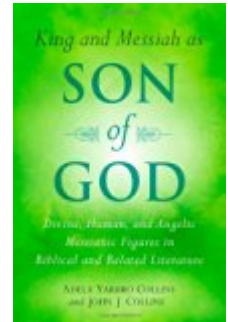


Adela Yarbro Collins, John Joseph Collins. *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008. xiv + 261 pp. \$28.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-0772-4.



Reviewed by Gerbern Oegema

Published on H-Judaic (March, 2010)

Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

This book, which had as its origin the Speaker's Lectures in Oxford, May 2006, delivered by both authors, traces the history of the idea that the king and later the messiah is "son of God," from its origins in ancient Near Eastern royal ideology to its Christian appropriation in the New Testament. The study includes a preface, list of abbreviations, and introduction. In eight chapters, John J. Collins (chapters 1-4) and Adela Yarbro Collins (chapters 5-8) cover a wide range of topics. The book ends with a conclusion, bibliography, and index.

In the first chapter, "The King as Son of God," John Collins argues that like in ancient Egypt, the portrayal of the king as son of God in the Hebrew Bible does not imply any parity with God, but only suggests a special relation to the Most High, namely, in the sense that he can act as God's surrogate on earth. Like in Canaanite kingship traditions, the Hebrew Bible also attributes to the king a love for justice and righteousness. Another aspect of Israelite kingship is his tutorial relationship with God. Whether the king is also

thought to be immortal (cf. Psalm 72), however, is to be doubted. Finally, in ancient Israel the king was surely not an object of the cult or of veneration. "The Kingship in Deuteronomistic and Prophetic Literature," the following chapter, shows that in the heyday of the monarchy the king was conceived under the influence of Egyptian tradition in mythological terms as son of God. In the Deuteronomistic history from the seventh century onward, however, the king is made subject to the Law (cf. Deuteronomy 17, 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 89 and 132, and 1 Kings 8). Chapter 3, "Messiah and Son of God in the Hellenistic Period," shows that both the son of God in 4Q246 and the David/royal messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls function as warriors to subdue the Gentiles. Here the title son of God is honorific, but does not say anything about his birth. It only shows the willingness to entertain language of divinity with reference to a future king. However, the Septuagint does go further in this respect, in that it attributes to the messiah preexistence and angelic status. This belongs to another cluster of traditions,

namely, around the "son of Man." Finally, in "Messiah and Son of Man," Collins demonstrates that whereas some traditions attribute certain messianic aspects to a "man" or a man from heaven or king sent from God, they do not indicate divinity or heavenly origin, as is the case with those texts that use the term "son of Man." In its (Jewish) reception history, the latter expression has clearly been connected with both messianic and divine attributes, although in the case of his divine status there is no mention of the "son of Man" being the object of worship (with the possible exception of 1 Enoch).

In chapter 5, "Jesus as Messiah and Son of God in the Letters of Paul," Adela Yarbro Collins argues that the epithet "Christ" in the letters of Paul is proof that Jesus's messiahship was a well-established tradition before Paul and that it was a fundamental part of that tradition. Here, the portrayal of Jesus as "son of God" is closely related to his portrayal as messiah of Israel, and it is linked with his death on behalf of others. "Jesus as Messiah and Son of God in the Synoptic Gospels," the next chapter, examines the three passages in the letters of Paul (the hymn in Philippians, 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, and 2 Corinthians 4:3-4) that possibly refer to Jesus's preexistence only in the "form of God" and the "image of God." The passages do not imply that Jesus was God or was equal to him, only that he was possibly identified with wisdom as a personified aspect of God. The following chapter, "Jesus as Son of Man," argues that after his crucifixion his followers identified Jesus, who saw himself more as a prophet than a king, with the "son of Man." This "son of Man" was presented in Daniel 7, 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra as God's agent in exercising external kingship, in executing the final judgment, and in defeating the nations. After Jesus's crucifixion, his followers then connected and transformed these concepts in their expectation of his coming/returning as a heavenly messiah and "son of Man," who would come to act as God's agent in ruling, judging, and defending God's people. In the context of "the im-

perial cults it is then not surprising that Jesus was viewed as a god and that worship of him became an alternative to the worship of the emperor," as Collins concludes (p. 174). In the final chapter, "Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man in the Gospel and Revelation of John," Collins looks at the writings attributed to John, in which Jesus is more clearly than in the other New Testament writings portrayed as preexistent and divine, namely, as an emanation of God or as being a god. They also clearly identify the royal epithet "son of God" with the expression "Messiah," the latter being closely linked with the "son of Man" in Daniel 7.

This is a fine work with a clear thesis: the term "son of God" must be seen in its historical context as the constantly changing expressions of the books of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, both in the way that they develop throughout history and in the ways that they pick up biblical and ancient tradition, and transform and further develop them in new concepts and beliefs. Both authors complement each other and work with a solid knowledge base. They lead us through the texts with their always careful and sound judgment. They finally underline that we have only partial textual evidence of the possible trajectories of a "son of God" concept and that we must always adapt our reconstructions to this.

As a whole, Collins and Collins argue that Jesus was called "the son of God" precisely because he was believed to be the messianic king. This belief and tradition led to the identification of Jesus as preexistent, personified Wisdom, or a heavenly being in the New Testament canon. However, the titles Jesus was given are historical titles tracing back to Egyptian New Kingdom ideology. Therefore, the title "son of God" is likely solely messianic and not literal. King and Messiah as "son of God" is distinctive in its range, spanning both Testaments and informed by ancient Near Eastern literature and Jewish noncanonical literature.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

Citation: Gerbern Oegema. Review of Collins, Adela Yarbro; Collins, John Joseph. *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. March, 2010.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23894>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.