected to have mentioned in his own summary of the gospel; and unusual or unique vocabulary in Paul—viz., ὑποδηντός and πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης. Finally, Paul’s representation of this formula as the εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ could lead us to expect something traditional (cf. 1 Cor 15:1–4). Other occurrences of similar formulae are also taken to demonstrate the traditional nature of Rom 1:3–4. The confession’s resemblance to the “adoptionist” Christologies of the apostolic speeches in Acts (2:36; 13:33–34) seems to confirm its primitiveness.

Yet there is not such agreement with regard to what belongs to the formula and what to Paul. The attribution of every element beyond the basic dual structure of parallel participles—“born of the seed of David, appointed son of God”—is contested. Diverse disputes over the pre-Pauline or Pauline origins of particular elements of the confession play subordinate roles in the larger and more vital discussion about the distance between Paul and the tradition he employs.

On one hand, Robert Jewett builds on several previous analyses of Paul’s use and redaction of the formula of 1:3–4 to find an explosive substratum beneath a layer of Pauline redaction:

The popular Jewish expectation of a Son of David as found in Pss. Sol. 17:21 and elsewhere is reflected here, with the traditional expectation of national restoration, victory over the Gentile nations, and governance over the world. Jewett argues that Paul’s skillful amelioration of a known confession demonstrates his drive to unite the Roman Christians behind his vision of world mission. James Dunn, on the other hand, concludes that the task of first importance, and of greater feasibility, is to determine the meaning of the passage in its present context. . . . the more redaction argued for, the less fitted would the formula be to serve its most obvious function of assuring the Roman addressees that Paul fully shared their common faith.

Jewett’s project is ultimately of great historical interest; the size and shape of the gap between Paul’s own thought and any traditional material he employs invite analysis as a window onto the common thought of the early Western church and the earliest patterns of christological reflection. But the present essay presumes that we have not yet adequately accomplished Dunn’s task.

4 Almost no published scholarly work has challenged the traditional view of this passage since at least 1960, with the exception of Vern Poythress, “Is Romans 1:3–4 a Pauline Confession After All?” ExpTim 87 (1976): 180–83. Poythress professed agnosticism on the subject, but offered arguments for the sake of balanced scholarship. A more recent and vigorous objection is raised by James M. Scott, Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ἸΘΕΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus (WUNT 2.48; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992), 229–36. Scott mounts an impressive rebuttal of each of the standard arguments for a traditional formula and concludes that “it is in no way certain that Rom. 1:3b–4 contains a Pre-Pauline creed” (p. 236).
6 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 2:8; 1 Pet 3:18; Ign. Smyrn. 1.1 (et al.); and tradition common to the Synoptic birth narratives.
8 Ibid., 104.
10 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 5.
Only relentless attention to the lines of allusive connection between 1:3-4 and the broad context of Romans—especially its scriptural arguments—will show what Paul expects his audience to recognize as “tradition” and how he plays upon their expectations. The context of Romans suggests that the commonalities Paul anticipates with his audience are shared understandings of the oracles of the God of Israel.

II. Romans 15:7-13: An Essential Context for 1:3-4

The relationship of Romans’ introduction to 15:7-13 casts vital light on the scriptural allusions of 1:3-4. The parenthetic section of the letter which began at 12:1 comes to a subclusion in 15:1-6; then, in a paragraph that repeats a number of the themes in 15:1-6, Paul turns his attention to a broader conclusion, “Paul gives [in 15:7-13] a concluding description of his gospel which is similar in many ways to that in Rom 1:2-4.”

15:8-9a: A Twofold Christological Confession

Paul grounds his exhortation to the Romans to “receive one another” (15:7a; cf. 14:1) in the “reception” they themselves received from Christ (15:7b; cf. 14:3); then he begins a solemn declaration (λέγω γὰρ) about Christ’s “service” to both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 8-9a). J. Ross Wagner’s recent study of this passage takes 15:8-9a as an imperfectly constructed parallel pair of statements about Christ:13

λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον γεγενήσθαι περιτομῆς ὑπὲρ ἑλέους θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ δοξασάτο τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ ἑλέους θεοῦ εἰς τὸ δοξασάτο τὸν θεὸν


14 J. Ross Wagner, “The Christ, Servant of Jew and Gentile: A Fresh Approach to Romans 15:8-9,” JBL 116 (1997): 473-85. The “imperfection” in the parallelism Wagner proposes is the imbalance between the genitive περιτομῆς and the accusative τὸ θέων, which Wagner reads as an accusative of respect (p. 482). Once this imperfection is accepted, though, the verses resolve into a parallelism that is syntactically and contextually superior to other proposals for dealing with this passage Wagner admits at the outset is a “syntactical mare’s nest” (p. 474).

For I say that the Christ has become a servant of the circumcision on behalf of the truthfulness of God, in order to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, and [a servant] with respect to the Gentiles on behalf of the mercy [of God] in order to glorify God.15

Wagner’s reading relates Paul’s statement about Jesus convincingly to the argument of 15:7-13 and the rest of Romans: Christ is a servant “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16). With regard to Jews, Christ vindicates God’s faithfulness, which has been at issue throughout Romans (1:17; 3:21, 25-26), by confirming the promises made to the patriarchs (4:13-21; 9:5). Concerning Gentiles, Christ manifests God’s mercy (9:15-18, 23; 11:30-32), glorifying God (15:7), as he is immediately heard to do in 15:9b.16

Servant of the Circumcision

If 15:8-9a offers a twofold analysis of Christ’s “service,” what exactly has Christ done (διακονοῦν γεγενήσθαι)? Christ’s “service of the circumcision” is for the sake of (ὑπὲρ) the truthfulness of God. This can refer only, as in 3:4, to the complex of covenantal, theodicean questions more typically referred to in Romans by δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.17 But what promises has Christ confirmed, and how?

The term ἐπαγγελία is introduced (disregarding for the moment προεγγελίαται in 1:2) in ch. 4, where Paul discusses the priority of the promise to Abraham, “or to his seed,” over the law. The promise to either or both is “that he would be the inheritor of the world” (4:13). Romans 4:14-16 argues that the promise must be εἰ πίστεως rather than εἰ νόμου, “so that the promise is confirmed [βεβαιωθῇ] to all his seed, not only to the one from the law but also to the one from the faith of Abraham.” For the promise to Abraham, Paul quotes Gen 17.5 (LXX): πατέρα πολλῶν ἑθνῶν τεθείκας ἐν (4:17).

The discussion of ch. 4 provides the reference point for the mention of the promise in ch. 9. Torn by Israel’s near-total rejection of his gospel, Paul pro-
duces a list of the advantages of the Jews in 9:4–5. The list ends with ὅν αἱ ἑγαγελίαι, ὅν ὀι πατέρεσ καὶ ἔξ ᾧ ὁ Χριστός τὸ κατὰ σάρκα. The climax of this list is not haphazard. The patriarchs fall between the promises and the Christ because Paul is preparing to show that Christ confirms the promises; the patriarchs are a middle term here precisely because they are a middle term in the argument that follows, 9:6–13. God’s λόγος, the “oracle of the promise” (9:9a), is confirmed, οὐκ ἔκκλητος (9:6), through God’s selective and singular calling of Abraham’s σπέρμα. Paul’s history of the elective promise keeping of God begins precisely where it finds expression in a single person, Sarah’s νῦνSCO, and ends with Jacob—the last patriarch who, as an individual, bears the σπέρμα of the promise. Paul’s argument relies on a tenet made explicit only in Gal 3:16: “your [Abraham’s] seed” (Gen 17:8) = Christ.

If present, this tenet is implicit rather than explicit in Rom 9:6–13; but Paul’s apology is incomplete in any case. Romans 9:7 defends God’s faithfulness to Israel with the paradox, “not all Israel is Israel.” But when the explanation of this statement drops off in diatribe after 9:13, Paul has progressed only as far as Jacob, who still embodies “all Israel,” by anyone’s reckoning. Paul’s defense of God vis-à-vis Israel must be extrapolated to be coherent. The sequence of Israel’s privileges in 9:5 and the recurrence of the elements of promise and patriarchs in 9:6–13 suggest that the unstated element in the argument is Christ. Christ is present in 9:6–13 as the type for which these individual σπέρματα, the patriarchs, are antitypes. It is as the seed of Abraham that Christ fulfills the promises to the patriarchs.

After a defense of God’s free exercise of mercy in 9:14–24, Paul offers a catena of scriptures that prophesy God’s paradoxic calling of the Gentiles (9:25–26) and the mere remnant of the faithful in Israel (9:27–29). The final citation from Isa 1:9 brings the argument back around to its previous terms: “If the Lord of hosts had not left σπέρμα to us, we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Comorrah” (Rom 9:29). The discovery that Paul is still talking about σπέρμα opens our ears to hear the language of the promise echoed in his quotation of Isa 10:22, where the people of (unfaithful) Israel are like the “sand of the sea” (cf. Gen 22:17; 32:12). The reckoning of Abraham’s seed, Paul insists, does not branch genealogically; for the purposes of the promise, it is reckoned κατ’ ἐκκλησιάν (9:11). Not Abraham’s “children of the flesh” but the “children of the promise” are reckoned εἰς σπέρμα (9:8). We now see why the list of Israel’s benefits in 9:4–5 is bracketed on both sides by κατὰ σάρκα (9:3, 5); Paul’s defense of God’s honesty on the basis of the promise and the seed relies on physical descent (4:19) at the same time that it prepares for the transcendence of all “fleshy” strictures (9:8).

The difficulty of arguing that Christ fulfills the promises to the patriarchs because “Christ is the seed” is that the explicit statement of Gal 3:16 is not in Romans. Nils Dahl demonstrated that Paul’s identification of Christ as “the seed” in Galatians “depends on an exegetical inference by analogy. Just as thine offsprings’ in the promise to David [i.e., 2 Sam 7] refers to the Messiah, so does thine offsprings’ in the promise to Abraham.” Dahl pointed to Paul’s free exegesis of Gen 49:10 in Gal 3:19 to show how readily Paul could extend the idea of the seed/Messiah. Most important, Dahl found that Paul’s argument in Galatians demands an underlying exegetical tradition: “Gal 3:14a already presupposes the messianic interpretation of ‘the offsprings of Abraham’: that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles.”

Features of his letter to Rome suggest that he does the same there. Though he had never visited Rome, it is easy to imagine that his co-workers there (ch. 16) would explain such a fundamental exegetical principle of his gospel, were it not already known. Richard Hays’s comment on Galatians could extend to Romans as well: “although Paul’s exegesis could never pass historical critical muster, it is internally consistent and compelling, once one grants his promise that σπέρμα is to be understood as a reference to the Messiah.” The importance of this promise is frequently underestimated in exegesis of Galatians, and almost universally neglected—presumably because of its implicitness—in Romans: “Paul insists that the Messiah (Χριστός) is the one and only heir of the promise to Abraham and that others participate in this inheritance only ‘in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:14).”

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18 It seems puzzling that Paul would pluralize ἑγαγελίαι, since he has explicitly discussed only the one promise made to Abraham (cf. Gal 3:21). Two comments will suffice here: (a) Paul also pluralizes διὰ δύο in this verse, a term for which he has given no previous explanation and whose pluralization is equally enigmatic; (b) προσεγγίσεως in 1:2 is also a part of the complex of promises under consideration—Gen 17:5 and the other promises to Abraham are not the only set of promises Paul credits Christ with confirming. Textual variants at 9:4 (1P and a few uncials have ἑγαγελία) are best seen as scribal simplification.

19 I leave aside the difficult question of the meaning of 9:5b; it is not clear that it would matter for this argument whether it is a parenthetical panec or a divine ascription to Christ.
The promise Christ confirms in Rom 15:8 is the promise "to the patriarchs," that is, to Abraham. As it is spelled out in Romans, that promise concerns not the land or Abraham's physical descendants but Abraham's universal fatherhood of Gentiles. 25

Servant of the Gentiles

In substance, the first of the two statements on the "service" of Christ in 15:8-9a already deals largely with Gentiles; the promises to the patriarchs are confirmed, and God's truthfulness defended—Christ is the promised σαρμα— but in such a way as to have no practical bearing on Israel. 26 Israel is always in view as Paul works out God's faithfulness and labors to bear fruit among the Gentiles. Yet Paul is quick to move on—once he has compactly noted Christ's service to the circumcision answers the ever-preserving problem of God's faithfulness (15:8)—to an extended celebration of Christ's achievements for Gentiles.

When Paul characterizes Christ's service to Gentiles as ὑπὲρ ἐλέους, he is building on his final analysis of the "mystery" of Jewish unbelief in 11:25-32. The Jews are enemies of the gospel for the sake of the Gentiles (11:28), who "have now received mercy because of their [the Jews'] disobedience" (11:30). Romans 9:14 opened the subject of God's selective exercise of ἐλέους (9:15-18) in direct response to the question of God's apparent unfaithfulness to Israel (9:6, 14). Paul answered the charge by arguing that the σαρμα of Abraham confirms God's faithfulness to his promises; this accounts for the apparent exclusion of some ("children of the flesh," 9:8) from the blessings of God's faithfulness. But what about the surprising inclusion of others, notably Gentiles (9:23)? This Paul explains in terms of God's free exercise of mercy. The way God has chosen to exercise his mercy is to (temporarily) exclude Israel through their hardening (11:7) or "stumbling" (11:11) so that Gentiles may receive mercy (11:30-32) and in turn provoke Israel's jealousy to the end that they too will receive mercy. Paul has prepared the ground carefully for his characterization of Christ's "service" to the Gentiles as ὑπὲρ ἐλέους (15:9a).

The "glory" that Christ offers to God through the inclusion of Gentiles is likewise anticipated, in association with God's mercy, in 9:23. It is more precisely and proximately adumbrated in 15:7, where the theological warrant for the Romans' mutual reception is that "The Christ received you eἰς δόξαν τοῦ

ορανατικοι λεκτος, 27 Finally and most significantly, glory to God is the theme that Christ himself enacted in 15:9b and to which he summons the Gentiles in 15:10-11. 28 Wagner's reading of 15:8-9a also clarifies Paul's perplexing choice of γεγονότα in v. 8a. The perfect has puzzled interpreters (beginning with manuscripts that emended to the aorist) because its sense of a change of condition with continuing results seems an awkward way to describe Jesus' relationship to Israel (when was the Christ not a servant of the circumcision?). 29 But the infinitive's governance of the second half of the twofold assessment of Christ's service makes Paul's choice transparent, since a change of condition with continuing results is precisely what has happened in Christ's relationship to the Gentiles. Romans 15:9b-11 shows the speaker of the Psalms—understood as Christ himself—calling this new condition into being; 15:12 shows from scripture that this change was predicted in the scriptures as a result of his resurrection; and, in retrospect, 1:4-5 adumbrates both the grounds of the change (ὁρισθεντὸς ἢ ἐξ ἀναστάσεως, νεκρῶν) and its continuing result (εἰς ἡμῶν πίστευς ἐν πάσιν τοῖς ἐθνεσιν), for which Paul's mission to the Gentiles is instrumental.

In 15:8-9a, especially in the reading supported above, Paul's relentless
dual focus on Jew and Gentile in Romans finds expression in his assessment of Christ. This twofold analysis is the common structure of three key christological statements in Romans: 1:3–4, 15:8–9a, and 15:12. Paul’s expression of this double perspective on Christ is interwoven with latent exegetical premises; but unraveling this fabric of assumptions will clarify both Paul’s messianic Christology and the exegetical postulates of Paul’s brand of early Christianity.

Paul’s Prooftexts: Rom 15:9b–12

The quotations in 15:9–12 are presented as warrants or explications of the statement of 15:8–9a, καθὼς γέγραπται. As Käsemann noted, “Paul mentioned his essential concern before in v. 8a almost as a premise in order to uphold the ‘firstborn right’ of the Jews in relation to the salvation event. Nevertheless the acceptance of the Gentiles is for him the decisive eschatological event. Hence the keyword ἐσθήν binds the quotations together.”

The contexts of the Psalm passages quoted in the catenae of 15:7–13 both refer to God’s ἐλεος (15:9b/Ps 17:50 LXX; 15:11/Ps 116:2 LXX) in exhorting the ἐσθήν to praise God. Though Paul does not cite the portion of either Psalm that contains the term, Richard Hays suggests that Paul chose these passages precisely because they bring references to God’s mercy into juxtaposition with references to praise of God among the Gentiles.31

Romans 15:9b places the words of the righteous sufferer of Ps 17:50 LXX in the mouth of Christ.32 Christ speaks from a Psalm in which “David” celebrates God’s aid against his enemies and salvation from crisis. Paul’s only modification of the LXX text is to omit a vocative κύριε (since it is the κύριος Jesus, who is speaking here). The Psalm culminates with a rhapsothic description of the Psalmist’s God: “Magnifying the saving deeds of his king and performing mercy [ἐλεος] for his Messiah [Χριστος], for David and his seed [σπέρματι] forever.”

Apart from 1:3, Paul names David twice in Romans, both times as the speaker (Δαυιδ λέγετι ... ) of a Psalm (4:6–8/LXX Ps 31:1–2a; 11:9/LXX Ps 68:22–23). These three occurrences make up all of Paul’s explicit references to

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29 Dunn raises the question in such terms (Romans 9–16, 847).
30 Käsemann, Romans, 386.
31 Hays, Echoes, 72.
33 Dennis Duling finds it curious that Paul did not include 17:51 in his quotation, “a passage which is messianically interpreted in Rabbinic literature and could easily have provided a link to Isa 11:10 in an exegetical tradition” (“The Promises to David and Their Entrance into Christianity: Nailing Down a Likely Hypothesis,” NTS20 [1973–74]: 71). We can only speculate that Paul did not need to include 17:51 for his audience to understand the messianic import of the portion he did quote.
34 Hays, “Christ Prays the Psalms,” 16.
35 Paul’s only modification of the LXX is to omit the temporal reference “in that day;” “For the opening indication of time Paul has no application since he is not concerned with the future but with the epiphany of the shoot of David which has already taken place and is indicated by χρονος ...” (Käsemann, Romans, 386).
37 The passage that initiated Paul’s argument based on the presupposition that Christ is the seed (9:5) is the one Nils Dahl pointed to as the single unambiguous usage of Χριστους in Paul, where “anyone who knows the original meaning of the term understands that the Christ belongs to Israel, precisely as the Messiah” (“The Messiahship of Jesus in Paul” [1953], reprinted in The Crucified Messiah and Other Essays [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974], 39).
summed up in the word justification, and Paul’s handling of the “confession” anticipated this theme by moving beyond its limiting Christology to the universal approbation of “Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:4). Bornkamm was right to look for a connection between these two summaries of Paul’s gospel; but he took the dichotomy of Jew and Gentile in 1:16–17 as merely encoding the universal humanity justified by God. For Paul, the dynamics of this dichotomy, in the new age inaugurated by Christ, raised issues about the justice of God, issues that animated his letter to Rome. Paul had to show God’s justice to Jews first, as well as to Gentiles. That is exactly what his christological analysis in 15:8–9, echoed in his reading of Isa 11:10/Rom 15:12, claims to do. The same pattern rules the allusive exegeses of 1:3–4.

The gospel of God in 1:2 was “pre-promised” (προεπηγάγατο) through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son...” Like the scriptural catena of 15:9b–12, 1:3–4 presents a messianic gospel expressed through reference to scriptures. The gospel is a confirmation through God’s son of the απεστείλατο given long ago to the patriarchs; and it is announced in 15:12 by the prophet par excellence (in Paul’s estimation), Isaiah. A number of seemingly miscellaneous similarities supply further hints at the connection between the beginning and the end of the letter. Romans 15:13 pairs “grace and peace” for the first time since 1:7. The ἐν τῷ πασίνατος of 15:13 shows the fruit of Paul’s apostleship as stated in 1:5, ὑποκοή τίσεως. In 1:4, Jesus is appointed son of God ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἑαυτῆς; in 15:13, the prayed-for abundance of the Romans is ἐν δυνάμει πνευμάτως τῆς ἐκκλησίας—the closest parallel in Paul, lexically, to the difficult phrase of 1:4. Paul’s conclusion to the confession of 1:3–4—the typical accolade “Jesus Christ our Lord”—anticipates the praise and hope of the nations in 15:7–13. These similarities point to the underlying bond between 15:12 and 1:3–4. In both passages, Paul interprets the Davideic heritage and kingship of Jesus on the basis of Jesus’ resurrection and with reference to Christ’s reign over Gentiles. The relationship I suggest for 1:1–7 and 15:7–13 is comparable to that proposed by Nils Dahl for Rom 5:1–11 and 8:1–39; the earlier, denser formulation is spelled out in greater detail in a later, fuller exposition. That Christ was born of David’s line demonstrates God’s truthfulness and faithfulness.

Günther Bornkamm insisted that, rather than simply repeating a creed of no interest to him, Paul must have understood the first of the two summaries of the gospel in Romans’ introduction (1:3–4) to relate to and anticipate the second (1:16–17). For Bornkamm, the gospel as it appears in 1:16–17 could be read:

The second portion of Isa 11:10, like Rom 15:9a, addresses Christ’s service to Gentiles: “[he will be] the one rising [ἐπί οὐρανοὺς] to rule the Gentiles; the Gentiles shall hope in him.” Avissam can simply mean “arise,” but Paul’s oracular reading of Isa 11:10 is shaped by the conviction that Jesus’ resurrection was also his exaltation to be “appointed Son of God in power.” Isa 11:10 predicts, in Paul’s reading, the resurrection of the root of Jesse/seed of David to rule Gentiles. Thus Christ’s exaltation to David’s throne serves at the same time to bring in the Gentiles promised to Abraham.

In the concluding prayer of 15:13, Paul’s wishes for the Romans echo the end of the Isa 11:10 quotation: “the Gentiles shall hope in him.” Paul has constructed his peroratio carefully and uses it to evoke and reinforce important arguments and themes throughout his letter.

Paul’s Introduction in Retrospect

Günther Bornkamm noted that, rather than simply repeating a creed of no interest to him, Paul must have understood the first of the two summaries of the gospel in Romans’ introduction (1:3–4) to relate to and anticipate the second (1:16–17). For Bornkamm, the gospel as it appears in 1:16–17 could be read:

30 Ibid., 6.
31 Dunn, Romans 9–16, 850.
32 Revelation 5:5 conflates the seed of David and root of Jesse to produce the μῆτρα Δαυίδ; cf. 4QFlor 1:11.
33 I take Paul’s seamless movement from the hope of the Gentiles to the hope of “you,” the Romans, as another indicator that the encoded audience is Gentile.
God raised him from the dead points forward to God's glory (15:9a) and is the basis for the hope that is the concluding substance of 15:7–13.51

III. God's Son: Romans 1:3–4

Paul's citation of Isa 11:10 in 15:12 is probably indebted to an interpretive tradition; yet the passage is thoroughly integrated—as indicated above—into Paul's argument. Similarly, 1:3–4 presents a conflation of 2 Sam 7:12–14 and Ps 2:7[–8], whose allusive character suggests that his audience will already have considered these texts in juxtaposition—as had pre-Christian Jewish interpreters of scripture. This exegetical apposition and the allusive terms of reference are the tradition Paul invokes. His interpretation of the passages thus cited is wholly a part of the rhetoric of Romans and gives every appearance of being Paul's own.

In 1:10–3a, Paul announces his interpretive intent with crystal clarity: he will present the gospel of God, which was pre-promised through God's prophets in holy scriptures concerning God's son.52 The prophets to whose promises Paul will allude are Nathan and David.53 Their oracles are associated by the common exegetical rule gezerah shavah, the association of texts based on similarity of wording. The exegetical tradition Paul takes up in Rom 1:3–4 associates the only two texts in the LXX in which the oracular voice of God calls the Davidic king/Messiah yôc.54

The connection around sonship makes clear that the prepositional phrase "concerning his son" (1:3a) modifies not the "gospel of God" (1:1c), but the "holy writings," which immediately precedes it.55 The failure to recognize that Paul is doing messianic exegesis appears to have produced the awkward yet standard attachment of peri to the yôc aytou to to eisogèllon theou.56 If, however, peri to the yôc aytou modifies not to to eisogèllon but gar tois agiàs, then Paul does not insert the phrase to "correct" the christologically inadequate expression of the gospel that follows.57 The phrase turns his readers' minds toward specific and recognizable scriptures "concerning his son." To the yôc aytou is not editorial comment; it is the organizing principle of Paul's exegesis.

The logic behind the consensus that Paul cites a proto-creedal confession to reassure the Romans of his "orthodoxy" is not the dominant logic of Romans. When Paul wishes to make a point, solve a problem, or clinch an argument in Romans, he usually turns to scripture. When he wishes to introduce himself and his gospel, he shows the Romans their common ground in a christological reading of Israel's "prophets."

Romans 1:3: Born from David's Seed

peri to the yôc aytou to geven'meno ek spêrimatos David kata' sarka (Rom 1:3)

anastisuo to spêrima sou meta' se, ois anostai ek tis koulias sou . . .

kai aytou histai moi eis yôc (2 Sam 7:12, 14)

Dennis Duling has argued that the tradition of Davidic promise, represented fundamentally by Nathan's oracle, enters Christian exegesis in the formula of 1:3–4.58 The whole of Rom 1:3b states and restates Jesus' fleshly descent from David, the precise element of the promise of 2 Sam 7 that plays a role in Paul's argument; Christ's physical descent demonstrates God's faithfulness.59 Numerous interpreters of Rom 1:3–4 have found an allusion to 2 Sam 7:12–14, though they do not suggest any self-conscious use of the scripture by Paul.56 Thus Jesus' Davidic heritage fits into the complex of promise and seed

why would he depart completely from his usage elsewhere? If he felt compelled to clarify that Jesus was God's son in introducing the formula, why didn't he simply call it to the eisogèllon to the yôc aytou (cf. Rom 1:9)?

pace Kiesemann, Romans, 13.


The limitations of space prohibit any adequate discussion of kata' sarka here. I simply note that 9:5 shows that it at least conveys Jesus' physical descent—and thus, his confirmation of the promises to both David and Abraham.

E.g., Otto Betz, What Do We Know About Jesus? (London: SCM, 1968), 95; Hengel, Son of God, 64; Dahl, "Promise and Fulfillment," 128. Joel even suggests the combination argued here of 2 Sam 7 with Ps 2 (Messianic Exegesis, 51). Elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, 2 Cor 6:18 does cite a portion of 2 Sam 7:14, but I do not count it as helpful in the present case for two reasons. First, it seems probable that the passage of which the citation is a part (6:14–7:1) is a non-Pauline interpolation into the melded text of 2 Corinthians (for a history and assessment of arguments over the placement and authorship of the passage see M. Thrall, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [ICC, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994], 1:25–36). Second, divine parentage is promised to the whole community in 2 Corinthians, a very different appropriation of the promise from that in Rom 1:3, which emphasizes the physical descent of Jesus as the channel of God's faithfulness to a genealogi-
in Paul’s arguments. Jesus’ Davidic descent plays the same role—in an anticipatory way—in 1:3 as in 15:12; it confirms God’s promise to David and thus confirms God’s truthfulness to the seed of Abraham. Very much like Ps 89:19–37, Paul answers the present unhappily plight of Israel (Rom 9:1–3) by citing God’s faithfulness to the promise of 2 Sam 7; God’s trustworthiness toward David (now fulfilled in David’s seed, Jesus) confirms God’s faithfulness in all things.

Romans 1:4: Appointed from the Resurrection

τοῦ ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου ὦ ὄς θεός ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεύμα ἀνεξάρτητος ἐξ εἰκότους τοῦ καιροῦ

Υἱὸς μου ἐν σοί, ἐγὼ σύμμορφος γεγένηκα σε (Ps 2:7)

Several factors indicate that 1:4 contains an allusion to Ps 2:7—and to the apocalyptic narrative this Psalm signaled in early Christian and contemporaneous Jewish interpretation. Early Christianity saw a fulfillment of God’s promise to David when Jesus’ resurrection/exaltation was taken to be his royal investiture. 60 In 1:4, Christ’s exaltation and enthronement are encapsulated by ὀρθοδόξους, a verb found nowhere else in Paul. Particularly in association with language of resurrection and divine sonship, ὀρθοδόξους points to Paul’s allusive use of Ps 2.

Leslie Allen has argued that ὀρθοδόξους and προφορικῶς in the NT conventionally refer to Ps 2:7. 61 Particularly in the messianic sermons in Acts, these verbs are regularly joined to the theme of Jesus’ resurrection as his “appointment” (e.g., Acts 10:42). Προφορικῶς ὦ θεός in 1 Cor 2:7–8 is the only other use of either verb in Paul’s letters other than Romans. Given the background of early christological appropriations of Ps 2, “the combined motifs of God’s decree, rulers, crucifixion and resurrection (τὸν κύριον τῆς δόξης) in 1 Cor 2:8) point unerringly to Ps 2.” 62 If Paul’s use of προφορικῶς in 1 Cor 2:7 is part of an interpretation of Ps 2, the probability of its use in Rom 1:4 is markedly enhanced. 63

60 Duling, “Promises to David,” 70.
62 E.g., God προφορίκως the delivery of his anointed child (τὸν ἐμοὶ καὶ τίνα τῇ ἐξοπλισμῷ) to his enemies in the exegesis of Ps 2 in Acts 4:25–28, cf. 2:23.
64 Another attractive result of such a background for 1 Cor 2:6–7 could be a blunting of the context of Rom 1:4 confirms Paul’s interpretation of Ps 2 there. By combining christological interpretations of 2 Sam 7 and Ps 2, Paul fashions a twofold analysis of Christ’s divine sonship that corresponds to the pattern found in Rom 15:8–9a and 15:12. 65 Christ’s Davidic heritage fulfills the promises and confirms God’s faithfulness to the Jews; his appointment—that is, his resurrection—relates him to the Gentiles as the node of their inclusion in the family of Abraham and the rule of God’s Messiah.

Our first hint that 1:4 has primary reference to Gentiles comes retrospectively, when we realize verse’s alignment with 15:12b—the resurrection to rule Gentiles. It will have been clear to Paul’s audience earlier. His language (e.g., ὀρθοδόξους) and the probably familiar exegetical pairing with 2 Sam 7 will have brought Ps 2:7 to mind. Then Paul continues his exegesis with the unquoted continuation of the divine voice in Ps 2. On the heels of the appointment of the king as son in Ps 2:7b, God promises: άφημα γενίμα, καὶ δοθεὶς σοι θόνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου (Ps 2:8a). In Rom 1:5–6, Paul follows his allusion to the royal appointment/adoptive of God’s son with a description of the working out of God’s gift of the Gentiles: “through whom we received grace and apostleship unto the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, among whom you also are called of Jesus Christ.”

The appointment language representing Ps 2:7b casts the implicit shadow of Ps 2:8 in Rom 1:5–6, where Paul inserts his own apostleship into the oracular promise of God. Christ’s resurrection inaugurated his service to (or rule over) the Gentiles (15:8, 12); Paul the apostle to the Gentiles (11:13) is the vessel by (or in) which Christ’s rule comes to Gentiles from Asia to Achaea to Rome and beyond, as he produces the “obedience of faith” among them. The apostle himself is the unnamed executor of the inheritance granted to God’s Christ in Ps 2:7b–8/Rom 1:4–6.

Pre-Christian Jewish messianic exegetes had long combined 2 Sam 7 and Ps 2 (4QFlor 1:10–13, 18–19; Pss. Sol. 17:4, 23). The juxtaposition occurs in problem of ὀξυντικῶς in 2:6: that is, whether it indicates political/social powers or supernatural beings. If Paul is alluding to Ps 2, the entire question might take a changed tone. Might he not cite it without making clear or even being certain himself what “powers” it involves? This would fit with his consistent reticence elsewhere (except 1 Thess. 2:15) to assign the guilt for Jesus’ execution to any human agent.

65 For Scott, “The traditional basis for [the] climactic parallelism [of Rom 1:3–4] is none other than 2 Sam. 7:12, 14, which promises that the Messiah from the ‘seed’ (σπέρματι) of David would be adopted as Son of God. Hence τὸν ὀρθοδόξους ἐν δυνάμει in 1:4a . . . is a circumscription for the Adoption Formula in 2 Sam 7:14c” (Adoption as Sons of God, 341–42). Scott’s explanation does not finally agree with the numerous authors cites supporting the influence of Ps 2:7 in Rom 1:4; consequently, his construal of the confession does not reproduce the twofold christological pattern which we have seen repeatedly and which fits the overriding Jew/Gentile concern of Romans.
other early Christian exegeses as well; in Heb 1:5, Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 are juxtaposed as the first members of a long christological catena. Acts 13:32–33 documents a more intricate interweaving of these oracles.

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers [τὴν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἐσπευσθέντα γενομένην], this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus: as also it is written in the second Psalm, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.”

When the Areopagus speech of Acts connects appointment (ἀρίστημα) and resurrection (17:31), it adds a stereotyped image of righteous judgment that suggests a further connection with Isa 11 (vv. 4–5). Pre-Christian Jewish texts frequently associated Ps 2 with Isa 11 in messianic interpretation. Max-Alain Chevallier surveyed the Psalms of Solomon, the Parables of Enoch, Sirach, 4 Esdras, and Baruch, and concluded:

Insofar as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha represent Palestinian Judaism, . . . it developed its messianic beliefs from two or three foundational scriptures: Isaiah 11:1–10, Psalm 2 and, interestingly, Isaiah 49:1–9, the second song of the Servant of YHWH, which already combines Isaiah 11 and Psalm 2 in its own original fashion.

Chevallier found the same combination in the Sibylline Oracles, in Philo, and in Alexandrian LXX texts of Num 24:7, 17, Balaam’s oracle. The regular association of these three oracles in pre-Christian Jewish messianic exegesis makes it entirely intelligible that Paul would also use them to build a bridge of messianic interpretation that spans the length of Romans. Paul can be allusive because he draws on an exegetical practice that preceded and would survive him; the grounding assumption for his use of this exegetical practice is that Jesus the Son of God, as Messiah, is the στέρμα.

66 The fact that this bit of messianic exegesis occurs precisely in a speech of Paul at Pisidian Antioch is intriguing—but I would not want to rely on this as “independent, historical evidence that Paul did indeed affirm the Christology contained in Rom. 1:4” (thus Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 233).
67 See Wilcos, “Promise of the ‘Seed,”” 10.
70 Ibid., 40–41.

IV. Loose Ends in 1:3–4

My aim has been to read Rom 1:3–4 as Paul’s interpretation of traditional messianic scriptural exegesis. In this last section, I want to show how this reading clarifies some of the “difficulties” of these verses.

Jesus as Messiah

The principal marker of Paul’s tension with the formula of 1:3–4 has been its stress on Jesus’ Davidic kingship. This study challenges the orthodoxy that Paul is disinterested in Jesus’ royal messianic status. It is true that the kind of Jewish messianic hope thought by Jewett, for example, to underlay 1:3–4—the hope classically expressed in Ps. Sol. 17—is completely marginal to the messianic interpretation found in Romans. Cranfield suggests that 1:3 “endorses the reality of those promises on which Israel’s messianic hopes were founded.” In reality, Paul shows interest only in those promises that fit his vision of the incoming of the Gentiles and support the axiomatic faithfulness of his God. Still, by entering the fray of Christian messianic exegesis, Paul demonstrates his continued engagement with the question of Jesus’ identity vis-à-vis the messianic hope of Israel—no matter how surprising or disturbing his solution may prove.

Flesh and Spirit

In my reading, the parallel participial construction of the confession of 1:3–4—often highlighted as a marker of its traditional nature—simply reflects the allusive use of two scriptures. The dichotomy of flesh and spirit that reinforces this parallel structure, however, remains difficult. Eduard Schweizer’s important study of this dichotomy in 1:3–4 contended (following Bultmann) that its function there is fundamentally non-Pauline. Schweizer argued that in this christological application, flesh and spirit indicate different but neutrally expressed spheres and thus evince a pre-Pauline, Jewish formulation. Because I see Paul working with an exegetical convention rather than a comparatively rigid proto-creed, I am less willing than Schweizer to imagine that he takes over this dichotomy, which clearly represents a secondary stage of inter-

71 There are exceptions to this; see, e.g., Dahl, “Messiahship of Jesus in Paul.”
74 Kittelmann, Romans, 11.
pretation. But if Paul is responsible for the flesh/spirit dichotomy, then what does it mean for him to speak of God's son κατά σαρκα, particularly if the phrase carries here its normal pejorative valuation (as it indisputably does in every other case where Paul pairs it with κατά πνεύμα;)? And why, if Paul is alluding to the two OT passages suggested here, does he add this dichotomy to them?

It must suffice for now to suggest that there are other indications in Romans that Paul could and did employ the spheres of flesh and spirit as part of his own christological analysis (esp. 8:3–14; 9:5–13). That he chooses to characterize the two sides of his exegetical dichotomy in this way suggests a radical qualification or devaluation of Christ's "service of the circumcision." Interpreters have clashed over this attribution for decades, recognizing that the vocabulary and structure are distinctively Pauline, even while insisting that the usage here indicates different authorship. I suggest that the evidence of Paul's overall command of the material in 1:3–4 tips the scales against authorship other than Paul's. Though its precise working remains clouded, the dichotomy of flesh and spirit in 1:3–4 plays a role in a Pauline resignification and revaluation of Jesus' Davidic heritage and kingship. 76

Appointment and Adoptionism

It has been charged that the so-called adoptionist language of 1:4 demonstrates Paul's distance from the creed. But if Paul alludes to Ps 2:7–8 in 1:4, he presumably chose his specific language because he wanted his allusion to be recognized. Perhaps the adoptionism of 1:4 is a product of this traditional language (i.e., ὑποκειόμενος), which fits ill with Paul's own Christology; yet Paul is able to associate the resurrection of believers with that of Christ—notably in Rom 8—in a way that implies little difference apart from prestige and chronology. 77 Discussion of 1:3–4 has stuck on this point because readers persist in seeing the confession as relating two chronological stages in Jesus' messianic career. It is true that the narrative the two verses depict is adoptionist, if they are read as a summary story of Jesus. But reading 1:3–4 together with 15:9–12 suggests that Paul alludes less to two stages than to two aspects of Jesus' messiahship: confirming God's faithfulness (i.e., to Israel), and glorifying God among the nations.

V. Conclusions

Dennis Duling concluded that Rom 1:3–4 is the most likely place for the promises to David to have entered Christian discourse. So far as the extant evidence is concerned, I would concur; but Jesus' Davidic messiahship had clearly been the subject of prior, extended exegetical reflection. Paul's use of 2 Sam 7 and Ps 2 depends on assumed connections deep in the fabric of christological interpretation, and it opens certain of those connections to further scrutiny.

Paul offers Rom 1:3–4 as an expansion of his self-presentation in the epistolary prescript of Romans. He goes so far as to insert himself into the christological narrative of Ps 2, as the instrument by which God's Messiah inherits the nations. Paul's function as Apostle to the Gentiles is integral to the foreordained plan of God as it is outlined in Paul's gospel. It is no surprise, though, to learn that Paul plays a unique and important role in his own worldview.

The surprise I hope to have shown is Paul's interest in an aspect of early Christology that he is not commonly thought to have cared about. To be sure, Paul's messianism is not the same as that of Ps. Sol. 17, or any other known Jewish messianism. But Paul does make conscious use of the datum that "Jesus is the Messiah of Israel"; and the startling conclusions he draws from this datum call for continued reflection on Paul's interpretive enterprise as the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles.

75 Later appearances of confessions structured by this dichotomy reflect little of Paul's complexity: δε ἐφενερέθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδεικνύθη ἐν πνεύματι (1 Tim 3:16); θεοπατεῖς μὲν πσωτε ζωοποιοῦσαις δὲ πνεύματι (1 Pet 3:18).
76 If the completion of this dichotomy highlights the superiority of the second aspect of Christ's messiahship over the first, ἐν δυναμεί παραγείρεται a similar service. Like δυναμεί, it is without parallel in 1:3. Where we do find this expression applied to the resurrection, its opposite member is ἐν σαρκί (1 Cor 15:43). "The opposition between the ἑσπέρησι of the σαρκ and the δύναμις of the πνεύμα... is precisely the juxtaposition that suggests itself here" (H. Schneider, "Κατά Πνεῦμα Ἀγιουσώμενος [Rom 1:4]," Bib 48 [1967]: 363). Ἐν δυναμεί "indicated that Jesus' divine sonship (v. 3) had been 'upgraded' or 'enhanced' by the resurrection. For Paul this would be a further way of saying that the gospel was not about Jesus simply as Messiah; that role was inadequate for the full sweep of God's purpose; the full extent of God's purpose could only be realized through Jesus as Messiah (of Israel) risen from the dead to become the Son of God in power (for all)" (Dunn, Romans 1–8, 14).
77 Rom 1:4 implies that the Son's resurrection is prototypical of the future resurrection of the dead (ἀναπτσαμενοὺς νεκρῶν)... Rom 8 goes beyond this by arguing that those who are in Christ will participate in the resurrection and sonship of the Son by being adopted as sons of God at a Spirit-mediated resurrection. The correlation of Rom. 8 with Rom. 1:4 is thus complete and unmistakable: believers will share in the destiny of him who was 'appointed Son of God in power by the Holy Spirit at the resurrection of the dead' (Scott, Adoption as Sons of God, 245).
78 Duling, "Promises to David," 77.
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