

<CN>Chapter 4

<CT>~~The~~ Son of God in the Book of Revelation and Apocalyptic Literature

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Speaking to the congregation in Thyatira, Jesus identifies himself as “the son of God (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), the one who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze” (Rev 2:18). Although this is the only explicit case where Jesus is identified with the definite title “son of God” in the Apocalypse, Revelation’s presentation of divine sonship is part of a broader trajectory located in a number of early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts.<sup>1</sup> Comparing divine sonship traditions in Revelation with other apocalypses offers an opportunity to map Revelation’s place within the narrative of visionary sonship traditions that emphasize the messianic and angelomorphic features of God’s S/son.<sup>2</sup> Previous discussions have revolved around the question of whether Revelation’s Jesus is a sort of principal angel, and there remains a divide between those who advocate more generally for the influence of angelology on early Christology and those who see it as a more limited factor.<sup>3</sup> I will only tangentially address this discussion here, as the purpose of this essay is to analyze sonship traditions in apocalyptic literature more generally and locate Revelation’s place within this tradition.

<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that God is his father in other passages (Rev 1:6; 3:5, 21; 14:1).

<sup>2</sup> William Horbury argues that the book of Revelation should be considered to be in the same traditional stream of works as 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the Sibylline Oracles (among others) when it comes to messianism generally (“Messianism in the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Day, JSOTSup 270 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 408). I adopt a similar approach here in terms of divine sonship.

<sup>3</sup> I do not revisit this issue directly here since numerous full-length studies have been devoted to it in the past twenty years. Cf. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, WUNT 2/70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, WUNT 2/94 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997); and Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity*, WUNT 2/109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). While acknowledging the place of son of God traditions within this discussion, I attempt to extricate sonship from this question in an effort to take it on its own merits. Additionally, the question of angelic influence on Christology is but one factor of a larger tradition of mediatory figures, some of whom are called sons of God in ancient Jewish and Christian traditions. See Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, AGJU 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 51–183; Loren Stuckenbruck, “‘Angels’ and ‘God’: Exploring the Limits of Early Jewish Monotheism,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. L. T. Stuckenbruck and W. E. S. North, JSNTSup 263 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 45–70; and Andrew Chester, *Messiah and Exaltation: Jewish Messianic and Visionary Traditions and New Testament Christology*, WUNT 207 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 45–80. For a systematic description of the Christological titles in Revelation, see Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie, 1971), 5–26.

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In what follows, I contextualize the depiction of Jesus as divine son in Revelation by, first, briefly analyzing the use of the title in the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism, a topic that is discussed in some depth in other parts of this volume.<sup>4</sup> I then explore this thread within Revelation, highlighting the exegetical proclivities that underlie its deployment, as well as its functions with the narrative. Finally, I compare the use and function of son of God traditions in Revelation with other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic material. This comparison understands the messianic and angelomorphic connotations of the phrase “son of God” in Revelation within a broader literary oeuvre.<sup>5</sup> Revelation is an important central text for this discussion because it functions as a transition for conceptions of divine sonship in apocalyptic traditions.

#### <H1>1. Son of God in Early Judaism

Divine sonship in Jewish scriptural texts is primarily located at the intersection of two traditions: the presentation of angels as “sons of God” (בני אלהים; e.g., Gen 6:2) and the adoption of certain members of the Israelite royal family, particularly David and Solomon, as divine sons.<sup>6</sup> In addition to Torah traditions in which “sons of God” are clearly angels or interpreted as such in early Jewish texts (e.g., Gen 6:2; Deut 32:8 in 4QDeut<sup>j</sup> [בני אלהים] and the Old Greek (OG) [ἀγγέλων θεοῦ]; cf. Ps 89:1), Nathan’s oracle to David in 2 Samuel 7 ties divine sonship to the Israelite monarchy, singling out Solomon in particular.<sup>7</sup> God tells David, “I will be a father to him [David’s offspring] and he [David’s offspring] will be a son to me” (אני אהיה-לך לאב והוא יהיה-לי לבן; 2 Sam 7:14;

<sup>4</sup> See especially the contributions of George Brooke, Reinhard Kratz, Jan Joosten, and Menahem Kister in this volume. For other summaries of the discussion, see Ulrich B. Müller, “‘Sohn Gottes’: Ein messianische Hohetitel Jesu,” in *Christologie und Apokalyptik* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 91–97.

<sup>5</sup> “Angelomorphic” refers to having the appearance or stature of an angel but not necessarily being identified as such. Cf. Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “Some Reflections on Angelomorphic Humanity Texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *DSD* 7 (2000): 292.

<sup>6</sup> Israel is also referred to collectively as God’s children in multiple traditions (e.g., Jer 3.19, Jos. Asen. 19:8), even sometimes in the singular (e.g., ומצרים קראתי לבני, Hos 11:1). Because the presentation of Jesus as a messianic figure is the primary point of inquiry in this article, I set aside traditions of Israel or early Christian communities as the family of God (e.g., 4 Ezra 6:58; 5 Ezra 1:28–29; Sib. Or. 3.702–714, 725; Jos. Asen. 19:8; 2 Bar. 13:9; Pss. Sol. 18:4). Cf. S. B. Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s),” *DDD* 794–800. See Menahem Kister’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Ps 89:7 and its description of the heavenly council as בני אלים; and Philip S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972): 60–71.

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cf. 1 Chr 28:6), emphasizing the filial connection between God and Israel's rulers.<sup>8</sup>

Nathan goes on in the same verse to report that, when this son acts iniquitously, he will be punished with a rod (בשֶׁבֶט), a term that plays a key role in another important sonship tradition located in the Psalter, linking these texts through key word association.

In Ps 2:6–9, YHWH reports that he has set his king in Zion, on his holy hill, and declares to the king in verse 7, “You are my son, today I have begotten you” (בְּנִי אַתָּה אֲנִי) (הַיּוֹם יִלְדֶנֶךָ). If the king asks, YHWH will give the nations to him; he will shatter them with a rod (בשֶׁבֶט) of iron like one shatters a pot (2:8–9). Similarly, in Ps 89:27–28, David cries, “You are my father” (אָבִי אַתָּה), and the psalm's divine governing voice reports, “I will make him the firstborn (בְּכוֹר), the greatest of the kings of the earth.” Both of these psalms highlight the monarchy's special status vis-à-vis its divine patron.<sup>9</sup>

The book of Daniel, too, is replete with divine sonship traditions, traditions that are crucial for understanding the deployment of son of God figures in later works such as 4Q246, Luke 1:32–33, and the book of Revelation.<sup>10</sup> After condemning Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the fires of a furnace, Nebuchadnezzar is astonished that a fourth figure appears among the flames (Dan 3:24). He exclaims, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are unharmed. And the fourth's appearance is like a son of God (לְבָר־אֱלֹהִים)” (3:25). The three are removed from the fire, and Nebuchadnezzar blesses their God who sent his angel (מַלְאָכָה) to deliver his servants (3:28). The identification of the “son of God” (v. 25) as an “angel” (v. 28) connects

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<sup>8</sup> This formulaic phraseology is also closely connected to Egyptian and Mesopotamian enthronement and royal ideology, even though it is sometimes interpreted as referring to a messiah in early Judaism and Christianity. While aware of these ancient Near Eastern traditions, Hans-Joachim Kraus argues that “Die Sohnschaft der jerusalemischen Königs liegt in einem Adoptionsvorgang begründet” (*Psalmen 1–59*, 5th ed., Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament 15/1 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978], 152). Cf. also Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 25–30.

<sup>9</sup> Once again, Kraus connects the use of sonship language to adoption and polemics against foreign kings who claim similar titles. Identifying the king as son of God is most obvious in Egyptian traditions (*Psalmen 60–150*, 5th ed., Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament 15/2 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978], 791–92). Cf. Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 2–24; and John Baines, “Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 16–53.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the connection between 4Q246 and Luke, see George J. Brooke, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 261–71. Cf. also J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 171–90. Although it would be easy to do so, I will not dwell on the controversial 4Q246 here, since it is the primary focus of a number of other contributions in this volume, especially those of Kratz, Kister, and Brooke.

divine sonship to the figure's angelomorphic characteristics, drawing upon antecedent traditions of sons of God as angels.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, although the figure is not explicitly identified as a son of God, the “one like a son of man” (כבר אנוש) in Dan 7:9–14 is deeply connected to the discussion. This figure “comes with the clouds of heaven” (7:13) and is allotted dominion and power over the world, and his kingdom will not end (7:14). This “one like a son of man” retains angelomorphic characteristics (flying on clouds) but is also invested with typical messianic traits as the eschatological agent, acting as ruler of an eternal kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Traits found individually in multiple Jewish scriptural texts become invested here in a single figure.

A final encounter in Daniel that impinges on this discussion occurs in chapter 10. Standing on the bank of the Tigris, Daniel experiences a private vision (10:7) of a man clothed in linen and wearing a gold belt, with a face like lightning, flaming eyes, a loud voice, and bronze extremities (10:5–6). Upon hearing his words, Daniel falls to the ground and is roused by the touch of the figure, identified as “one in human form” (כדמות בני אדם; 10:16, 18) who had been assisted by the angel Michael in his confrontation with the “prince of the kingdom of Persia” (10:13–14).<sup>13</sup> Once again, explicit sonship traditions are not present here, but the appearance of the figure and his actions as a heavenly warrior are closely connected both to the vision in Daniel 7 and to the book of Revelation.

Jewish scriptural traditions provide an important background from which we can begin to conceptualize the use of sonship traditions in early Judaism and Christianity. The two main strands of this tradition—the identification of sons of God as angels or as divinely sanctioned kings/messiahs—eventually come together in the “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7, a text that becomes an important messianic touchstone along with texts such as Psalm 2.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Collins, *Scepter and the Star*, 181.

<sup>12</sup> Flying on the clouds is also theophanic (e.g., Exod 19:19, Ps 18:10–13).

<sup>13</sup> Although the Aramaic and Hebrew phrases differ slightly in Dan 7:13 and 10:16, 18, the Greek form θ identifies both figures with very similar phrases: ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου in 7:13, ὡς ὁμοίωσις υἱοῦ ἀνθρώπου in 10:16, and ὡς ὄρασις ἀνθρώπου in 10:18. If it is unclear in the Semitic Daniel traditions, the Greek forms (esp. θ) highlight the similarities of these figures, closely linking these traditions.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, Revelation also interacts with complex trends and appellations common in Roman imperial ideology. “Son of god” is an important part of this discourse too. See Michael Peppard’s

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## <H1>2. Son of God in the Book of Revelation

The use of the title “(the) son of God” in early Jewish literature, especially as it comes together in the book of Daniel, is markedly similar to the deployment of this title in Revelation.<sup>15</sup> The similarities are pronounced in two ways: Jesus’s depiction in angelomorphic terms and the connection of this title to the messianic connotations of Psalm 2. This latter strand is most obvious in light of other early Christian correlations of son of God and messiah (e.g., Luke 1:32–33). To begin, the seer’s vision of Jesus in Rev 1:13–20 is obviously angelomorphic, using the language of angelophanies and divine appearances to describe the “one like a son of man” (ὁμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου; cf. Dan 7:13, 10:6 [ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου]) who walks among the lampstands.<sup>16</sup> This figure has “white hair, white as snow,” “eyes like burning fire,” “feet like burnished bronze,” a “voice like the sound of many waters,” holds in his right hand seven stars, a double-edged sword comes from his mouth, and his appearance is like the sun in its power. These descriptions connect the vision to antecedent angelic episodes and heavenly court scenes, especially Daniel 7. The relationship between Rev 1:13–20 and other angelic traditions is presented in the table 4.1, although the parallels here are not exhaustive.

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Among these diffuse traditions, the depiction of Jesus in Revelation 1 is most closely related to the figures described in Dan 7:9–14 and 10:1–11:1. His hair and eyes are similar to the Ancient of Days’s hair and throne in Dan 7:9, and additionally, the “one

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contribution to this volume; and Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). I focus on Jewish traditions here because I am interested in tracing conceptions of divine sonship beginning in the Hebrew Bible to the Apocalypse and to other Jewish and Christian apocalypses.

<sup>15</sup> I only selectively comment here on texts directly connected to divine sonship in Revelation. For a fuller treatment of “angelomorphic Christology” texts in Revelation, see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 245–69.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 189–94. For recent treatments of this passage beyond the question of divine sonship, see Michael Labahn, “Der Menschensohngleiche als Gottes Richter und Gottes Krieger in Offb 1,9–20: Christologie zwischen Schriftrezeption, griechisch-römischer Vorstellungswelt und christlicher Deutung,” in *Das Gottesbild in der Offenbarung des Johannes*, ed. M. Stowasser, WUNT 2/397 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 83–111; and Luca Arcari, “Vision and Tradition: The Son of Man in Rev 1:7.12–20,” in *Poetik und Intertextualität der Johannesapokalypse*, ed. S. Alkier, T. Hieke, and T. Nicklas, WUNT 346 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 343–66.

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like a son of man” in Dan 7:13 who “comes with the clouds of heaven” corresponds to Jesus’s first-person speech in Rev 1:7 (“Behold, I am coming with the clouds”).<sup>17</sup> Although these figures in Daniel 7 may not necessarily be angelic, it is clear that the vision deals with the heavenly court and the complex of relationships within it.

The angelomorphic nature of Rev 1:13–20 becomes more clear when the text’s relationship to Daniel 10 is recognized. Daniel’s visitor on the Tigris looks very much like Revelation’s heavenly Jesus. Their garb (robe and gold belt), eyes (flaming fire), extremities (burnished bronze), and voices are very similar, if not identical.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the angel’s touching of Daniel after his collapse (10:10) is analogous to Jesus’s touching of John following his collapse in awe of the vision (Rev 1:17). And even within Revelation, Jesus’s garb in 1:13 is similar to that worn by the seven angels exiting the heavenly temple in Rev 15:5–8.

In addition to reliance upon Daniel, material from other Jewish traditions are drawn upon in this passage. The description of Jesus’s voice like the sound of “many waters” is indebted to the vision of the creatures accompanying God’s chariot-throne in Ezekiel 1.<sup>19</sup> The sound of the creatures’ wings is similar to the sound of Jesus’s voice (even though we are not made aware of the substance of his speech). Furthermore, the sharp sword that comes from Jesus’s mouth recalls the figurative language that describes the servant’s mission in Isaiah 49. The seven stars that Jesus holds are also similar to a complex of angelic traditions located in Joseph and Aseneth, which uses son of God language to indicate angelic traits throughout, a point to which I return below.

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<sup>17</sup> This quotation is a combination of material from Zech 12:10 and Dan 7:13. Much has been made of this composite tradition due to its appearance in Matt 24:30; Barn. 7.9; Apoc. Pet. 6; and Did. 16.8. For conversations on this tradition, see Adele Yarbro Collins, “The ‘Son of Man’ Tradition and the Book of Revelation,” in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 536–68; Daniele Tripaldi, “Discrepat evangelista et Septuaginta nostraque translation’ (Hieronymus, Briefe 57.7.5): Bemerkungen zur Textvorlage des Sacharja-Zitats in Offb 1,7,” in *Die Johannesoffenbarung: Ihr Text und ihre Auslegung*, ed. M. Labahn and M. Karrer, Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 38 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), 131–43; and Garrick V. Allen, *The Book of Revelation and Early Jewish Textual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 112–22.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also Ezek 1:7, which describes the creatures’ feet as “like bronze” (ὡς ἐξαστράπτων χαλκός; נחשן קלל).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 91: “Das Motiv einer Stimme, die wie Wassermassen rauscht, findet sich 3-mal in Offb (1,15; 14,2; 19,6). Im AT ist von diesem Motiv nur an zwei Stellen die Rede: Ez 1,24; 43,2.”

One of the results of the employment of this network of traditions is that Jesus is described in terms that are often applied to angels. The use of collocations from Daniel 10 and Ezekiel 1 lend particularly strong support to this conclusion. Jesus is described in angelomorphic terms in Revelation 1, even if he is not explicitly denoted as an angel (but cf. Rev 10:1).<sup>20</sup> The importance of this observation for the discussion of divine sonship becomes clear in the letter to Thyatira, the epicenter of son of God traditions in Revelation; this letter is where the angelic and the royal/messianic dimensions of sonship initially converge. Although Jesus is not called “son of God” in chapter 1, he is referred to as such in the introduction to the Thyatiran congregation (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ). That this title is connected to two parts of his description by the seer in chapter 1—his flaming eyes (1:14) and burnished bronze feet (1:15)—suggests that Jesus is ascribed the title “son of God” precisely because of his angelomorphic features. Although, at this juncture, the author remains ambiguous about the question of whether or not Jesus is an angel, his sonship is at least tangentially connected to his angelomorphic description.

At the conclusion of the letter, the persona of Jesus alludes to material from Ps 2:8–9: “To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered—even as I also received from my father” (2:26–28a). Psalm 2 played an important role in the development of divine sonship traditions, and the author’s reuse of it here emphasizes a different aspect of Jesus’s sonship from the angelomorphic vision in Revelation 1.<sup>21</sup> The correlation of Ps 2:7–9 and Rev 2:26–28a illustrates the relationship (see table 4.2).

<Insert Table 4.2 around here>

Rev 2:26–28 rearranges material from Ps 2:7–9, using the theme of authority over the nations and the shepherding with an iron rod as the core of the tradition (cf. Acts 13:33, Pss. Sol. 17:24–25). What the author rearranges is the placement of sonship

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<sup>20</sup> Regarding the distinction between the seer’s perception of Jesus in angelomorphic terms and the Apocalypse’s presentation of Jesus in relation to angels, see Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation*, WUNT 2/203 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 219–46.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. N. T. Wright’s contribution to this volume.

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material. Preceding the main part of the quotation, the Psalm preserves first-person direct speech in which YHWH adopts the king as his son. Revelation moves the sonship material so that it follows the direct quotation. In this instance, Jesus passes on the authority of his father to those from Thyatira who conquer.

Based on the reuse of Psalm 2, it seems that Jesus's sonship is connected here not to his angelomorphic state but instead to his position as ruler and keeper of authority—his role as messiah.<sup>22</sup> Jesus's status as son in this letter is tied both to his exalted state in Revelation 1 and to his messianic identification. Within this single letter, Jesus's depiction as son draws on the two main poles of Jewish tradition.

This pattern is continued throughout Revelation. In chapter 12, two signs appear in heaven: a woman in labor and a great red dragon hungry for her offspring. The woman gives birth to “a male child, who is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod” (ὐἰὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ) and the child is snatched away to God and his throne (12:5; cf. also Isa 7:14 OG). Although this child is not explicitly identified as God's son, Jesus is portrayed as a cosmic child who is taken to and enthroned in the heavenly court in this scene.<sup>23</sup> The use of Ps 2:9 implies Jesus's divine sonship by connecting the birth of the child to his authority over the nations. His presence in the context of the throne (12:5) also implies this relationship, and the song heard from heaven following Michael's defeat of the dragon and its expulsion to earth (12:7–9) ascribes salvation, power, and kingdom to God and authority to his messiah (ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ; 12:10). In this cosmic infancy narrative, Jesus's implied sonship is explicated in terms of his authority over the nations through the deployment of Ps 2:9 and the heavenly voice's description of him as messiah. The birth of the “male child” also emphasizes the sonship aspect of the scene: Jesus's ancestry is closely tied to the heavenly realm and cosmic events therein.

The emphasis on the messianic aspect of sonship in Revelation 12 is recombined in 19:11–16 with angelomorphic features. The seer notices an open heaven and a rider upon a white horse called Faithful and True who judges in righteousness (19:11). The

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rev 5:5 (Gen 49:9). Scholion XV of GA 2351, a tenth-century commentary manuscript that preserves ancient interpretive traditions, also makes this argument, noting that the phrase “son of God” speaks to Jesus's power over all things.

<sup>23</sup> See Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 555.

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rider's eyes are like flames of fire (φλόξ πυρός; cf. 1:14), those who follow him wear "fine linen, white and pure" (ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν; 19:14), and a sharp sword comes from his mouth (19:15; cf. 1:16). Each of these features is connected to the vision in Rev 1:13–20 and highlights, once again, Jesus's angelomorphic characteristics. The tradition of heavenly riders as angelic figures is a common trope in Jewish traditions (cf. Zech 1:8–10, 6:1–8; Job 1:6–8; 2 Macc. 3:25–28, 10:29–31, 11:8–10). Connected with these features are two explicit connections to Jesus's sonship and his status as messianic ruler. First, in 19:15, we are told that the sword from his mouth is meant to strike down the nations and that "he will rule them with a rod of iron" (αὐτὸς ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ). Once again, this is an allusion to Ps 2:9, a locution that refers to the actions of God's son (cf. Ps 2:7). The shepherding action of the rider is further established—insofar as shepherding is a metaphor for ruling—by the name written on his thigh ("King of Kings and Lord of Lords"; 19:16) and the fact that he wears many diadems (19:12). In 19:11–16, Jesus is described using angelomorphic traits (cf. Rev 1:13–20), in combination with messianic traditions (esp. Ps 2:7–9) that celebrate him as a king and ruler.

Jesus's divine sonship in Revelation, anchored by his title in 2:18 and the thread of allusions to Psalm 2, stands within a broader network of tradition in which sons of God are portrayed sometimes as angelic and on other occasions as royal children (cf. 2 Samuel 7). An intricate network of angelomorphisms and messianic overtones are combined in the figure of Jesus in a way that captures the broad spectrum of son of God traditions in early Judaism. The Christology of the Apocalypse draws upon the full resources afforded by antecedent Jewish traditions, including angelology and kingship texts. In this way, the Jesus of the Apocalypse is intimately tied to portrayals of divine sons in diverse Jewish traditions, revealing a continuity in the Apocalypse's presentation of Jesus as son of God. Significantly, this continuity builds a bridge from pre-70 CE divine sonship traditions to works composed after the destruction of the temple, to which we now turn.

### <H1>3. Son of God in Apocalyptic Literature

Son of God traditions are also prevalent in other apocalypses that are eschatologically oriented and deeply motivated by the devastating results of the First Jewish Revolt and

other events. Many of these works, or at least portions of them, are literary expressions contemporary (or nearly so) with the book of Revelation.

### <H2>3.1 Jewish Traditions

The book of 4 Ezra (late first century CE) preserves a number of divine sonship passages that emphasize messianic figures.<sup>24</sup> As part of the third vision (6:35–9:25), Ezra has an extended conversation with an angelic messenger (7:1–25). Following this discussion, the angel describes a messianic kingdom, using first-person divine speech in 7:26–44.

Describing the messiah, the text reads: “For my son the messiah will be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain will rejoice for four hundred years. And after these years my son the messiah will die . . . and the world will return to primeval silence for seven days” (7:28–30; cf. John 20:31).<sup>25</sup> This language is similar to Jesus’s depiction as son and messiah in Revelation, although this connection between sonship and messianism is much more explicit in this example. And while Christian tradents may have influenced this title, the predominance of redeemer figures in 4 Ezra lends credence to the Jewish origin of this tradition.<sup>26</sup>

The most concentrated location of son of God traditions in 4 Ezra occurs in the sixth vision (13:1–58): the Man from the Sea. In the night, Ezra sees “something like the

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of the messianism of 4 Ezra and its date, see Michael Stone, “The Concept of Messiah in IV Ezra,” in *Religions in Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner, SHR 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 295–312; Stone, “The Question of the Messiah in 4 Ezra,” in *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. J. Neusner, W. S. Green, and E. Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 209–24; Jacob M. Myers, *I and II Esdras: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 42 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 126–31; and Ulrich B. Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn in jüdischen Apokalypsen und in der Offenbarung Johannes* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1972), 107–34.

<sup>25</sup> The Latin text reads “filius meus Iesus” in v. 28 and “filius meus Christus” in v. 29, indicating that the tradition was transmitted in Christian circles. The Syriac and Arabic 1 versions read an equivalent of *Christus* in v. 28 (cf. 1 En. 105:2).

<sup>26</sup> The traditional origin of this saying is ambiguous. Michael A. Knibb, with R. J. Coggins, notes that this may be a Christian interpolation but also that Psalm 2 (cf. Pss. Sol. 17:26) indicates that Jewish authors of the period were cognizant of divine sonship as a category (*The First and Second Books of Esdras*, Cambridge Bible Commentary [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], ad loc.). Michael E. Stone points to anomalies in the versions that suggest *παῖς*, not *υἱός* (or עבד, not בן), may have stood in the original text, creating at least some doubt as to the status of the messiah as son. He suggests that “servant” may be a more appropriate English equivalent, although *παῖς* remains multivalent (*Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 207–13). This suggestion goes back to Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 293–94. However, *παῖς* and *υἱός* are used interchangeably in certain traditions, and it is very difficult to retrovert a tertiary translation to its Semitic original. Cf. also Müller who argues that *filium meum* and similar constructions are equivalent to עבדי, “my servant” (*Messias und Menschensohn*, 125, 153). Regarding redeemer figures in 4 Ezra, cf. Collins, *Scepter and the Star*, 186–88.

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figure of a man” coming out of the heart of the sea (13:3). This man flies with the clouds of heaven, every person trembles under his gaze, and his voice melts everything like wax (13:3–4). Threatened by a great multitude, the man carves himself a mountain in a hidden region and flies to it (13:5–7). When the frightened multitude attacks, fire from his mouth devours them, leaving behind only ash. After the massacre, the man calls forward a peaceful multitude (13:8–13).

The vision frightens the seer, who beseeches God for an interpretation, which is forthcoming in 13:21–58, although it is not entirely consistent with the vision.<sup>27</sup> The man from the sea is “he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation” (13:26). He is also “my son” (*filius meus*), “whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea” (13:32). The Man from the Sea, “my son (*filius meus*), will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness” (13:37). The mountain upon which he stands is Zion, “carved without hands” (13:35–36; cf. Dan 2:34, 45). The peaceable multitude is decoded as the ten tribes of the Assyrian exile, who have been sojourning in an uninhabited land (13:39–50; cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 11.133; Sib. Or. 2.170–173; T. Mos. 3.4–9, 4.9). The interpretation concludes with God’s answer to Ezra’s question about why the man came from the sea: “Just as no one can explore or know what is in the depths of the sea, so no one on earth can see my son (*filium meum*) or those who are with him, except in the time of his day” (13:52).

The description of the Man from the Sea in the sixth vision is also directly related to the “eagle vision” of 4 Ezra 11:1–39, which begins with an eagle coming out of the sea with twelve wings and three heads (11:1). The eagle, representing Roman imperial power, repeatedly morphs its wings and heads to symbolically parallel changes in Roman leadership (11:10–35), and it is challenged by “a creature like a lion” from a forest (11:37; cf. Gen 49:9, Rev 5:5).<sup>28</sup> The lion prophetically reproaches the eagle, telling it that it will be utterly destroyed, “so that the whole earth, freed from your violence, may be refreshed and relieved” (11:46). Following the indictment, the eagle’s heads disappear, and its body is eventually burned, terrifying the earth (12:1–3).

<sup>27</sup> Müller notes that “ist es endgültig evident, daß Vision und Deutung nicht zusammenstimmen,” although he has overstated the case somewhat (*Messias und Menschensohn*, 125).

<sup>28</sup> The description of the devouring heads in 11:28–32 corresponds to the failed triumvirate and Octavian’s ascension to power, for example. Cf. Stone, “Concept of Messiah,” 297–99. Stone identifies fifteen stages throughout the whole of the vision (*Fourth Ezra*, 346–47).

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The vision is interpreted in 12:10–39. The eagle is identified as the fourth kingdom from Dan 7:7, but its significance “was not explained to him as I now explain or have explained to you” (12:12). In opposition to the eagle, the lion from the forest is identified as “the anointed (*unctus*), whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David” (12:32). These interpretations contextualize the vision of the Man from the Sea that immediately follows it. The man’s “coming from the sea” creates a direct correlation to the eagle vision, whose antagonist also “comes up from the sea.” These figures, both of whom appear to be powerful and menacing, stand opposed to one another. However, their fates in each vision drastically differ. The eagle is eventually burned, and the Man from Sea leads a peaceable and great multitude. In a similar vein, the fact that the messiah comes from the forest in the fifth vision and from the sea in the sixth, corresponds to the parable of the forest and sea in 4:13–21. The double origin of the messiah in 4 Ezra 11–13 emphasizes his authority over the entirety of creation. The fifth vision supplements our understanding of the son of God in the Man from Sea vision by placing the origin of the conflict between the eagle and God (or his messiah) in the primordial sea—the events playing out on earth are the result of a longstanding conflict.<sup>29</sup>

As in Revelation, the son of God in 4 Ezra is a fusion of angelomorphic and messianic categories. He is angelomorphic in that he “flies with the clouds of heaven” (13:3), flies to a carved mountain (13:7), and issues sparks and flame from his mouth (13:10–11; cf. Isa 11:4). But he is also messianic in that, both in the form of a lion from the forest and as a primordial man upon a mountain, he confronts the menacing worldly forces and enemies of God. The son of God overcomes the reigning world kingdom and

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<sup>29</sup> I omit mention of 2 Baruch here because, although its messianic conceptions are closely related to those in 4 Ezra, it lacks any explicit divine sonship language in reference to the messiah and, in fact, lacks it entirely. Perhaps the closest sonship tradition occurs in 2 Bar 70:9, where “my servant the messiah” (cf. 30:1–5, 72:1–6) takes control of the earth following the historical periodization of the “Apocalypse of the Clouds.” This particular text is also one of the main points of evidence for considering the sonship texts in 4 Ezra to really be “servant” texts. For further reading on the messianism of 2 Baruch, including its close relationship to 4 Ezra, see Matthias Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel*, TSAJ 142 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 293–305. Michael A. Knibb confirms that 2 Baruch’s messianism is muted in comparison to 4 Ezra’s, despite their literary relationship (“Messianism in the Pseudepigrapha in the Light of the Scrolls,” *DSD* 2 [1995]: 180–81). For a recent collection of studies examining these works, see Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds., *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall*, JSJSup 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2013). For a side-by-side comparison of relevant texts, see K. Berger, *Synopse des Vierten Buches Esra und der Syrischen Baruch-Apokalypse* (Tübingen: Francke, 1992).

establishes the reign of God, although this event has not yet occurred and will not occur in Ezra's lifetime. The seer (that is, Ezra) will be taken up (*converteris*) to live "with my son (*cum filio meo*) and those who are like [him], until the times are ended" (14:9).<sup>30</sup>

Son of God traditions are also prevalent in the Hellenistic Jewish novel *Joseph and Aseneth*, a work that, although not properly an apocalypse, is pertinent to the discussion.<sup>31</sup> Although difficult to date, the book presents Joseph as a "son of God" with numerous angelic features, and Aseneth as a queen who also shares qualities with angels.<sup>32</sup> To begin, the description of Pentephres's compound is reminiscent of a sumptuous temple.<sup>33</sup> Aseneth lives atop a plush high tower and is waited on by seven virgins, who are "like the stars of heaven" (2:2–9; cf. 14:1, where the angelic visitor is

<sup>30</sup> Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 420.

<sup>31</sup> The Greek text comes from the edition of the longer recension edited by Christoph Burchard (*Joseph und Aseneth*, Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece 5 [Leiden: Brill, 2003]). Some have argued that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Jewish "missionary" text (e.g., Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth* [Leiden: Brill, 1968]) or a novel (e.g., M. Vogel, "Einführung in die Schrift," in *Joseph und Aseneth*, ed. E. Reinmuth [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 6–11), but it is most fundamentally an expansion (or digression) of the scriptural text (Gen 41:45). *Joseph and Aseneth* does also retain some apocalyptic features, including the appearance of an otherworldly figure and a sort of cosmic transformation. The work, however, is not analysed in John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse the Morphology of a Genre* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979). Cf. Susan Docherty, "Joseph and Aseneth: Rewritten Bible or Narrative Expansion?," *JSJ* 35 (2004): 27–48.

<sup>32</sup> Regarding the date of composition, options range from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE, but the consensus has oscillated between a date either in the mid-second century BCE (Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], 84–87) or in the mid-second century CE (Edith McEwan Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identify in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas*, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series* 17 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 32–34). Ross Shepherd Kraemer points to an even later date of the third to fourth century CE (*When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], 231–39). Regardless of whether *Joseph and Aseneth* predates the Apocalypse or not, it stands within a range of literary proximity to the Apocalypse's portrayal of divine sonship traditions. On this point, see Christoph Burchard, *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraphica* 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 265–66, 307–10. Its lack of historical allusions makes it difficult to date, but its lack of explicit Christian additions points to a date of composition on the earlier end of the spectrum. There are, however, many features of this work that may be interpreted as Christian rites, as Rivka Nir has noted in arguing that the features of the work point to third-to-fourth-century Edessa as the context for its production (*Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book*, *Hebrew Bible Monographs* 42 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012]). Interestingly, according to Burchard, *Joseph and Aseneth* first appealed to New Testament researchers due to the perspective it offered on the 144,000 male virgins (*παρθένοι*) in Rev 14:4, since *Joseph* too is called a *παρθένος* in Jos. As. 4:7 and 8:1 (*Gesammelte Studien*, 263–65). This was first noted in Friedrich Dürstendieck's 1859 commentary and was picked up subsequently by Bousset (1896) and Charles (1920).

<sup>33</sup> There is also a division between "the strange" (οἱ ἀλλότριτοι) and the known that divides those inside and outside the gates (5:6). Bohak refers to this phenomenon as "graded holiness," an idea that was also characteristic of the functioning of the Jewish temple (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 71–74). See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 117–27.

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described as a “star out of heaven in the east”).<sup>34</sup> A wall surrounds the compound, complete with four iron gates guarded by eighteen strong young men (2:10–11). Within the walls are ripe and handsome fruit trees and a stream of living water that runs into a large cistern (2:11–12). Aseneth also dresses in garb similar to angels in other Jewish texts. She wears white linen interwoven with purple and gold, a gold belt, bracelets, gold footwear, abundant jewelry with the images of Egyptian gods, and a diadem (3:5–6). Her parents rejoice over her appearance because she is adorned “like a bride of God” (ὡς νύμφην θεοῦ; 4:1). This scene provides the erotic undertones of the book that come to the surface in particular passages (cf. 8:5; 18:9), but it also portrays Aseneth as one closely related to divinity—in this case, the gods of Egypt, whom she initially worships.

Additionally, her description places her on the same level as Joseph, who is depicted in similar terms and whose portrayal is markedly similar to the angelic visitor in 14:1–17:10. Joseph rides to Pentephres’s compound from the east by means of a golden chariot pulled by four pure white horses with golden bridles (5:4). He wears an exquisite white tunic and a robe interwoven with purple and gold. He dons a crown with twelve stones and golden rays and also holds a royal staff and a valuable olive branch (5:5). In response to his arrival, Aseneth’s family prostrate themselves before him (5:6), and on numerous occasions, Aseneth declares that he is a son of God (υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ; 6:3, 5; cf. 13:13 [“your son,” υἱός σου]).

Following Joseph’s rejection of Aseneth, a strange man appears in her chamber. The narrator tells us that the angelic visitor is “in every respect similar to Joseph” (14:9), with some exceptions. The angel keeps the same crown, staff, and garments as Joseph, but his “face was like lightning” (τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἦν ὡς ἀστραπή), “his eyes like sunshine” (ὡς φέγγος ἡλίου), his hair “like a flame of fire of a burning torch” (ὡς φλόξ πρὸς ὑπολαμπάδος καιομένης), and his hands and feet were like iron in a fire (14:9). His extremities shot sparks.<sup>35</sup> As with Joseph, the response to the angel’s appearance is prostration: Aseneth falls “on her face at his feet” (ἐπι πρόσωπον αὐτης ἐπι τοὺς πόδας αὐτου; 14:10). When the angel suddenly leaves (17:8), Aseneth sees that he rides to the east, upon a flaming chariot pulled by four horses.

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<sup>34</sup> Kraemer identifies Aseneth’s chamber as a temple (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 98–99, 119–27).

<sup>35</sup> Also compare the description of Jacob/Israel in 22:7–8, who is described as having arms “like [those] of an angel.”

The correlation between the descriptions of Joseph and the heavenly visitor is not accidental, and Joseph's identity as a son of God is tied to his angelomorphic characteristics.<sup>36</sup> The strange honeycomb that Aseneth eats is the food of "all the angels of God . . . all the chosen of God and all the sons of the Most High" (πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ . . . πάντες οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πάντες οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ ὑψίστου), because it grants eternal life (16:14). Joseph's identity is also associated with his place of power in Egypt. Pharaoh declares to Aseneth that Joseph is the "firstborn son of God" (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ πρωτότοκος) and that she will be called "daughter [lit., 'bride of the son'] of the great king" (νύμφη τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως; 21:4, 20).<sup>37</sup> The blessing of Pharaoh connects Joseph's status to his dominion as Pharaoh's agent over Egypt during the years of plenty.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, Joseph's status as son of God is connected to his human lineage. When Aseneth goes to meet Jacob, she tells Joseph, "I will go and see your father, because your father Israel is like a father to me and God" (πορεύομαι καὶ ὄψομαι τὸν πατέρα σου διότι ὁ πατήρ σου Ἰσραὴλ ὡς πατήρ μοί ἐστι καὶ θεός; 22:3). Jacob is also described in angelomorphic terms (22:7–8), but his description as "father" (πατήρ) and "God" (θεός) suggests that Joseph's sonship is a complex matter.

A multifaceted web of sonship (and daughtership) traditions surrounds Joseph (and Aseneth to a lesser degree) in this work. Joseph is son to a God in three senses. Most overtly, he is identified as son of God because of his appearance and likeness to heavenly messengers. He is magnificent, pure, might, and immune from sexual temptation (despite Aseneth's erotic allure and his own sensuality). Second, Joseph is a son of God because of his close relationship to Pharaoh. He rules with authority, is worshiped by Pentephres (an Egyptian priest) and his family, and marries the woman that Pharaoh's son covets. His status as ruling agent within Egypt makes him the adopted son of Pharaoh, the son of

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<sup>36</sup> See also 25:6, where Naphtali and Asher rebuke their older brothers, saying that Joseph is able to command "angels of God."

<sup>37</sup> For a fuller discussion of Aseneth's daughtership in the context of her conversion, see Humphrey, *Ladies and the Cities*, 30–56.

<sup>38</sup> It is unclear if Aseneth's description of Joseph in her psalm as "the great king's firstborn son" (ἐγὼ ἔσομαι νύμφη τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου τοῦ πρωτοτόκου; 21:20) refers to Pharaoh or God. If it does refer to Pharaoh, it is clear that Joseph is a son of God in a second sense. Compare this title to the account where Levi advises Pharaoh's son to leave Joseph alone because Joseph is "like the firstborn son of God" (ὡς υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πρωτότοκος; 23:10).

a god. Finally, Joseph is a son of God in that he comes from a chosen line; his father “had wrestled with God” (22:7) and is “like a God” to Aseneth (cf. Jacob in the Prayer of Joseph).

Condensed within this narrative are an array of son of God traditions that shed light onto the interpretive options for this title in other Jewish and Christian traditions. Joseph and Aseneth draws on traditions that correlated divine sonship with ruling, special relationships with the divine, and exalted appearances. This work differs from Revelation in that the angelomorphic features of Joseph are emphasized over and above any potential eschatological or messianic connotations. Its son of God traditions show that Revelation’s engagement with Jewish angelology is not something entirely unexpected, and its complexity is even muted in comparison to analogous works.

### <H2>3.2 Christian Interpolations

Although they are often set aside as later developments or as interpolations into traditions otherwise thought to be Jewish (which they are), Christian additions to “apocalyptic” works remain a valuable resource, providing insight into the perspectives and theologies of ancient tradents. Some of these interventions also preserve son of God traditions and expand on depictions located in Revelation and other Jewish apocalypses. One of the most obvious examples of this type of intrusion into Jewish material is found in 5 Ezra (ca. 200 CE), also known as the first two chapters of 2 Esdras (of which chapter 3–14 are known as 4 Ezra, examined above).<sup>39</sup>

In addition to a form of communal sonship in 5 Ezra 1:28–29, the very end of this addition preserves a vision markedly similar to scenes from Rev 7:9–17 and 14:1–5. In 5

<sup>39</sup> Regarding this dating, see Hugo Duensing and Aurelio de Santos Otero, “The Fifth and Sixth Books of Esra,” in *Writing Related to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, vol. 2 of *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Clarke; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 641–52. For further information on the message of 5 Ezra and its traditional sources, which include Psalm 78, some New Testament texts (e.g., Gal 4:21–31), and a supersessionist reading of Baruch, see Theodore A. Bergren, *Fifth Ezra: The Text, Origin and Early History*, *Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 25 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); and Bergren, “The Structure and Composition of 5 Ezra,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010): 115–39. The Latin text of 5 Ezra in this discussion derives from the eclectic text in Bergren’s article. For a clear articulation of the various designations assigned to this text, see Robert A. Kraft, “Towards Assessing the Latin Text of ‘5 Ezra’: The ‘Christian’ Connection,” *HTR* 79 (1986): 158–69. Interestingly, Kraft is not convinced that the son of God in this text does not reflect Jewish ideologies. For a critical overview of Ezra materials generally, see Kraft, *Exploring the Scripturesque: Jewish Texts and their Christian Contexts*, JSJSup 137 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 129–47.

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Ezra 2:42–48, Ezra sees a great multitude on Mount Zion praising God. They are given crowns and palm branches by a “young man of great stature” (*iuvenis statura excelsus*), who is “taller than any of the others” (*omnibus illis eminens*) and “exalted” (*magis exaltabantur*; 2:43; cf. Herm. Sim. 5.5.2–5.6.1 [58:2–59:1]). In response to Ezra’s query regarding the man’s identity, an angel tells him that “he is the son of God (*filius Dei*), whom they have confessed in the world” (2:47). Ezra then praises the multitude for their steadfastness and is told to proclaim the wonders of God in all creation.

The multitude upon Zion in this passage is dependent upon the multitude scenes in Revelation, particularly 7:9 and 14:1–5, where Jesus is depicted as a lamb among 144,000 who bear the mark of his father (cf. also Bar 4:36–5:9). Likewise, in Ezra’s vision, the figure who stands out is a messiah, and although he is not explicitly identified as Jesus, the equivalence is obvious. This figure is identified as the son of God (*filius Dei*), the one who rules and cares for the faithful, a messianic figure whose status as divine son is defined by his exalted appearance and the fact that he is “confessed in the world” (*confessi sunt in saeculo mortali*; 2:47).

Additionally, this son of God is physically reminiscent of other messianic figures in Jewish tradition. The most notable connection is to the son of man described in 1 En. 46:1–8, whose face is like that of a human, but whose appearance is like one of the “holy angels” (46:1). Like the son of man in 1 Enoch 46, the intermingling of human and angelic characteristics is located in the son of God in 5 Ezra 2. He takes the form of a human, but his eminent stature is reminiscent of later Jewish mystical traditions that describe Metatron and God’s body as enormously large (e.g., Sefer Haqomah B 12–24), although the scale in 5 Ezra is not explicit.<sup>40</sup> Like Jesus in Revelation, the messianic figure in 5 Ezra is identified as son of God, both because of this messianic function and because of his angelomorphic physical features. Both of these qualities continue to define what it means to be a divine son, although perhaps here we can begin to see “son of God” used as title for Jesus in a way that is not directly connected to antecedent traditions but instead to early Christian confessional formulae. The fact that 5 Ezra draws directly upon

<sup>40</sup> See Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi’ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions*, TSAJ 9 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 126–35. For an English translation of material from this tradition, see James R. Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism*, Supplements to the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

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Revelation as a literary resource illustrates that Revelation is a waypoint for sonship traditions—a transitional work, if you will—that encompasses the breadth of Jewish traditions and then serves as a threshold of interpretation for other Christian apocalypses.

A similar case occurs in the Christian redactional layers of parts of the Sibylline Oracles, notably in books 1 and 8, where Jesus is identified as the son of God because of his messianic mission and heavenly origin.<sup>41</sup> The addition to book 1 (lines 324–400) refers a number of times to a son of God, using the term *παῖς* (servant, child, son) instead of *υἱός* (son). In 1.324, the beginning of a section on the incarnation and life of Christ, the sibyl begins by describing the anticipated coming of the “son [servant] of the great God” (*μεγάλιο θεοῦ παῖς*), who will appear to be like one of the mortal men on earth. The figure is identified in the gematria of 1.325–330 and in the exhortation in 1.330–331, which urges the reader to “consider in your heart Christ, the son [servant] of the most high (*θεοῦ χριστὸν παῖδ’ ὑψίστου*), immortal God.”<sup>42</sup> Following an extended rehearsal of Jesus’s actions, couched in prophetic terms, the sibyl once again identifies Jesus as son of God in a supersessionist statement: “When the raging wrath of the Most High comes upon the Hebrews, it will also take faith away from them, because they did harm to the son [servant] of the heavenly God” (*οὐρανίου . . . παῖδα θεοῦ*; 1.362–364).

Despite the difference in terminology between *παῖς* and *υἱός*, which are used interchangeably in some texts (e.g., John 4:46–53), the two strands of divine sonship hang together here once again, even though angelomorphic features are downplayed. The emphasis on *παῖς* language also stresses the messianic dimension of Jesus’s sonship over and above the angelomorphic. Instead of describing his physical characteristics as exhibiting an exalted state, his origin in heaven connects Jesus to God’s court. For the sibyl, the incarnation—the taking on of the appearance of a mortal and coming from God (1.324–325)—is proof of Christ’s sonship. Additionally, his messianic actions and leadership (esp. 1.345–382), largely summarizing Jesus’s actions in the Gospels and other New Testament works, is what confirms his identity as God’s son.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Greek text of the Oracles is taken from Johannes Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902).

<sup>42</sup> The number 888 is the numerical equivalent of *ἠσοῦς*.

<sup>43</sup> A likely Christian interpolation in 3.776 also highlights the eschatological aspects of Jesus’s sonship. He is God’s son not only because of his origin but also because he has returned to the heavenly

Moreover, in an acrostic poem in 8.217–250, spelling “Jesus Christ, Son, Savior, Cross” (Ἰησοῦς χριστὸς υἱὸς σωτὴρ σταυρὸς), the role of eschatological judge is attributed to God “who suffered for us” (8.250). The poem also alludes to Ps 2:9, commenting that “an iron shepherd’s rod will prevail” (8.248) at the time of judgment. The acrostic code, the identification of God as sufferer, and the allusion to Ps 2:9 point toward a development of conceptions of sonship traditions vis-à-vis Revelation. Sonship here is tied not to angelomorphic characteristics but to Jesus’s messianic mission, concluding ultimately in eschatological judgment and his identification as divine. Sonship is now connected to divinity in a manner absent from Revelation. In 8.329, part of an extended poem about Christ, the sibyl encourages the hearer to “know that he is your God, as he is son of God” (θεὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν ἐόντα). This text, along with a more explicit articulation in 8.473 (“but nothing is a great wonder for God the Father and God the Son”), indicate that the Christian material in book 8 represents a later developmental stage, where detailed reflection on the relationship between Father and Son had crystalized into more advanced doctrinal formulations.

In the Christian material embedded in the Sibylline Oracles, it seems clear that conceptions of Jesus’s sonship differ from formulations in the book of Revelation and even 5 Ezra. Angelomorphic features of the exalted Christ are downplayed, if not absent, and his role in the coming rule of God and eschatological judgment are highlighted. Articulations of Jesus’s sonship in book 8 even border on binitarian formulae. However, even in this later tradition, the influence of Ps 2:9 remains at the forefront of defining Jesus’s sonship: he is God’s son because he has been appointed as judge in the age to come, even to the extent of blurring the lines between God and Jesus.

#### <H1>4. Conclusions

A number of concluding observations arise from this analysis of son of God traditions in apocalyptic works. First, it is clear that the Christology of the book of Revelation is partially the result of the meditation of Jewish angelology, drawing on a number of related sacred traditions. It is not at all clear to me that Revelation’s Jesus is in fact an

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realm in an exalted state. In the eschatological age, according to 3.776, mortals will “invoke the name of the son of the great God” (υἱὸν . . . μέγαλοιο θεοῦ).

Comment JLB17: AU: Should this be “mediation”?

angel, but his angelomorphic features do recur throughout the work, and the identification of particular figures (e.g., the mighty angel in Rev 10:1–3) remains ambiguous, even suggestive. The angelomorphic characteristics of Jesus are also tied to his identity as son of God. The only mention of this title (Rev 2:18) is directly juxtaposed to physiognomies that define his angelomorphic state in chapter 1. Moreover, his depiction as the cosmic infant of a heavenly woman in chapter 12, his appearance as leader of the heavenly army in 19:11–21, and the sonship traditions preserved therein are closely connected to angelomorphic appearances and actions. As part of a broader reservoir of resources, the author of Revelation has drawn upon the breadth of sonship traditions, highlighting both the angelomorphic features of Jesus (his appearance) and his messianic function, grounded in the string of allusions to Psalm 2. The tying together of angelic and messianic qualities is not entirely unexpected, since both figures function as servants sent from God; this is, of course, a primary semantic field of the lexemes ἄγγελος and מַלְאָךְ (messenger).<sup>44</sup>

Second, just as Revelation draws upon the breadth of its potential resources, so too do Jewish apocalyptic works. Emphasizing differing aspects of the tradition, the presentations of sonship in 4 Ezra and in Joseph and Aseneth bear some resemblance to those in Revelation. These works also throw into sharp relief the range of the spectrum upon which the title “son of God” might be deployed in this era, providing the possible range of traditions from which someone like the author of Revelation may have drawn. Finally, in the second and third centuries CE, Revelation’s sonship traditions became a resource for other Christian apocalypses, most notably 5 Ezra. Revelation stands at a central juncture between early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic sonship traditions.

This survey has also highlighted the fact that the explicit use of the title “son of God” is only sparsely deployed. If Joseph and Aseneth is excluded, only a handful of instances remain. And many of these remaining examples explicitly use παῖς instead of υἱός or preserve translations that may be undergirded by the more ambiguous παῖς. This has led many scholars to cast aside instances of παῖς as unrelated to sonship proper. Although the lexical equivalency is not direct, the diversity of sonship traditions within

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<sup>44</sup> On the relationship between Jesus’s messianic mission and terminology associated with angels in the Fourth Gospel (from a diachronic perspective), see Jan-A. Bühner, *Der Gesandte und sein Weg im 4. Evangelium*, WUNT 2/2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977).

these works shows that the concept retains a level of elasticity, a suppleness that might include the interplay of servant, angelic, messianic, and messenger language. When it comes to finding comparative texts for sonship in Revelation, it should not be so easy to set aside 4 Ezra and the Sibylline Oracles.<sup>45</sup> The concept and representations of divine sonship are broader and more diverse in apocalyptic literature than it might first appear.

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<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Holtz, *Die Christologie*, 21–22.