

BOOK REVIEWS

R.B. Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. 216 pp. Paperback. \$30.00

R.B. Jamieson's book, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, tackles the complex use of the name "Son" in the book of Hebrews. The author puts forth three theses concerning this usage: (1) "Son" designates Jesus' distinct mode of existence, (2) "Son" designates the office of messianic rule to which Jesus is appointed at his enthronement, and (3) Jesus can become the messianic Son only because he is the divine Son incarnate (1-2). The book's title aptly captures its focus on embracing and exploring the paradoxical aspects of the concept rather than attempting to provide simplistic explanations. In examining the scholarly landscape, Jamieson highlights three prevailing approaches to the perplexing use of "Son" in Hebrews. The first approach suggests that the term Son solely pertains to what Jesus became—that is, his messianic sonship. The second approach contends that the two-fold uses of "Son" are fundamentally irreconcilable. And the third approach posits that the Son exclusively unveils what he already was—that is, Son by nature of his divinity. Departing from these established perspectives, Jamieson presents a new (yet, historically plausible) thesis that embraces the paradox inherent within Jesus' singular identity and dual natures, seeking to demonstrate the coherence and fittingness of both his pre-existent and merited sonship. According to Jamieson's interpretation, Hebrews exhorts its audience to behold the "the Son who became Son," signifying the divine Son's assumption of humanity and ultimately, messianic sonship, crole uniquely fulfilled by meeting specific prerequisites.

The strength of the book lies not only in its exegetically persuasive and theologically illuminating arguments, but in the richness and clarity of Jamieson's overall approach. The author implicitly introduces a fourth thesis within the work, and it might be his most significant contribution to the scholarly conversation, not because the contents of the study itself are lacking in any way, but because his methodological insight is so desperately needed. This additional thesis pertains to the relationship between Hebrews and conciliar Christology. Jamieson asserts that Hebrews and the creeds convey essentially the same narrative about Jesus. The soteriological narrative presupposed and expounded upon by Hebrews finds expression in a compact and schematic form within the ecumenical creeds (43). This viewpoint suggests a dynamic relationship between the creeds and the Scriptures. If this thesis is applied broadly, which the author encourages us to do, then Hebrews is only a case study in the type of work that can be accomplished

with this holistic approach to New Testament studies. Regarding the specific topic of paradoxical sonship, Jamieson suggests two further avenues of textual exploration in Acts 2:36 and Romans 1:3-4 (156 – 167).

As the author sets out in the first chapter to prove his thesis that the Son became Son, he employs “A Classical Christological Toolkit,” which includes six complementary, heuristic tools to aid the project. The first three tools are answers to basic questions concerning the Son: Who is he? What is he? and When is he?: (1) The Son is a single divine subject, (2) the Son is one person with two natures, and (3) the Son has an eternal divine existence and incarnation in time. The other three tools are reading strategies (or exegetical rules) that seek to account for the “paradoxical fullness” of what Hebrews says about Jesus: (4) Partitive Exegesis, which distinguishes between theology and economy; (5) Twofold or reduplicative predication, which distinguishes between the divine and human natures of Christ; and (6) Paradoxical predication or the communication of idioms, which enables the reader to interpret both divine and human predicates as ascriptions to the one person of the Son.

Jamieson deftly wields these conceptual tools to illuminate Hebrews’ twofold use of sonship. However, before each tool is put to use, he establishes the viability of the tool by uncovering the internal pressure embedded within Hebrews, compelling readers to grapple with the paradoxical nature of sonship. In doing so, Jamieson dispels any notion that he seeks to superimpose external frameworks onto the text, a common accusation hurled at theologians by biblical scholars (which is at least partially warranted). Instead of switching teams or leaning into these divisions, Jamieson, as a New Testament scholar, endeavors to demonstrate how these classical categories and reading strategies serve as aids in our engagement with the text.

To clarify his intentions, Jamieson forthrightly declares, “My ultimate goal in this book is to read Hebrews. What the text says is my chief concern; I will employ these tools in search of a firmer grip on the text in all its peculiar, paradoxical detail” (45). His adherence to this objective is evident throughout the work, exemplifying his skillful execution in accomplishing it. Consequently, discussions surrounding the dichotomy of “low” and “high” Christology appear somewhat incongruous when viewed within the context of Hebrews. Jamieson contends that Hebrews does not set out to offer proof of Christ’s divinity; rather, it assumes it as an indispensable prerequisite for his identification as the Christ, the Messiah (144). Only the Son, possessing divinity, can rightfully assume the office of Son. The author of Hebrews perceives the divinity of Christ as “not an inference of theological reasoning but a premise of biblical exegesis” (145), and

the present Christology does not suggest “the rough edges of a new breakthrough but the orderly exposition of an achieved synthesis” (145).

If this proposition is valid, then it follows that interpretive approaches such as Partitive Exegesis align harmoniously with the textual fabric. In this manner, Jamieson advocates for an interpretive framework that coheres with the intrinsic nature of the text, eschewing any attempts to impose external perspectives or artificial constructs upon it. These particular ideas build upon the works of Kavin Rowe, David Yeago, and Wesley Hill in crucial ways. Jamieson further substantiates the arguments of Rowe and Yeago regarding the connection between the Scriptures and the creeds, while incorporating Hill’s methodological approach, originally applied to the exploration of the Trinitarian doctrine in Pauline studies, into the ongoing academic discourse surrounding Christology in Hebrews. Consequently, he concludes that Hebrews, in a profound sense, is not merely an intermediary stage leading toward Nicaea and Chalcedon, but rather has already achieved that definitive synthesis that was more formally articulated at the ecumenical councils (146).

This book is an incredible achievement for both biblical and theological studies, especially as it serves as a precursor to R.B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman’s more recent, compressive treatment of this topic, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*. However, despite the grandeur of this later work, *The Paradox of Sonship* stands out as a masterclass in how to apply those rules to a specific topic and book of Scripture, beckoning us further up and further in to the text. Jamieson deserves wide-recognition for his audacious proposal and his ability to demonstrate its effectiveness. I suspect, and greatly hope, that both works will be of monumental influence in the academy and the Church going forward.

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