

PAPER #4

The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

The purpose of this paper is to debunk two popular misconceptions right from the outset of this examination. The two are these: (1) that the miracles that Jesus performed are proof that *he had a divine nature*; and (2) that the titles that are assigned to Jesus in the Bible—specifically, the “Son”, the “Son of God”, the “only-begotten Son”, the “Messiah”, and the “Christ”—explicitly identify him as a human being *with a divine nature*.

These misconceptions affect how one would assess the biblical evidence for Orthodox Trinitarianism. If either misconception were actually true, a foundational premise of Trinitarian doctrine—that Jesus has a divine nature along with his human nature—would be directly and indisputably proved. Both notions are applied to precisely this end in the express thinking of many Christians.

Popularly, Christians often point to the miracles that Jesus performed as proof of his deity. He had to have a divine nature; otherwise he couldn’t have performed the supernatural deeds that he did. Hence, one hears, “I know Jesus is God because... look at the miracles he was able to perform!”

Alternatively, Christians often point to the titles given to him as proof of his deity—especially the title, “Son of God.” Their use of this designation proves that the writers of Scripture considered Jesus to be God; and since they are inspired, it follows that Jesus is, in fact, God. Hence, one might very well hear, “Of course the Bible teaches that Jesus is God, that’s what it means when it calls him the Son of God’, and even the ‘Messiah.’”

Neither inference is valid. It does not follow from the miracles that he performed that Jesus is God. Furthermore, it does not follow from his being called the “Son of God” that he has a divine nature. The purpose of this paper is to explain how and why each is a faulty inference.

The misconceptions this paper is intended to clear up are *popular* misconceptions— notions that are widely held amidst the larger culture of Christians. Students who have made a serious study of the Bible in the original languages will not likely share these misconceptions. Their study has led them to see how wrong these notions are. Accordingly, serious students will find little (if anything) new in the arguments of this paper. It is not directed at them. I will discuss each of the two misconceptions in turn.

Misconception #1

The fact that Jesus performed supernatural miracles proves that he was God, in possession of a divine nature.

Why do I maintain that this is a misconception? There are fundamentally three reasons:

(1) The miracles performed by Jesus cannot prove that he has a divine nature any more than the miracles performed by a prophet or apostle proves that he has a divine nature.

It requires neither deep thought nor extensive biblical knowledge to realize that it is fallacious to argue for Jesus' deity on the basis of his performance of miracles. Moses performed supernatural deeds, did he have a divine nature? Elijah performed miracles, was he divine? Peter and Paul performed miracles, does that mean they were God?

Throughout the Bible, supernatural deeds are performed by ordinary human beings who have been granted a special and remarkable authority by God. Strictly speaking, no human being can perform miracles. It is always God who performs the miracle. Yet, sometimes, he does so in connection with the word or deed of a human being. Why? Because he purposes to credential that human being. He wants to verify and validate the man's claim to have authority from God.

When miracles happened in connection with a prophet, it was to verify that he really was a prophet, that he really had been sent by God. When the supernatural happened in connection with an apostle, it was to offer evidence from God himself that that apostle really was an authoritative spokesman for the Messiah. When the supernatural happened in connection with the word or deed of Jesus, it was designed to be a "sign" from God, proving his claim to be the Messiah. We never see Jesus being and acting out of his innate power as God; we see him acting out of his unique authority as the Messiah. Accordingly, his miracles could and did prove his Messiahship (as they were intended to do); but they do not and cannot, in and of themselves, prove his deity.

(2) To the extent that Jesus gives an account of how he performs miracles, he does not explain them in terms of his own divine nature; he attributes them to his Father.

The point made above is entirely consistent with Jesus' own account of his supernatural work. Speaking with respect to his supernatural deeds, he says,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

shows him all things that he himself is doing; and the Father will show him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he wishes." (John 5:19–21, NASV)

Jesus' point in this passage seems to be this: The Son cannot just decide at his own discretion to perform a miracle. He can only perform those miracles that are in keeping with what he "sees" his Father is going to do. The Father loves him; he has appointed him to his status as "Son." That is why the Father "shows him" what he is going to do and invites him to become a part of it—so that the glory and awesome power of God might offer proof of his unique status as the Son. Furthermore, he says to his disciples, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

Accordingly, the great works that are being done, Jesus tells us, are a matter of "what the Father is doing." He predicts further that "the Father" is going to do still greater works. True, the Son is an agent connected to those works. Hence, "whatever the Father does, these things the Son does in like manner." But Jesus is quite clear that the power and initiative behind the "works" he does come from his Father. Jesus never attributes his ability to do miracles to his own innate ability as God. He always refers it away from himself and to his Father. It is the Father who does the words! Jesus only shows up and follows instructions.

What Jesus says about the power and initiative to perform miracles being from God is also true of his teaching. Jesus does not speak from some innate authority within himself. He derives his authority to speak from his Father—"...I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me." (John 8:28, NASV) [See also John 6:38–39; 12:49–50]

(3) We never see Jesus acting out of a divine nature; we always see him acting as an ordinary human being in subjection to and dependence upon God.

Everything else we know about Jesus from the gospel accounts points to a human being in a unique relationship to God. He is never depicted as being different from us by virtue of some divine attributes. He sleeps, he eats...he just is a human being like we are. Accordingly, if we assume that Orthodox Trinitarianism is right and that Jesus does, in fact, have a divine nature, then that divine nature in Jesus is an *invisible, non-empirical* reality. It is always his *human* nature that is prominent and empirically observable when we see him in action. We never see God acting from inside of him; we always see a human being, submitting to his Father, waiting to obey and serve his Father, and being "glorified" by his Father.

Jesus' temptations in the wilderness are sometimes treated as if they were a showdown between God and Satan. Reading the account accordingly strips it of its primary significance and its true poignancy. What we see in the temptations is a man

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

being tempted by Satan to disobey God, his Father. What we see in Jesus is a man who was so thoroughly committed to the truth of the Scripture that he chose to remind himself of and obey what those Scriptures said rather than listen to the subtle lies of the enemy. The bottom line is this: we never, in any circumstance, see Jesus behaving in any way that is not explicable in terms of him being a human being. He is a human being with a unique role, an unmatched authority, and a remarkable moral purity; but he is just a human being. He is not the transcendent omnipotent God walking—not in the sense that popular Trinitarianism wants to suggest.

Misconception #2

The fact that Jesus was given the following titles proves that he was considered God and was thought to have a divine nature: Son of God, Christ, Messiah, Son, and only-begotten Son.

Why is this a misconception? My explanation will have to be more involved than my explanation of the first misconception. I will construct my response by making a series of observations that build on each other:

(1) The titles “Christ” and “Messiah” are exactly the same title—“Anointed One.”

The English word “Christ” is simply an anglicized form of the Greek word *christos*. In Greek, *christos* means “the anointed one.” The English word “Messiah” is simply an anglicized form of the Hebrew word *meshiach*. In Hebrew, *meshiach* means “the anointed one.” Clearly, therefore, all three titles mean exactly the same thing. “Messiah”, “Christ”, “Anointed One,” they all simply mean the One who has been anointed. They only differ with respect to whether they are derived from Hebrew, Greek, or English.

(2) The titles “Christ”, “Messiah”, and “Anointed One” are not titles that indicate Jesus’ deity; they are titles that indicate Jesus’ status and authority as king of the eternal Kingdom of God.

The title “Anointed One” refers specifically to the one who has been anointed to be king. This can refer to any king. It is used to describe King Saul in the Old Testament. Then, it is used to describe King David and all the kings of Israel who were sons of David. Accordingly, select any one of these kings—the title “Messiah,” or “Christ,” or “Anointed One” was applied to him; for he was the king of Israel.

The reason “anointed one” came to be a title for this king was a result of the ritual that was practiced in conjunction with his coronation as king. When a man was appointed king, he was anointed (he had olive oil poured over his head) to signal the fact that he

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

now had the authority as king. Anointing had other cultural significance as well. Indeed, it was used in conjunction with other offices. Prophets were anointed. Priests were anointed. Also, anointing could be employed in ordinary life medicinally and cosmetically. But, by the time we get to the coming of Jesus, there is one who is to be anointed that everyone is waiting for. He is "THE ANOINTED ONE." He is the final promised king who will rule over the eternal kingdom of God.

For the purposes of this paper, the important thing is that it is Jesus' status as the divinely appointed king of God's kingdom that is being identified and emphasized by the title "Anointed One" ["Messiah", "Christ"]. The title says nothing, one way or the other, about Jesus' deity. Whether Jesus possesses a divine nature or not, what is in view when the Bible calls him the Christ [Messiah, Anointed One] is his status and authority as the King of Kings.

(3) The titles "Son" and "Son of God" are messianic titles. They too indicate Jesus' status and authority as king of the eternal Kingdom of God. They do not indicate Jesus' deity.

The title "son" has its roots in the Davidic Covenant. In 2 Samuel 7 we have an account of the spectacular promise that Yahweh made to David.

David had begun making plans to build a temple to Yahweh. David consults with the prophet Nathan, asking if that would be acceptable to God. Nathan initially says "yes." But God comes to Nathan with a message to deliver to David:

"You are not going to build me a temple (house), David. I am going to build you a dynasty (house). I will raise up your descendent after you to rule, and I will establish his kingdom, and 'the throne of his kingdom' will endure forever. I will establish a unique relationship with your descendent. I will be a 'Father' to him; and he will be a 'Son' to me. When he strays from me and commits iniquity, I will chasten him and correct him, but I will not forsake him. I will remain loyal to my promise to you and not withdraw my favor from him as I did from Saul when he fell into iniquity. Your house, your rule, your kingdom will remain always in my favor; your throne will be established forever."
[See 2 Samuel 7:8–17; also note David's prayer that follows in 7:18–29]

God promises David that he and his descendents have been chosen to fulfill a special role in God's purposes. Yahweh—who has promised to be the God of Israel; and who has called Israel to be his people—will be God over them by establishing a Kingdom where he, Yahweh, rules. How will he do that? Yahweh will rule through a man that he appoints to rule on his behalf. David, and his sons after him, are the ones through whom God will establish his rule. And their right to that throne—the throne of Yahweh's rule—is permanent. God will never forsake the dynasty of David. It will always—to the end of time—be a son of David who has the right and legitimacy to sit on the throne of the king of Israel, mediating the rule of Yahweh.

There is a particularly significant part of God's promise to David. Yahweh says—speaking explicitly about David's son, Solomon, who would rule after him (but, as other evidence shows, David understood it to apply equally to himself as well)—“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me.” This is clearly and indisputably in the context of promising Solomon (and, therefore, David before him) kingly rule. Accordingly, whatever exactly it means to make Solomon his “son” and to become a “father” to Solomon, it means roughly something like this: “I will invest my authority in you and embody my rule in you (be a “father” to you) and you will be that human being in whom I shall embody my rule (be a “son” to me).” We can conclude this only from the general nature of the Davidic Covenant itself. Nothing in the context of 2 Samuel 7 would allow us to know more specifically than this what the metaphor might mean. However, as various Psalms begin to spell out the glories, privileges, and significance of being the “son” of God, it becomes clear that how I have defined it above is in the ballpark of how David understood it.

Psalm 2 is very instructive with respect to the concept of the “Son.” It is widely held that Psalm 2 was written by David to serve as a song to be performed at the coronation ceremony of a new king. It was probably written for Solomon's coronation. In the Psalm, the king who is being crowned...

- is referred to as the “*messiach*” [the Anointed One, the Messiah] (“... against Yahweh and against his *messiach* [Anointed One]...”, Psalm 2:2);
- he is referred to by Yahweh himself as “my King” (Psalm 2:6);
- he is said to be the one with respect to whom the promise was made in the covenant with David (“I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”, Psalm 2:7);
- he is called “My Son” in that same sentence and then again in verse 12 (“Do homage to the Son, that he may not become angry, and you perish in the way...”, Psalm 2:12)

So, we see three distinct messianic titles attributed to this king: (i) Messiah/Christ/Anointed One; (ii) Son; and (iii) King (in connection with the Davidic Covenant).

More importantly, Psalm 2, is a window onto who and what this Son is who is being crowned as king. This Psalm shows us what David believes is entailed by his being decreed Yahweh's son [“My Son”]:

(1) ***His rule will be opposed by all the ungodly nations and rulers of the world.*** (2:1–3) Presumably he will be opposed because the ungodly oppose the rule of Yahweh. Hence, if to oppose the rule of Yahweh necessarily translates into opposing the rule of His Son, His Anointed, then it follows that the Son must, in fact, be the very representative of Yahweh's rule. Perhaps he is even the very embodiment of that rule.

(2) ***His rule will be absolutely secure, because Yahweh himself has invested himself in that rule.*** Yahweh's response to the ungodly opposition is to laugh. (2:4–6) He laughs because he is committed to the King he is installing on Zion. The nations are no match

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

for his Son; because they are no match for him, Yahweh. The rule of the Son just is the rule of Yahweh. God will meet all opposition to the Son's rule as if it were opposition to his own rule. Presumably, because—in the final analysis—*it is* his rule.

(3) *He stands to rule over everything in God's creation* (2:7–9)—because he is the recipient of the monumental promise ("the decree") made by Yahweh to David. Presumably, the extent of the Son's rule results from the fact that this Son, who is installed in Zion, is the very embodiment of the rule of Yahweh himself. Because Yahweh's rule knows no limits, because Yahweh rules over the entire universe (cf., 1 Chron. 29:10–13), so does the Son's authority to rule extend over the entire universe.

(4) *He is worthy of worship as if he were Yahweh himself.* David writes, "*Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship Yahweh with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that he not become angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in him.*" (2:10–12) These are incredible exhortations to give to all the kings and judges of the earth. They are to respect the Son above any and every other person. They are to respect him, fear him, and worship him as they would Yahweh himself. Indeed, the very outcome of their lives hinges on whether or not they give the Son his due respect. Surely that is an attribute of God, not a human being. So, presumably, this is what David must be thinking: How you respond to the Son is the same as how you respond to his Father, Yahweh. The Son is the embodiment of what Yahweh is. All the authority and divine status of Yahweh is embodied in the Son. Therefore, the Son is what Yahweh is. [Note, however, that these assertions are being made with respect to the very human Solomon.]

Finally, notice how Psalm 2 supports what we maintained above. Psalm 2 is completely and utterly focused on the Son being KING and having the very rule and authority that innately belongs to Yahweh himself. The title "Son" for David is not a designation of the person's ontological nature. It does not describe the genesis of his being. It does not indicate what sort of "stuff" he is composed of. It is a metaphor that is sharply focused on his divine *rule*, not on his divine nature. It apparently does imply that the Son is the embodiment of God's authority, status, and power; but it does not imply that the Son is the embodiment of divine stuff. True, it doesn't rule out that the Son is made of divine stuff; but that is not what it expressly affirms—at least, not so far as David is concerned in Psalm 2.

∞ ∞ ∞

The same statement in 2 Samuel 7:14 that we already discussed above is the foundation for the title "Son of God." The "Son of God" is the one who is the recipient of the promise made by God to David with respect to his descendents, "I will be a father to him and he will be a *son* to me." The Son of God is that man to whom God is committed to being "a father" in the sense that he meant it in 2 Samuel 7:14. My contention is that he meant it in the sense of "I will invest my divine authority as Yahweh in you, so that

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

your rule will represent my rule in the world.” Therefore, to be the Son of God is to be that man whose rule as King is representative of the rule of Yahweh himself.

Since David, Solomon, and all the sons of David down the line after him have borne the title “Son of God,” it clearly is not a title that indicates the deity of the man. David, Solomon, etc. were clearly not divine. They were not God incarnate. But the Bible does not hesitate to call them “sons of God.” Why not? Because the title indicates their status and authority as appointed kings over Israel, as men whose rule represents the rule of Yahweh himself. An ordinary human being can bear that title. There is nothing in the title itself that requires the King to have a divine nature.

The title “Son” is interchangeable with “Son of God.” To be the “Son” is exactly the same thing: to be that man to whom God had made the promise in 2 Samuel, “I will be a father to him and he will be a *son* to me.” The “Son” is the recipient of that promise.

Again, by the time we get to the coming of Jesus, there is one who is to exist in this promised relation to God as his “son” for whom everyone is waiting. He is “THE SON.” He is the final promised king who will rule over the eternal kingdom of God forever, just as God had promised David. They are relatively rare, but there are other descriptions of this promised king in the New Testament that are instructive: “the One,” “the Coming One,” or simply “the One who is to come.” It is quite clear that such designations mean to describe that expected individual who will come to be king over the eternal Kingdom of God.

Notice, therefore, that all of the titles of Jesus ultimately designate the same thing. There are all synonymous. Whether Jesus is called the “Anointed One”, the “Messiah”, the “Christ”, the “Son”, the “Son of God”, the “Coming One”—no matter which title is used, it is indicating his status as the king who is to come to rule over God’s Kingdom.

Once again, for the purposes of this paper, the important thing is that it is Jesus’ status as the divinely appointed king of God’s kingdom that is being identified and emphasized by the title “Son”. The title says nothing, one way or the other, about Jesus’ deity. Whether Jesus possesses a divine nature or not, what is in view when the Bible calls him the “Son” or the “Son of God” is his status and authority as King.

(4) The description of Jesus being the “only-begotten” or “only-begotten Son” does not indicate Jesus’ deity. Indeed, it is a mistranslation.

Christians sometimes make much of the fact that Jesus is the “only-begotten” Son of God, focusing on the “begotten” part. Given their Trinitarian assumptions, they assume that being “begotten” by God must necessarily entail God’s having imparted his divine nature to Jesus. Viewed this way, it would seem to strongly support Trinitarian doctrine. Jesus is one person with a human nature and a divine nature. That has to be true. He was “begotten” of God.

There is a problem with that. Virtually all scholars agree that "only-begotten" is a mistranslation of the Greek. (It stems from the fact that Jerome, who translated the Latin Vulgate version, mistranslated it. Subsequent Bible translations were loathe to depart from the Vulgate.) The Greek word *monogenes* would better be translated "unique," or "one and only." It means, quite literally, one of a kind. [See Appendix L] So, when the New Testament speaks of Jesus as the *monogenes* Son, it is suggesting that he is the "unique Son," the "one-of-a-kind Son."

What is it about Jesus that makes him unique? As we saw in (2) and (3) above, Jesus shared his titles with others. David was called the Messiah. Solomon was called the Son of God. Any messianic title that was applied to Jesus had been applied to many others before him. So, the New Testament writers—John especially—are eager to point out that Jesus is not just "the Son" like others before him had been, he is the unique, one-of-a-kind Son who never has been before. (And who will never cease to be the Son.)

One of the things this series of papers should begin to fill out is what, exactly, constitutes Jesus' uniqueness. Jesus fits the qualifications to be the Son as no previous son of God ever had. Jesus fulfilled the promises made with respect to the son of God, while no other son had. Jesus was not just a better and more magnificent son than previous sons. He was of a whole different order. As we shall see, he was the one for whom all of creation was created in the first place. He was appointed to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords before there even was a cosmos. Jesus was not a son of God, he was THE SON OF GOD. John emphasizes just this point by calling him the *monogenes* Son.

(5) The title "Son of Man" is a messianic title. It too indicates Jesus' status and authority as king of the eternal Kingdom of God. It does not indicate Jesus' humanity.

The title "Son of Man"—used almost exclusively by Jesus in indicating himself—is simply an equivalent title to both "Son" and "Son of God." The operative term in all three titles is "Son." The "Son" is the one to whom God promised, "...and he will be a *son* to me." The title "Son of God", then, simply makes explicit what is already implicit in the title "Son." The promise in the Davidic Covenant was that Solomon would be a son "to me (Yahweh, God)." Accordingly, the promised "son" was going to be a "son of Yahweh"—a "son of God." So, "Son of God" is a fuller phrase that describes *exactly* the same thing as "Son."

The title "Son of Man" has fundamentally the same designation as the titles "Son" or "Son of God." We can see that quite clearly in John 5. In Jesus' discourse from John 5:19–30, Jesus is describing the relationship between "the Son" (or "the Son of God") and his Father. The whole discourse concerns the Son in the sense of the Davidic Messiah. In the midst of that discourse Jesus says, "...and he (God) gave him (the Son)

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man." I think it is clear that Jesus is using the title "Son of Man" to be virtually synonymous with "Son."

However, the title "Son of Man" is not *exactly* the same as "Son." It carries a nuance of emphasis that does not exist in the title "Son of God," or "Son." The title "Son of Man" means the one, taken from among mankind, who is the "Son." Or, the "Son appointed-from-among-men." While the title explicitly carries the connotation that this one who has been appointed to be a son to God is a man, a human being, nevertheless, the operative term is still the "Son." That is, to be the "Son of Man" is to be the King of Israel, the one appointed to rule for Yahweh himself. It is an exalted messianic title, not a humble, lowly depiction of oneself as just an ordinary guy. It is a humble, lowly guy who has been given an exalted status.

The foundation and origin of this title is in Psalm 8:4. Psalm 8 is a poetic reflection or meditation on David's response to the Davidic Covenant, announced to him by Nathan. After Nathan declared God's promise to David, David responded, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" [2 Samuel 7:18; also 1 Chron. 17:16–18] David was greatly humbled that someone as insignificant as he is would be granted such an exalted honor and status. It is this experience that David memorializes in Psalm 8.

The heart of the poem is 8:3–8. I would paraphrase it like this:

When I consider how vast and magnificent your creation is, when I consider how wondrous and grand it is, I am amazed that you have had a mind to appoint *me*, a lowly human being—the one you have designated your Son—to such an exalted role. Though I am a mere man, you have given me a status that is above every other creature. You have made me barely below your own exalted status as God. [For my purposes here, I will assume the reading of the NASV rather than the Septuagint.] You have given me authority to rule over the whole of creation.

In the course of saying what I have paraphrased above, David writes, "What is man that you take thought of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" We could capture the sense of this in its context like this: *What am I, who is a mere human being, that you would even give me a thought? And what am I, whom—from among all mankind—you have chosen to be your Son, that you would have any care for me at all?* Here in Psalm 8:4, therefore, David uses the description "Son of man" to describe his newly appointed status as the king who embodies Yahweh's rule. Because it parallels "man" in the line above [What is man // (What is) the son of man], it is clear that "son of man" is meant to mean something like this: "the Son who is appointed from among mankind."

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

In context, the statement as a whole is intended to highlight the relative insignificance of David, whom Yahweh had appointed to be his Son. He is a but a *man*; and yet Yahweh has been mindful of him by choosing to make him his Son. As Yahweh’s Son, he was a *man* chosen from the midst of humanity; and yet Yahweh has taken care to exalt him. Man is so small against the vastness of God’s creation; but God has chosen the one humble, insignificant man David to rule over it all.

When Jesus appropriates the title “Son of Man” for himself, it is Psalm 8:4 that serves as the foundation for its meaning and significance. Many scholars argue that Daniel 7:13 serves as the foundation for this title. I don’t think so.

The vision described in Daniel 7:13–14 is certainly a vision of the Messiah, the Son of God. That is beyond dispute. In the context of describing that vision, Daniel writes, “And, behold, with the clouds of heaven *one like a son of man* was coming” In my judgment, we could rephrase this, “Behold, with the clouds of heaven, one who had the appearance of a human being was coming” If that is right, then the phrase “son of man” is not being used in the technical sense that stems from the Davidic Covenant. Rather, Daniel is using the common idiom—a “son of man” is a human being.

That common idiom does not elucidate the title that Jesus appropriates for himself. When Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of Man,” he is not referring to himself as “the Human Being.” He is referring to himself as “the King taken from among men, according to the terms of the Davidic Covenant.” “Son” is being used as a technical term grounded in its meaning in the promise God made to David.

Unless one reads into Daniel 7:13 something that is not there, the phrase “son of man” would not even strike that reader as remarkable. It is difficult to see how it could become the trigger for an allusion. What is remarkable in Daniel 7:13 is the actual *vision* itself—the *fact* of a human being ascending up to the Ancient of Days, in the clouds, and being granted dominion by him. Describing him as “like a son of man” in the description of the vision is no more noteworthy than if it described him as “like a human being.” If the following two things were true—(i) the text of Daniel had read, “like a human being,” and (ii) Jesus had habitually referred to himself as “the Human”—would we claim that Daniel 7 was the basis for his self-chosen title? Why not Genesis 1? Or, any number of other places in the Bible?

The concept of the Messiah is as explicit and as concisely put in Daniel 7 as anywhere in the Bible. Clearly, Jesus was aware that Daniel 7 described him. But it doesn’t make sense that it is the basis of the title “Son of Man.”

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

[Matt. 26:64 is no evidence to the contrary. The meaning of Jesus' declaration to the High Priest would not be changed at all if he had said, "nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Christ sitting at the right hand of Power, and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" It is not the phrase "Son of Man" that connects Jesus' statement to the vision in Daniel; it is his allusion to the distinctive details of that vision.]

Why is the title "Son of Man" relevant to our discussion? Is there anyone who would argue from the fact that Jesus is the "Son of Man" that he must be God and have a divine nature? No. To my knowledge no one has ever made that argument. But those who argue that Jesus' being the "Son of God" proves his deity will often use the title "Son of Man" to attempt to make their argument all the more plausible. The title "Son of Man," they argue, is a title intended to indicate the real and authentic humanity of Jesus. That being the case, is it not clear, then, that the title "Son of God" is intended to indicate the real, authentic, and full deity of Jesus? Such reasoning, however, is based on a faulty premise. The title "Son of Man" is not used by Jesus to indicate his real and authentic humanity. Rather, it is used by Jesus to indicate his exalted status as the one designated by God to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the ruler over all creation! Is he a real and authentic human being? Yes, of course. And the title "Son of Man" intimates that. But the title is not intended to focus on that and turn that into the central significance of the title. The remarkable thing about Jesus is not "He's human!" The remarkable thing about Jesus is "He's King!" The title "Son of Man" is intended to signal the latter, not the former. Granted, he is the human that God appointed to be King; but nevertheless it is the fact that he is appointed King that is of utmost significance.

Therefore, we do not and cannot find in the title "Son of Man" any indirect evidence that "Son of God," by way of contrast, is intended to indicate the deity of Jesus. Therefore, it does not provide any evidence that Jesus had a divine nature. On the other hand, the title "Son of Man" does not rule it out. It says nothing, one way or the other, about Jesus' deity. Whether Jesus possesses a divine nature or not, what is in view, when the Bible calls him the "Son of Man," is his status and authority as King. He is that man whom God has appointed to rule on his behalf forever. He could be a man with a divine nature within him or not. The title "Son of Man" cannot tell us.

(5) The title "Son of David" is a messianic title. It too indicates Jesus' status and authority as king of the eternal Kingdom of God. It does not merely or primarily indicate Jesus' descent from David.

The title "son of David" means exactly that, an offspring of David. The son of David is a man who has descended from David. In the previous titles we have examined—"Son," "Son of God," and "Son of Man"—the operative word is "son." The meaning of the title is borne by that word as it is used metaphorically in the Davidic Covenant—"...and he will be a *son* to me." That is not the case with "son of David." This title simply follows the common idiom of the day. It describes Jesus as a "descendent of

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

David." So, the operative word in the title is "David," not "son." Much like the rarer descriptions I referred to above—"the One," "the One who is to come," "the Coming One"—"son of David" takes its meaning entirely from the cultural background. Specifically, it derives its meaning from the messianic expectations of Jesus' day.

By the time Jesus comes on the scene, the people of Israel were looking expectantly for God to keep the promise that he had made to David. God had promised that a descendent of David would come and rule as king, and God would establish his rule, and that rule would endure forever. The people of Israel were looking for just that one to finally arrive. That is why they could refer to him simply as "the One," or as "the One who is to come." But since the one they were expecting was, more specifically, a descendent of David, they could also describe his as "The descendent (son) of David." The question, "Are you the descendent (son) of David?" was not a casual question about his family tree. It was a hopeful question about his unique status in God's providential purposes in history. "Are you the descendent (son) of David" was shorthand for "Are you that descendent of David who will finally come and establish the eternal Kingdom of God that Yahweh promised to David so many generations ago?"

Our discussion of this title has relatively little bearing on the controversy over Trinitarian doctrine. It is not of no significance however. It is noteworthy what a big deal the apostles made of that fact that Jesus was a "son of David." Without that being true, Jesus could not have made a valid claim to being the Christ, the Son of God. Hopefully, the above discussion has made it clear why that would be the case.

Paul, in the opening of Romans, writes with respect to Jesus,

"...he who, so far as he physical being is concerned, was born in the lineage of David; he who, so far as his spirit of holiness is concerned, was decisively confirmed to be the Son of God by a supernatural act of God, his resurrection from the dead...."

Paul's point is that there were two things necessary in order for Jesus' to be validly accepted to be the Son of God: (1) he had to be of the lineage of David; and (2) he had to be that one who was sufficiently "holy" in his inner character to be the one through whom God was going to fulfill his promises to David. (There had been many "sons of David" throughout time who lacked the unique inward qualifications to be the SON OF GOD.) Jesus clearly met the first qualification. He was a son of David. Did he meet the second? Yes, Paul argues. For if he hadn't met it, God never would have raised him from the dead. Jesus' resurrection was the final and decisive proof that he was the real deal—the *monogenes* Son of God. He whom God had appointed to be the One who would rule for God, and with the authority of God, forever.

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

How is this relevant to whether Trinitarian doctrine is biblical? As I said above, it is vitally important to the apostles whether Jesus is a “son of David”; but there is never any corresponding worry, on the part of the apostles, whether Jesus has a divine nature. Given that many Trinitarians see that—Jesus’ having a divine nature—was a prerequisite to his being the Son of God, it is noteworthy that there is no evidence that the apostles worried about it. I know of no place where their query was tantamount to “Did he *actually* have a divine nature, was he God in that sense?”

A Trinitarian may very well object that I have just cited an instance where Paul is making a query about that very thing. Note the second criterion listed above—namely, was Jesus sufficiently “holy” in his inner character to be the one through whom God was going to fulfill his promises to David? What is that, if not a question of whether Jesus was ultimately divine in his nature? How could any human being be “sufficiently ‘holy’ in his inner character” to be the One, unless he was also fully God in the nature of his being?

That is one of the important questions at issue between Transcendent Monotheism and Trinitarianism. Trinitarianism maintains that only a being who has a divine ontological nature could possibly be “holy” in the requisite sense. Transcendent Monotheism maintains that the human being that God purposed from before the world to be his Son need not be anything other than ontologically human to nevertheless qualify as the one whose “holiness” qualifies him as the Son of God. One sees evidence of Trinitarianism in Romans 1:4 only if he assumes Trinitarianism and puts on his Trinitarian lenses in the way he reads and interprets it.

Conclusion

I have tried to expose the fallacy of two important and widespread misconceptions in this paper. I have tried to show that it is wrongheaded to reach the conclusion that Jesus must be God from the simple fact that he performed miracles. Others have performed miracles and we do not conclude that they are God. I have, further, tried to show that it is misguided to think that any of the titles applied to Jesus in the Bible can serve as evidence of Jesus’ deity. The apostles were strictly focused on establishing that Jesus was the Messiah. They were intent on showing that he met the qualifications of the One promised by God through the prophets. The question for them was clear: is Jesus the promised King of Israel who will embody God’s rule over the whole creation forever? Whichever title they assigned to him, it always meant substantially the same thing—yes, he is the promised King of Israel who will embody God’s rule over the whole creation forever! [See Appendix M] No title of Jesus is intended to indicate a divine ontological nature within the person of Jesus. The fact that his titles do not specify Jesus’ possession of a divine nature does not, of course, prove that he does not have one. But it does make clear that none of the titles given to Jesus tell us that he does. If Trinitarianism is true, it

will have to make its case on some other basis. The titles of Jesus prove nothing with regard to Jesus' deity. [But, see Appendix N].

Objection

An objection could be raised to the above explication of the titles of Jesus: What about John 10:30 where Jesus says "I and the Father are one." The Jews take up stones to stone him in response to his claim. The text says that it is because they understood him to be claiming identity with God. The whole argument in John 10 revolves around Jesus' claim to be God. Just such a claim to deity is implicit in all the titles assigned to Jesus.

The encounter between Jesus and the Jews in John 10 should be instructive on several points. I will examine it in some detail. Jesus quotes Psalm 82 in his defense of himself in John 10. It will be helpful to begin our examination by discussing Psalm 82.

PSALM 82 (Translation by Jack Crabtree)

1•God stands before the assembly of rulers whom he has appointed to rule on his behalf [literally, the assembly of "gods"]. In the midst of these rulers [literally, "gods"] he is proclaiming his judgment:

2•How long will you rule unjustly and show partiality to the sinners?

3• • Make judgments which protect the orphan and the poor.
• Bring justice to the afflicted and the destitute.

4• • Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the sinners. 5•For they do not know; neither do they understand. They walk about in darkness. All the foundations of the earth are being shaken.

6•By my decree, I said "You are rulers who rule for God." [literally, "I said, 'You are gods.'"] I made all of you Sons of the Most High. 7•Nevertheless, you will die like mere men and fall like one of the other rulers.

8•Arise, Divinely Appointed Ruler! [literally, "O god!"] Bring justice to the earth! It is you who shall inherit the earth.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

The Psalm begins by setting the scene. It is a vision of God standing before an assembly of rulers. It is called an "assembly of gods." In keeping with the way "gods" is used consistently throughout the whole Psalm, it is probably an assembly of rulers who have been specifically appointed to rule on behalf of God himself. The designation

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

“gods” suggests to me that it specifically envisions an assembly of several Davidic Kings who have ruled during the course of several generations. These have been wicked and evil Davidic Kings. They have not ruled justly. God now stands before them to address them.

The Psalmist then proceeds to reports God’s exhortation of these rulers (Davidic Kings?):

“How long will you persist in being evil and ruling unjustly? Stop being wicked. Rule in such a way that you give legal protection to orphans and to poor people. Bring justice to those who are suffering injustice. Give aid and help to those who are helpless and in need. Don’t let evil men take advantage of them. They need your protection. Evil and injustice is running rampant in your Kingdom and turning the world morally upside down. The weak and helpless are completely at the mercy of the wicked. They are confused, lost, and without protection.”

God exhorts this imaginary assembly of unrighteous Davidic Kings to stop being unjust and to instead bring justice to the land. He then records God’s final comment to these evil Davidic kings:

“By my decree, I said ‘You are rulers who rule for God.’ [literally, "I said, 'You are gods.'"] I made all of you Sons of the Most High. 7•Nevertheless, you will die like mere men and fall like one of the other rulers.”

Here God states explicitly the nature of the appointment that put these kings in power. He appointed them to be “gods.” [To understand what that means, we need to notice that it is in parallel to “I made you Sons of the Most High.” We can understand the concept “Son of God”, and therefore “Son of the Most High,” from the Davidic Covenant. God is saying—presumably to a gathering of Davidic Kings—that he appointed them to be “god” in the sense that he appointed them to represent himself, God, to the people.] That is, he appointed each of them to be a man who would rule for him and represent his rule over the people. He appointed each of them to be him, God! All that is to say, he appointed them to be Sons of God, Sons of the Most High. But then God puts them in their place: “Nevertheless you are just ordinary mortals; you are going to die just like all the heathen rulers out there in the world.”

Then the Psalmist speaks in his own voice: “Arise, Divinely Appointed Ruler! [literally, "O god!"] Bring justice to the earth! It is you who shall inherit the earth.”

The Psalmist is crying out to the true Messiah to come. There have been a long string of wicked Kings who were Sons of God in name and title. But they did not fulfill the promises that God made to David. These Kings did not actually rule for God. They did not accomplish God’s justice. They did not oppose evil. They did nothing to embody the

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

rule of God in actuality. All they did was bear the title of the one who was supposed to do all that. In order for God's promises to be met, there is one who had yet to come. He would be the *monogenes* Son of God. He would be the Son of God indeed. He is the one who was destined to "inherit the earth." This is the one the Psalmist is crying out to, "Arise! *One and only* Son of God! [literally, "O god!"] Bring the justice of Yahweh to the earth!!"

We see in this Psalm a sharp contrast made between the Son of God whom John will call the *monogenes* Son of God and all the other sons of God throughout Israel's history. None of the other Sons of God was ever the Son of God in actuality. He did not bring God's righteousness to the earth. He did not live and act according to the righteousness of God himself. He never defeated the enemies of God. Most importantly, he was just one more wicked mortal who died and remained lying in his tomb. God may have issued a decree that designated him the Son of God, but he was never the Son of God except in name and title. He was a bearer of the promise that God made to David; but he was not one in whom the terms of that promise were ever fulfilled.

Of all that Psalm 82 says, there is only one thing to which Jesus will draw attention when he uses it to defend himself in John 10. Namely, Jesus notes that, according to Psalm 82, God granted the title "Son of God" to plain, ordinary human beings. [The fact that Jesus understands the title to be "Son of God" rather than "god" is support for the interpretation I gave to the Psalm above. Jesus takes "gods" as synonymous with "Sons of the Most High."]

We can now turn to John 10. The encounter we are seeking to understand begins with a gathering of Jews pressuring Jesus, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." (10:24) Note that this frames the entire interaction. The question on the table is whether Jesus is the Christ. The Jews are not asking whether he is God exactly. They do not want him to explain whether he has a divine nature. They simply want to know if he is as arrogant and presumptuous as they think he is. Does he really claim to be the Messiah?

That this is the issue is confirmed by one of Jesus' final statements in his defense, "...do you say of Him, whom the father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am **the Son of God**'?" Jesus states explicitly what he understands the Jews to have objected to: he has claimed to be the "Son of God." As we saw above, to claim to be the "Son of God" is the same as claiming to be the "Christ," the "Messiah," the promised King of the Kingdom of God.

Those who understand the issue in this confrontation to be Jesus' deity point to verses 30 and 33. The text reads,

“ ‘...29•My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all: and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30•**I and the Father**

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

are one.' 31•The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32•Jesus answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?' 33•The Jews answered Him, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because **You, being a man, make Yourself out as God.**'"

It should be clear from our discussion so far that the concept of "being one with the Father" and being "as God" are entirely consistent with the concept of being the Messiah, the Son of God. As we have seen, the Messiah is the son of David, appointed by God to represent and embody the rule and authority of God himself. Hence, the Messiah is he who, in a very significant sense, is "one with God." Alternatively, it is he who is "as God himself." We have seen above, in Psalm 2 and 8, how closely David understands the Christ—the Son—to be identified with Yahweh himself. As far as David is concerned, the Son and Yahweh are one. Verses 30 and 33, therefore, do not imply that Jesus is claiming to have a divine nature. In the context of this confrontation—where the issue, from beginning to end, is whether Jesus is the Christ—it only makes sense to interpret verses 30 and 33 accordingly—as indications that Jesus is claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God.

Next, it is important to understand why the Jews had a problem with Jesus' claim to be the Christ. Very simply, because he was a plain, ordinary human being. ("because You, **being a man**, make Yourself out as God", 11:33) To understand why this would be objectionable to them, we have to understand the cultural background.

At this time, the Jews had come to expect a truly grand and magnificent Messiah when the true Messiah finally came. What they expected was too grand for him to be an ordinary human being. They expected a quasi-angelic type being, a super-human being, a sort of super-hero. Accordingly, Jesus, an ordinary man who used to work as a carpenter, did not fit their image of the Messiah. We could restate their objection this way, "because you, being an ordinary man, make yourself out to be equal to God himself when you purport to be the Messiah."

In light of the above, Jesus' answer to them is brilliant. He begins by quoting Psalm 82. He cites the assertion in Psalm 82 that indicates how God had granted the title "Son of God" to ordinary, sinful, mortal human beings. Then, Jesus makes a simple defense: "If he called them 'gods' ['Sons of God'], to whom God's word came (and the Scriptures cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world [Jesus], 'You are blaspheming' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" His point is quite straightforward. If God does not have a problem granting the title "Son of God" to ordinary human beings—and it is clear from Psalm 82 that he has granted this title to such men—then why do you think my being a human being disqualifies me from claiming the title? I am the one that God specifically set apart and sent into the world to be the true Son of God. (If you don't believe me, believe my works.) If their being mere

PAPER #4: The Titles and Miracles of Jesus

men did not disqualify the unrighteous Kings in Psalm 82 from being Sons of God, certainly my being an ordinary human being does not disqualify me from the title!

It should be clear from the discussion above that John 10, rather than calling into question our exposition of the titles of Jesus, is an important confirmation of it. The controversial claim that Jesus made over and over again—the claim that ultimately got him crucified—was his claim to be the Messiah, the Christ. Nowhere does it become an issue between Jesus and the Jews whether he has a divine nature. That is not a category in terms of which any of these parties is even thinking. Everyone involved knows that Jesus is a human being. They can see that with their own eyes. The issue is whether he is the Messiah, the promised King. He says he is. He does miracles to validate his claim. The question is whether his Jewish contemporaries will accept it. That is exactly what we are seeing in John 10.