

## PARENTAL LOVE AS A METAPHOR FOR DIVINE-HUMAN LOVE

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Aristotle once remarked, “Everything said metaphorically is obscure.”<sup>1</sup> By this the great Greek philosopher indicated that figures of speech lack a certain degree of the clarity of a direct statement.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the use of metaphorical language forms a basic means of human communication.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one might say that A. T. Robertson’s remark that in one sense “words are metaphors, sometimes with the pictured flower still blooming, sometimes with the blossom blurred” has distinct validity.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as L. Ryken demonstrates, a high degree of richness exists in metaphorical language that brings not only freshness and vividness to an expression but tends to make a statement more memorable. By their very nature metaphors “force a reader to ponder or meditate on a statement.”<sup>5</sup>

Metaphorical language abounds in poetry.<sup>6</sup> Here the need for vividness and memorable statements make metaphor a suitable vehicle for the poet’s goal of creating emotional, as well as intellectual and volitional, appeal.<sup>7</sup> The prevalence of metaphors in poetry, however, places a constraint on the interpreter if he is to avoid “interpreting statements in a ‘woodenly literal’ fashion.”<sup>8</sup>

G. B. Caird’s observation that unlike simile, where the two things to be compared are juxtaposed, in metaphor “the name of the one is substituted

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Topica* 139b, 34.

<sup>2</sup> In another setting Aristotle (*Poetics* 1457b, 7–8) declared, “Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else.” For an incisive review of the functions and ramifications of metaphors, see K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 126–35.

<sup>3</sup> D. J. Williams (*Paul’s Metaphors* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999] 2) declares that “metaphor lies at the very root of our language.”

<sup>4</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (5 vols.; Nashville: Broadman, 1930) 1.x.

<sup>5</sup> L. Ryken, *How To Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 96. See also R. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton: Victor, 1991) 144–50.

<sup>6</sup> Ryken (*ibid.* 97) notes, “Image, metaphor and simile are the backbone of poetry.”

<sup>7</sup> M. Silva (*God, Language and Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990] 96) notes that metaphorical language “has a greater emotional impact on the reader than bare description has.”

<sup>8</sup> M. Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 48. Similarly, Vanhoozer (*Meaning* 310–15) speaks of such exegetical procedures as “letterism,” which is wedded to a “literalistic” interpretation. As such it is to be distinguished from literal interpretation, which “seeks understanding by determining the nature and content of the literary act” (p. 312). Simply put, literal exegesis understands metaphorical language metaphorically, not in some mechanically conventional fashion.

for the other,” is certainly correct.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in this study metaphor is not used technically but as an overarching term for both figures involving comparison (as well as hypocatastasis and metaphorical expressions). Indeed, there is good rationale for such an approach. For as H. W. Fowler points out, metaphor and simile “differ only in form.”<sup>10</sup> The inquiry undertaken here as to the use of metaphorical language will concentrate on one of the more prominent scriptural metaphors associated with familial love, the parent and the child. This image provides not only literary richness but has theological and practical ramifications. After a preliminary survey of Near Eastern literature, this study will emphasize poetry, where the effect of this metaphor can have its greatest impact. For as W. Watson observes, “Metaphor belongs to the stuff of poetry, so that to understand poetry involves coming to grips with metaphor and metaphorical expressions.”<sup>11</sup>

### I. THE PARENT-CHILD METAPHOR IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Although an extensive examination of the parent-child metaphor in the extra-biblical literature of the ancient Near East is not the focus of this study, the fact of Israel’s interplay with the surrounding nations necessitates some remarks as to the use of this metaphor among those peoples. Indeed, the metaphor can be demonstrated to have occurred with some frequency among the surrounding cultures, especially in texts of a propagandist nature. These herald the king’s authority and accomplishments as derived from his god who (in a sense) looks after him as a parent would a child.

Thus the eighteenth dynasty Egyptian queen Hatchepsut (1504–1483 BC) followed long-established tradition in affirming her legitimacy to the crown by demonstrating that she was the daughter of Amon-Re. In graphic detail her inscription at Deir-el-Bahri recounts the details of her conception. Here we learn that Amon-Re had a romantic encounter with Hatchepsut’s sleeping mother.

She waked at the fragrance of the god, which she smelled in the presence of his majesty. He went to her immediately, coivit cum ea, he imposed his desire upon her. . . . “Khnemet-Amon-Hatshepsut shall be the name of this my daughter, whom I have placed in thy body.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 152.

<sup>10</sup> *The New Fowler’s Modern English* (3d ed.; ed. R. W. Burchfield; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) 491. See further, J. M. Soskice, “Metaphor,” in (ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden; London: SCM, 1990) 447. For an analysis of the theoretical aspects of metaphor, see N. Stienstra, *YHWH is the Husband of His People* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993) 17–68.

<sup>11</sup> W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986) 263. Watson’s examination of poetic metaphors in the Scriptures (pp. 263–71) provides a basic introduction to the use of metaphor in Hebrew poetry. Helpful studies of Hebrew poetry itself include R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985); S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1994); and J. L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). See further E. R. Follis, ed., *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup 40; Sheffield, JSOT, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (5 vols.; London: Histories & Mysteries of Man, 1988) 2.80.

Subsequent texts furnish such details as her fashioning by Khnum, her birth and being nursed by Hathor, and her loving relationship with her divine father Amon-Re. As a little child she sits on his knees as he is enthroned in the presence of the lesser gods, and her father says, "Behold ye, my daughter [Hatshepsut] living; be ye loving toward her, and be ye satisfied with her."<sup>13</sup> Still other texts report that her success was due to the favor of Amon-Re and the gods of Egypt. Unprecedentedly, she not only assumed the time-honored Pharaonic title "son of Re" but even donned masculine attire. Such texts as these therefore provided legitimization to her claim for the double crown of Egypt. The tradition of being recognized as the god's son, begun in the fourth dynasty, was perpetuated into the late period. Even Alexander the Great was given such a title after his well-known visit to the Oasis of Siwah.<sup>14</sup>

In ancient Mesopotamia it was common for the king to refer to himself as "the son of his god" or be named for a given deity (e.g. Marduk-Apal-Iddina = biblical Merodach Baladan). Interestingly, the same king would at times refer to himself as son of more than one male or female deity, so that suggestions that this practice was related to a kind of formal adoption are questionable at best.<sup>15</sup> The concept of royal sonship to a deity indicated the king's special relationship to a particular deity, perhaps at times being cited as further proof of legitimization and/or divine favor. Examples of such a royal claim are numerous and attested in all periods of Mesopotamian history. Thus the third millennium BC Sumerian king Ishme Dagan claimed to be Dagan's son and the Akkadian king Shar Kalli Sharri proclaimed his sonship from the god Enlil. Likewise, the early second millennium BC Isin dynasty king Lipit Ishtar claimed to be the son of Enil, while first millennium BC Assyrian kings customarily proclaimed that they were the son of a god.<sup>16</sup>

In the western Fertile Crescent the Ugaritic king Kirta (or Keret) was often termed El's son or lad, and the god El called "his father."<sup>17</sup>

For Kirta is the son of 'Ilu  
The offspring of the Gracious and Holy One.<sup>18</sup>

It should also be noted that kings in the western Fertile Crescent often piously ascribed their kingship and success to divine favor. Thus Azatiwada affirms that he is "the blessed of Baal"<sup>19</sup> and Yehawmilk asserts that he was made king by the favor of the goddess.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>14</sup> For details, see W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* (Boston: Beacon, 1962) 42–44.

<sup>15</sup> See J. Bergman and H. Ringgren, "Bēn," *TDOT* 2.147.

<sup>16</sup> For details, see M.-J. Seux, *Epithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes* (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1967) 159–60, 392–93.

<sup>17</sup> For the text and transliteration of the Kirta epic, see C. Gordon, *UT* texts 128, 125–27. For a helpful translation and discussion of the epic, see M. Coogan, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 52–74.

<sup>18</sup> *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.; ed. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, Jr.; Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002) 1.339.

<sup>19</sup> *Context* 2.149; for full text in transliteration and commentary, see *KAI* 1.5–6; 2.35–43.

I am Yehawmilk, king of Byblos/Gubal, son of Yeharbaal,  
son of son /grandson of Urimilk, king of Byblos/Gubal,  
whom the Lady, Baalat/Mistress of Byblos/Gubal  
made king upon Byblos/Gubal.<sup>20</sup>

To be noted also is the boast of Zakkur, the Aramean king of Hamath: "I am Zakkur, king of Hamath and Lu'ash. I was a man of 'Anah and Ba'ishamayn [raised] me and stood beside me, and Ba'ishamayn made me king over Hazrach."<sup>21</sup> As well Panamuwa of Y'dy claims that "Hadad and El and Rakib-El and Šamaš and Rašap gave the scepter of dominion into my hands."<sup>22</sup>

Many kings throughout the ancient Near East claimed similar divine favor. Thus the Babylonian king Hammurapi affirmed that Anum, the father of the gods (*CH* xxvib 46) called him (*CH* xxivb 45–49) to bring prosperity and justice to his people (*CH* ia 1–49; iia 14–24).<sup>23</sup> Subsequent Mesopotamian kings regularly made this claim. For example, the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal frequently declares that his successes were due to the favor of the gods. In one instance he "modestly" reports,

Marduk, master of the gods, whose command is unchangeable, granted me a favorable destiny, Nabu, god of all scribal wisdom (lit., scribe of everything), [gave me] a hold on the wisdom which he loves. Ishtar, who dwells in Arbela, the honored one among the gods, [stretched over me] her goodly shadow (protection). Nergal, the all-powerful among the gods, [put into my possession] strength, vigor and unequaled power. From my childhood the great gods, who dwell in heaven and on earth, determined my destiny.<sup>24</sup>

Later even the Persian king Cyrus the Great attributed his conquest to the good pleasure of Marduk and in *Anatolia Hattusilis III* also claimed his elevation to be king and his subsequent successes were due to divine favor.<sup>25</sup>

## II. THE PARENT-CHILD METAPHOR IN THE SCRIPTURES

1. *The Old Testament.* With the ubiquity of the Near Eastern metaphor of the parent to the child used of divine favor to the king, it would be strange if the ancient Hebrews did not utilize such imagery. Certainly the Hebrews interacted culturally as well as linguistically with their neighbors, as numerous studies have demonstrated. An examination of Hebrew poetry shows that this metaphor was indeed often employed. Here, however, the metaphor remained closely tied to the image of family relationships.<sup>26</sup> As an Israelite son grew up, the father instructed him not only in matters of

<sup>20</sup> *Context* 2.151; see further, *KAI* 1.2; 2.11–13

<sup>21</sup> *Context* 2.155; see further, *KAI* 1.37; 2.204–11.

<sup>22</sup> *Context* 2.156; see further, *Context* 2.158; *KAI* 1.38–40; 2.214–32.

<sup>23</sup> For commentary and text in transliteration and translation, see G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1960). See further *Context* 2.257.

<sup>24</sup> *ARA* 2.362.

<sup>25</sup> See *ANET* 315; *Context* 1.199–204; 2.315.

<sup>26</sup> For family relations relative to parents and children in Israel, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961) 39–55.

education and practical advice (Prov 1:8–7:27), but especially in the truths of the faith (Deut 6:4–7; 32:7, 46). When necessary, the father disciplines the son in order to assure his eventual success (2 Sam 7:14–16; Prov 13:24; 22:6, 15; 29:17).<sup>27</sup> All of this provides a donor field for the OT presentation of Israel as God's son.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Hosea (11:1–11) uses it to emphasize God's compassion for his people despite a long catalog of charges against them (8:1–10:15). Here God is presented as a loving father grieving over his son's waywardness.

When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.  
But the more I called Israel,  
the further they went from me (Hos 1:1–2a).

In quasi-allegorical fashion Hosea moves from Israel's birth to its childhood.<sup>29</sup> As a father teaches his toddler to walk, so God instructed Israel and cared for them.

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
taking them by the arms;  
but they did not realize  
it was I who healed them (Hos 11:3).

<sup>27</sup> See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* 41–52; H. Haag, "Ben," *TDOT* 2.155; C. C. Caragounis, "בן (bēn)," *NIDOTTE* 1.676.

<sup>28</sup> For the idea of semantic fields that supply concepts for the expression of metaphor, see G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide for Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> In a careful and far-ranging study J. R. Melnyk ("When Israel Was a Child," in *History and Interpretation* [JSOTSup; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993] 245–59) demonstrates that much of the biblical writers' use of the father-son metaphor may be drawn from familiar ancient Near Eastern formulae and stipulations concerning adoption. Accordingly, Melnyk treats Hosea 11 in terms of adoption: "Here God is represented as the perfect parent, adopting and rearing Israel, teaching and providing for him" (p. 253). Psalm 2:7 is also often treated in similar fashion (see e.g. M. Dahood, *Psalms 1–50* [AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966] 11–12).

While the thesis of an indebtedness to adoption practices is well taken, it must be conceded that many texts clearly describe God as Israel's birthing father (e.g. Exod 4:22–23; Isa 46:3; 48:18; Jer 31:9). Thus Moses writes, "You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut 32:18). Moreover, the fact that Deuteronomy 32 contains texts that utilize the metaphor in a way consistent with both natural birth and adoption (cf. vv. 6, 10, 18) and that many of the stipulations applied to parent-child relations in adoption texts are no less applicable to natural parent-child relations demonstrates that the metaphor encompasses both.

The same is true for the NT. Paul speaks of Christians as adopted into the family of God by grace (ὑιοθεσία), a privilege once reserved for Israel (Rom 8:14, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). NT scholars (contra N. Turner, *Christian Words* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980] 3–4) generally concede that Paul's imagery is derived from the Graeco-Roman custom of conferring on an adoptee all the rights and privileges of the child born naturally into the family. See F. Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," *JBL* 88 (1969) 458–86; W. V. Martitz and E. Schweizer, "ὑιοθεσία," *TDNT* 8.397–99; Williams, *Metaphors* 74–76, 82–85. It should be pointed out, however, that Jesus (John 1:12–13; 3:3–7), Peter (1 Pet 1:3, 23), and John (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:18) speak metaphorically of Christians as newly born into God's family. Demonstrably, both Testaments employ the metaphor either way. In any case, the origin of the metaphor is not the focus of this study but its applications.

As his son grew and matured, God led him as a caring father. He recalls his goodness to Israel. No longer were they an enslaved people but tied only to the chords of God's kindness and love.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, son Israel strayed from God, repaying his loving care and kindness with increasingly idolatrous behavior (Hos 11:2). So entrenched was Israel's apostate behavior that only renewed enslavement by a foreign power could heal its sin (Hos 11:5–7). In a poignant apostrophe God cries out to his son:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
 How can I hand you over, Israel?  
 How can I treat you like Admah?  
 How can I make you like Zeboiim?  
 My heart is changed within me;  
 All my compassion is aroused (Hos 11:8).

Rather than continued judgment, when Israel has learned the lessons of captivity, God will return his son to the land once again. Here Hosea builds upon a theme he had introduced previously (e.g. Hos 1:10–11 [2:1–2]). In a vivid shift of imagery to the animal world and from corporate Israel to individual Israelites, God's children are likened to a lion's cubs following their roaring father and to a flock of birds returning to their homeland.

"They will follow the LORD;  
 he will roar like a lion.  
 When he roars,  
 his children will come trembling from the west.  
 They will come trembling  
 like birds from Egypt,  
 like doves from Assyria.  
 I will settle them in their homes,"  
 declares the LORD (Hos 11:10–11).

As there had been a first exodus out of Egypt, so a second would follow.<sup>31</sup> What had taken place so long ago in the original exodus will happen again.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In a dramatic shift of imagery God is portrayed as a farmer adjusting "some kind of bit or harness device that either went into the animal's mouth or around its jaws" (D. A. Garrett, [NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997] 225). The imagery here is much debated. Thus M. A. Sweeney ([Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000] 114) treats Hos 11:1–9 as an example of God being portrayed metaphorically as a mother. Central to his interpretation is his understanding of the imagery in 11:3–5. By taking the verb *rp'* to refer to sustenance rather than healing, and by repointing the nouns involved in verse four and redividing verses four and five, he understands Hosea to picture God's love for Israel in terms of the "bonds of love and childbirth that tie the mother and child together." The imagery then proceeds to liken God's nourishing of Israel to that of a mother who raises her suckling infant to her cheek and then bends down to feed him.

<sup>31</sup> For the exodus motif, see R. D. Patterson, "Wonders in the Heavens and On the Earth: Apocalyptic Imagery in the Old Testament," *JETS* 43 (2000) 385–403.

<sup>32</sup> The prophets often utilize the exodus theme to depict God's future blessings for Israel (e.g. Isa 11:11–16; 51:9–11; Jer 16:14–15; 23:7–8; Mic 7:14–15). In an interesting twist Matthew draws an analogy between Hosea's words concerning Israel's exodus out of Egypt (Hos 11:1) and God's instructions to Jesus' parents to take Jesus to Egypt and remain there until the time it was safe for them to return (Matt 2:13–15, 19–23).

Much as in the prodigal son of Jesus' parable (Luke 15:11–32), paternal love stands ever ready to forgive and restore the genuinely repentant to full fellowship. Hosea thus uses the metaphor freely both of God's relation to corporate Israel and individual Israelites. Sometimes both may be intended. This interchange between Israel and Israelites as God's child/children occurs in several other texts. In what has been termed the Song of Moses, the great lawgiver reminds an oft-wayward Israel that God was their father and the Creator whom they had forgotten.

Is this the way you repay the LORD,  
O foolish and unwise people?  
Is he not your Father, your Creator,  
who made you and formed you? (Deut 32:6).

Jeremiah likewise condemns his disobedient fellow countrymen as "senseless children" (Jer 4:22).<sup>33</sup> Yet Israel's loving father (Jer 31:3) will one day bring back his repentant children. "They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back" (Jer 31:9). Though disobedient, Israel remains God's dear son:

"Is not Ephraim my dear son,  
the child in whom I delight?  
Though I often speak against him,  
I still remember him.  
Therefore my heart yearns for him;  
I have great compassion for him,"  
declares the LORD (Jer 31:10).

In a striking change of imagery Israel is implored to repent; it is now addressed as God's daughter:

Return, O Virgin Israel,  
return to your towns.  
How long will you wander,  
O unfaithful daughter (Jer 31:21b–22a).

Variation in the use of parental imagery may be noted elsewhere in the occasional portrayal of God's love and concern for Israel. Although God is never referred to specifically as a mother, yet as a mother bears a child, so it was God who gave birth to Israel (Deut 32:18), nourished him, and saw to his early training (Deut 32:11–14). Indeed, God's love for Israel is like that of a mother's love for her child. Therefore, Israel may take comfort in knowing that, much as a mother's long wait for a child is capped by the travail of childbirth, so God's long seeming silence toward exiled Israel will one day be climaxed by his giving birth anew to Israel and inflicting defeat on its enemies (Isa 42:14). When Israel then returns to the land and delights in the abundance of God's blessing to Jerusalem, "As a mother comforts her

<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Hosea calls Israel an unwise son (Hos 13:13) and Isaiah brands his countrymen as rebellious sons (Isa 1:2).

child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem” (Isa 66:13).<sup>34</sup>

All of this leads to Jeremiah’s presentation of the new covenant (Jer 31:31–37). Here he once again changes the metaphor to a somewhat unusual figure, that of the husband and the wife (Jer 31:32).<sup>35</sup> Normal ancient Near Eastern practice employed the father and son metaphor in drafting covenant literature. Thus D. J. McCarthy aptly remarks, “The father-son relationship . . . is essentially that of the covenant. And there is no doubt that covenants, even treaties, were thought of as establishing a kind of quasi-familial unity.”<sup>36</sup> Here the background imagery of family relations becomes the source for the father-son metaphor to express covenant relationship. The presence of the father-child metaphor in Deuteronomy (noted above) in a document composed in accordance with ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties suggests that McCarthy’s observation is correct. Its appearance in prophetic passages, especially those employing exodus imagery, further reinforces McCarthy’s thesis. Israel (the child) stands in covenant relation with Yahweh (the father) who gave birth to his child at the time of the exodus.<sup>37</sup> Though constantly disobedient, God nevertheless loves his own and will once again restore him in a new and greater exodus.

Such a message was doubtless of distinct encouragement to those Jews who were carried away into exile. Cut off from their land, God’s children cried out,

You, O LORD, are our Father,  
our Redeemer from of old is your name (Isa 63:16b).

They implored God for his mercy:

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD;  
do not remember our sins forever.  
O look upon us, we pray,  
for we are all your people (Isa 64:8).

But God assures his children that he loves them still (Isa 43:4) and that he will one day call them back to himself:

I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’  
and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’

<sup>34</sup> See also the discussion in note 30.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremiah draws upon many images throughout this passage. In addition to the metaphors of Israel as son, daughter, and wife, God is not only father and husband but divine shepherd (Jer 31:10–12).

<sup>36</sup> D. J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1972) 33. See also D. J. McCarthy, “Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship between Israel and Yahweh,” *CBQ* 27 (1965) 144–47.

<sup>37</sup> C. J. H. Wright (“צָבָה,” *NIDOTTE* 1.222) is perhaps overly cautious in observing that the father-son relationship and covenant terminology “were not exactly coextensive or coterminous.”

Bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the ends of the earth (Isa 43:6).

As a corollary to this covenant relationship, certain conduct is expected on the son's part. Like any proper Israelite son, not only should he heed his father's instruction (Prov 3:1–4), but he should emulate the father's faithfulness (Deut 32:4–6) and honor him.

“A son honors his father,  
and a servant his master.  
If I am a father,  
where is the honor due me?  
If I am a master,  
where is the respect due me?”  
says the LORD Almighty (Mal 1:6).

Since the full passage underscores the person of God himself (cf. vv. 11, 14), Walter Kaiser correctly observes, “In direct proportion to which mortals grasp the greatness of the person, character, and attributes of God (-his name), to that degree will their own inadequacies, falseness, and diluted worship take on credibility, substance, acceptance, and posture.”<sup>38</sup>

In turn, God the father's faithfulness to the covenant demands that he discipline his child or children when such is needed (Prov 3:12). At times judgment must come:

“Woe to the obstinate children,”  
declares the LORD,  
“to those who carry out plans that are not mine” (Isa 30:1).  
“These are rebellious people, deceitful children,  
children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction” (Isa 30:9).<sup>39</sup>

The parent-child metaphor takes on special significance in key passages that have messianic implications. Building upon the foundation of God the father's promise to his son David and David's heirs (2 Sam 7:14–16), the psalmist Ethan affirms the inviolability of the Davidic Covenant (Ps 89:26–29).<sup>40</sup>

In a passage generally conceded to have distinct messianic force David declares,

I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:  
He said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father” (Ps 2:7).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 33. Malachi declares that Israel's priests have profaned God's name, his sacred being and reputation (1:6–8). A. Hill (*Malachi* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998] 177) points out that the term “name” stands for “the essence of God's being, especially his sovereignty, love, and faithfulness to Israel as revealed in his covenant name ‘Yahweh.’”

<sup>39</sup> It is no different for today's sons and daughters. Note Paul's bringing together a collage of OT texts to remind the believer of the necessity of a consistent holy walk (2 Cor 6:14–16).

<sup>40</sup> See the seminal study of the Davidic Covenant by W. Kaiser, Jr., “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *JETS* 15 (1972) 11–23.

<sup>41</sup> LXX, Vg, “I have begotten you” (cf. NASB; NRSV). The MT of Ps 2:12 further advises other earthly rulers to “kiss the son” (i.e. do homage to Yahweh's son).

Here one can perceive the Near Eastern precedents noted previously.<sup>42</sup> Like Sargon of Agade and the Ugaritic king Kirta, David is Yahweh's son.<sup>43</sup> Unlike the claims of the ancient Near Eastern kings, however, neither David nor any Israelite king declared himself to be divine.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as E. Lohse observes, "Israel took good care lest the designation son of God might be falsely linked to the physical divine sonship which was so widely spoken of in the ancient Orient."<sup>45</sup> In accordance with the terms of the Davidic Covenant the king is promised a wide ranging (Ps 2:8-9; Isa 9:6-7) and enduring (Ezek 37:27-28) rulership.

2. *The New Testament.* The crucial nature of the Davidic Covenant with this reference to God's "son" and his heirs made Ps 2:7 a natural text to be drawn upon by the NT writers. Here God's "beloved son" (Matt 3:17) Jesus is identified as a recipient *par excellence* of Ps 2:7. This is further authenticated by his resurrection (Acts 13:32-34), his high priestly position (Heb 5:4-10), and his superiority to the angels (Heb 1:5). All of this is in keeping with Jesus' own adopting of the parent-child metaphor in addressing God as his father (e.g. John 17:1) and declaring, "The Father loves the Son" (John 3:35).

Consideration of Jesus as God's Son raises the problem of poetic utterances of familial love in the NT. L. Ryken concludes that although most of the NT is printed as prose, much of it is nonetheless poetic.<sup>46</sup> Ryken avers that because of his great use of metaphor and simile, not only is Jesus the foremost poet of the NT, he is "one of the world's most famous poets."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, "the speech of Jesus was essentially poetic."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> H. Donner ("Adoption oder Legitimation?" [1969] 114) makes the interesting suggestion that Ps 2:7 reflects "ein auf die Ebene der Metapher transponiertes mythisches Element" ("a mythical element transposed at the level of metaphor").

<sup>43</sup> See H. Ringgren ("Psalm 2 and Belit's Oracle for Ashurbanipal," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* [ed. Carol Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983] 92) points out an interesting parallel with Ps 2:7-8:

Belit is his mother: fear not! The Mistress of Arbela bore him: fear not!  
As she that's given birth (cares for) her child (?), so I care for you.  
I have set you as an amulet (?) between my breasts.  
All night I am awake, I keep watch over you. All day I give you milk.

<sup>44</sup> See M. Dahood, *Psalms I* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) 11-12; G. Cooke, "The Israelite King as Son of God," *ZAW* 73 (1961) 202-25.

<sup>45</sup> E. Lohse, "ὁἰός, Palestinian Judaism," *TDNT* 8.360.

<sup>46</sup> L. Ryken, *Words of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 99-103. Ryken's demonstration of the features of NT poetry reinforces the conclusions of N. Turner that Semitic influences may be felt throughout the Greek NT. See his extensive remarks in volumes 3 and 4 of J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament* (3d ed.; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908, 1919, 1963, 1976). See also N. Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965). Many years of research and reflection caused Turner to conclude that "Greek-speaking Jews, even before the advent of the Savior, had worked wonders with the Greek language. . . . Christians being mostly Jews at the beginning, inherited this metabolized language only to transform it still more remarkably" (N. Turner, *Christian Words* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980] xiii).

<sup>47</sup> Ryken, *Words* 102.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

Illustrative of the often poetic language of Jesus is his conscious appropriation of the son metaphor in Matthew 11:27:

No one knows the Son except the Father,  
and no one knows the Father except the Son,  
and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, with due allowance for Ryken's thesis one may safely affirm that the metaphor of familial love not only exists in the NT but many passages in which they occur may often be viewed as poetic. The use of Ps 2:7 by the writer of Hebrews further underscores this fact:

For to which of the angels did He ever say,  
"You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you?"  
Or again,  
"I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son?" (Heb 1:5).

The parent-child metaphor extends even further. Not only was it employed for God's covenant relation to Israel and David, and especially to David's messianic heir, Jesus Christ, but to individuals. Thus the psalmist observes,

As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those that fear him (Ps 103:13).<sup>50</sup>

Carried over into the NT, the parent-child metaphor assumes two dominant forms. Believers are termed both "sons" (υἱοί) and "children" (τέκνα) of God. Those who have received Jesus are God's children (John 1:12). Lavished by his love (1 John 3:1–2) they are to respond in righteous living (1 John 3:10) and carry out his commands, especially in reproducing his love (1 John 5:1–3).

Made sons of God by faith (Gal 3:26) they are to show love even to their enemies, so that they may go on to reflect God's own perfection (Matt 5:41–45). They are to be those who encourage peace (Matt 5:9) and who regularly pray (Matt 6:9). In a bold use of the sons/children metaphor (Rom 8:14–17) Paul reminds believers that as sons of God they are to be "led by the Spirit of God." Now as those who have achieved the same status through God's sending of his Son Jesus Christ, all Christians have a close and living relationship to their heavenly Father. Therefore, they may boldly cry, "Abba, Father" (cf. Gal 3:6). Advancing the metaphoric language still further, Paul declares that as God's children believers have become full co-heirs with God's own Son, Jesus Christ (Gal 4:1, 7).

Here in a real sense the parent-child metaphor comes full circle. Far beyond the claims of special divine favor accorded to an individual king in the ancient Near Eastern metaphor, Israelite familial relationships provided a source to express God's covenant relation first to Israel and individual

<sup>49</sup> The theological implications of Jesus as the Son of God are not under consideration in this study.

<sup>50</sup> David (Ps 68:5) proclaimed, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling."

Israelites, then to David, Israel's king. From there it has come through David's heir *par excellence* to designate all true believers (cf. Gal 3:26–4:7). The old covenant, which provided Israel's sonship, was based upon God's redemption of his people out of Egypt. Together with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants it found new orientation in the new covenant and in its mediator, God's unique Son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; Heb 8:6–13; 1 John 4:9). As fellow heirs of the blessings of a long metaphorical tradition, Christian sons of God are no less obligated than son Israel of old to live up to the responsibilities of sonship. Moreover, they may expect God's correction when they fail to do so (cf. Isa 30:1 with Heb 12:5–6). Indeed, as God's children, because of their union with God's Son (John 17:20–23; 1 Cor 15:22; Gal 2:20), theirs is a calling to an even higher standard of devotion and the reproduction of the Father's character in their lives (Matt 5:48; Col 3:12–14; 1 John 3:1–3; 5:1–5).