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## PSALM 2:7: THE CREATED MEANING OF THE CREATED SON

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“I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son, Today I have *begotten* Thee’” (Ps. 2:7, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

One of the most troubling doctrines set forth by some popular cults is that the Son of God is not eternally preexistent, but rather is a “begotten” creature. They proclaim that He was *birthed first* in the order of creation. Biblical texts such as Psalm 2:7 (“Today I have begotten Thee”) and Colossians 1:15 (“He is...the first-born of all creation”) are used as a wedge in their attempt to shatter the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. Are they rightly interpreting these passages, however? Are these passages really statements about the essential nature of the Son of God? Are the writers of Scripture asserting that the Son is a very specially exalted, but ultimately *created*, being? In particular, is Psalm 2:7 setting forth that there is a point during God’s creation of the world at which the Son was “begotten” by God the Father? A journey through some good interpretive practices should reveal an answer.

**Correcting a Mistaken Interpretation.** Let me begin by describing an encounter I had with two men from a cult that teaches this doctrine. A few years ago I had a fruitless mulberry tree in my front yard. These trees have hundreds of branches that grow anywhere from 12 to 15 feet *each year* and have to be trimmed back to the nubs annually. One Saturday afternoon I had to cut all the branches and try to stuff them into my trash barrels. I was less than thrilled at having to do this on this particular day—I could have been fishing. Anyway, you get the picture.

As I was stuffing these limbs in the trash barrels, I looked up and saw across the street a couple of gentlemen in sports coats and ties, carrying briefcases, walking along and stopping at each house, chatting a little bit and passing out literature, then going to the next house. I thought, “Oh, no! Just what I need on a Saturday!” I watched them work the other side of the street as I began to formulate a plan of action in the midst of my grumpy branch stuffing.

Eventually these men made their way to me. Normally the doorbell rings, you open the door, and they are there. You don’t have time to prepare, and your responses are off-the-cuff. This time was different. I had about 15 minutes to prepare for our conversation. After their introduction, I took the initiative. “You guys are Arians, aren’t you?”

They wrinkled their brows and said, “Arians? No, we’re Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

“Oh, I know you are members of that group, but you are also Arians.” I explained, “Arius was an early church father who believed that the Son of God was a created being. Those who follow this ancient teaching are called *Arians*, right?”

“Yeah, I guess we are,” they replied. The theological dialogue thus began with them back on their heels a little bit.

There I was, in a grungy old shirt and jeans, with two days’ stubble on my unshaven face, stuffing tree limbs and calling them Arians! I continued my questioning, “Since you are Arians, you believe the Son is a created being, right?”

"That's right," they answered.

"Well, you believe that there are verses in the Bible that say specifically that He is a created being?"

"Yeah, that's right," they said.

"And you would use passages like Psalm 2:7, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, that's one of our passages," they answered.

"So please read it to me—Psalm 2:7."

They read, "I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'Thou art My Son. Today I have begotten Thee.'"

I said, "Oh my, that sounds like the Son is a begotten, created being, right?"

"Right."

I responded, "But what if the New Testament says otherwise?" No answer.

I then asked them to turn to Acts 13:30–33. I had been thinking of these passages, and I explained their context. "Note the setting here in Acts 13. Paul is preaching to a group of Jewish people in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia on his first missionary journey. This is at the end of his sermon to these Jewish people. He is coming to the punch line. Please read verse 30."

They read, "But God raised Him [Jesus] from the dead."

I stopped them and asked, "What event in the life of Jesus is Paul talking about?" I think the older gentleman sensed the trap that was forming and he fumbled around for an answer. I said, "Let's be honest; what event is he talking about? The resurrection of Jesus, right?"

"Right," they said. I asked them to continue reading verses 31, 32, and 33. They read, "And for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.'"

I said, "OK, gentlemen, the theological question of the day is this: What is the day of the begottenness of Jesus as the Son?" As they fumbled some more, I asked, "It's the day of resurrection, isn't it? The day Jesus was begotten as the Son of God was not the day He was *created*; it was the day He *resurrected* and the day God the Father *enthroned* Him, or *installed* Him, as the Messianic ruler with all the full authority and rights and privileges that come with that office. He was *begotten*, that is, *enthroned* and *installed*, as the Son, a messianic term, on the day of His resurrection. The term has *nothing* to do with the Son of God being a begotten or created being, does it? I know you are good, honest, sincere people, but you are teaching a wrong doctrine about the Son of God. I am not trying to be unkind to you, but I am telling you that Paul interprets Psalm 2:7 very clearly, and what you teach is just not true. [I also gave them Romans 1:3–4 and Hebrews 1:5–6.] Please take some time to study about the day that the Son was 'begotten,' because it was the day that He was raised from the dead."

We ended on a cordial note, and they went to their car. I did not see them again; however, they did send a high-powered fellow from the cult to our house a few weeks later, and we had an interesting time talking at the door.

**Understanding the Messianic Expectation.** The hermeneutical or interpretive mistake that many cults (and even some Christians) make is to assume that whenever the term *Son* is used in reference to Jesus, it is a reference to His deity. This may be true in some instances, but most of the time it is not; rather, the reference is to His identity as *the Messiah*. It is clear that Jesus' messianic identity *includes* His preexistence as deity, but this is not the focus in most instances in the New Testament. Instead, the New Testament writers are usually seeking to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the one and only person empowered with

God's Spirit to bring about God's kingdom on earth; in other words, that Jesus is the *Messiah*, literally, "the Anointed One."

A little bit of research into Psalm 2 underscores the messianic context of Psalm 2:7. This is a descriptive praise psalm that is also a royal psalm. Royal psalms were written for the reigning king of the house of David. They praise God in a general manner for His goodness through the exploits of the Davidic king. In some of these psalms, however, the exploits go well beyond what any Davidic king accomplished. Such fulfillment could only be found in the ultimate Son of David, the Messiah. In Him all of the expectations of the sons of David reach their culmination. In this sense Psalm 2 is an *indirectly messianic psalm* (like Psalms 45 and 72) where the psalmist's language far exceeds application to the present Davidic king.

This is why the New Testament writers demonstrate that the messianic expectations of Psalm 2:7 were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. At Jesus' resurrection from the dead, He was finally and definitively appointed and installed into the messianic office. He was "begotten" as the Messiah. He was "declared the Son of God *with power* by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4, emphasis added). Psalm 2:8, further, declares that Messiah is given a coronation gift: "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession."

Understanding the Bible's emphasis on Messiah's role in history not only helps us interpret passages about Jesus' messianic identity, but also helps us understand Messiah Jesus' present focus: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:18–19). The outworking of such practical hermeneutics is far reaching indeed.

— Walt Russell

## NOTES

1. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.