Chapter 13

What Does God Get Out of It? Reciprocity and Divine Sonship

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is clear that identity is formed in relational contexts. But through what strategies are actions and attitudes shaped and relational bonds strengthened in father-son relationships? One obvious way is by appealing to benefits that accrue to the son. But it is also possible to motivate behavior and shape identity by appealing to the benefits that accrue to the father. All parents know this: one can shape a child's behavior not only by describing rewards for the child but also by appealing to the honor, pride, or delight that the parent experiences.¹

Father-son metaphors are used to depict the relationship between God and various parties in texts from ancient Israel, Second Temple Judaism, and early Christianity.² Thus, it stands to reason that we should investigate relational dynamics in

1. For a taxonomy of motivations for behavior, see Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25 (2000): 54–67.

2. The divine father-son relational metaphor has been examined from many different angles. On metaphor theory and kinship language in ancient Jewish and Christian texts, see A. M. Böckler, "Unser Vater," in *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. P. van Hecke, BETL 187 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 249–61; Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, JSNTSup 247 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 18–28; Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah*, JSOTSup 398 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 10–11; and Jan Gabriël van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 394–432. For studies on the background of the metaphor and on its relationship to kinship, messianism, and group identity, see the essays in Felix Albrecht and Reinhard Feldmeier, eds., *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Annette Böckler, *Gott als Vater im Alten Testament. Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung eines Gottesbildes* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000), 49–52, 377–87; 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); John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead*

terms of the rhetorical presentation of *reciprocal* benefits.³ Indeed, the reciprocal nature of benefits in father-son relationships was recognized even in antiquity.⁴ The benefits enjoyed by the “son of God” (whether that is construed as Israel, the Davidic king, Jesus, or the followers of Jesus) can easily be located in the ancient sources and have been widely discussed.⁵ In this essay, I will investigate a topic

Sea Scrolls, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 171–90; James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 12–64; F. Charles Fensham, “Father and Son: Treaty and Covenant,” in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. H. Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971), 121–35 (esp. 129–35); Martin Hengel, *Der Sohn Gottes: Die Entstehung der Christologie und die jüdisch-hellenistische Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977); Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); and Aquila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus’ Self Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms*, WUNT 2/192 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). For how the divine father-son metaphor is used in specific compositions or corpora, see, e.g., Albrecht and Feldmeier, *Divine Father*; Böckler, *Gott als Vater*, 175–376; Diane Chen, *God as Father in Luke-Acts* (New York: Lang, 2006); Brandon D. Crowe, *The Obedient Son: Deuteronomy and Christology in the Gospel of Matthew*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 188 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012); Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), esp. 46–84; Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*; Larry W. Hurtado, “Jesus’ Divine Sonship in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 217–33; Abera M. Mengestu, *God as Father in Paul: Kinship Language and Identity Formation in Early Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); Amy L. B. Peeler, *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Library of New Testament Studies 486 (London: T&T Clark, 2015); Adele Reinhartz, ed., *God the Father in the Gospel of John*, Semeia 85 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Angelika Strotmann, “Mein Vater bist du!” (Sir 51,10): Zur Bedeutung der Vaterschaft Gottes in kanonischen und nichtkanonischen frühjüdischen Schriften (Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1991); Marianne Meyer Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); Watt, *Family of the King*; Matthew Vellanickal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings*, Analecta Biblica 72 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977); and Christiane Zimmermann, *Die Namen Des Vaters: Studien zu ausgewählten neutestamentlichen Gottesbezeichnungen*, AGJU 69 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 41–166.

3. Recent investigations of how reciprocity functioned in antiquity have yielded important results for the study of how divine-human relationships were understood. On reciprocity and gift-giving, see John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), esp. 24–51, 55, 575. On reciprocity and sacrifice, see Richard E. DeMaris, “Sacrifice, an Ancient Mediterranean Ritual,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 4 (2013): 60–73; Richard Parker, “Pleasing Thighs: Reciprocity in Greek Religion,” in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, ed. C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite, and R. Seaford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 105–26; Daniel Ullucci, *The Christian Rejection of Animal Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 24–35; and Ullucci, “Sacrifice in the Ancient Mediterranean: Recent and Current Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 13.3 (2015): 388–439 (esp. 405–409). On reciprocity and prayer, see Samuel E. Balantine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 37–42, 122, 142–43, 261–63; and David A. Bosworth, “Ancient Prayers and the Psychology of Religion: Deities as Parental Figures,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 681–700.

4. See Seneca, *Ben.* 3.36–38. The reciprocity in father-son relationships should be distinguished from that present in patron-client relationships. On this matter, see the useful observations in Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 184–86.

5. See, e.g., Peeler, *You Are My Son*, 159–61; and Watt, *Family of the King*, 351–52. Benefits enjoyed by the entities described as God’s son include love, care, and upbringing (Deut 1:31; Hos 11:1–4; Ps 89:21–29; Wis 2:16, 18; 11:10; Philo, *Spec.* 4.180; Josephus, *A.J.* 1.20; Matt 7:7–11; John 3:35; Heb 12:4–11), inheritance (Jer 3:19; Ps 2:7–8; Heb 1:2, 4; Rev 21:7), and reward or exaltation (Ps 89:25–28; Job. 2:19–20, 19:29; Matt 11:27; John 17:1–2; Rom 8:16–17). On the various referents who could be designated “son of God,” see Jarl Fossum,

that has received less attention, namely, what *God* gets out of divine sonship—and the rhetorical gains of using language describing these benefits. My conclusion is that in the majority of cases, the language of benefits enjoyed by God as Father is indeed used to shape identity, create ethical imperatives, and strengthen relational bonds.⁶

2. WHAT DOES GOD GET OUT OF DIVINE SONSHIP?

By asking what God gets out of divine sonship, I am not imagining that the authors of the texts under consideration spoke or thought of relational reciprocity in such crass terms. It is clear that ancient Jewish and Christian authors could speak of divine relationality, or what God received from or was owed by others, without implying that the deity “needed” or was contingent on such things (e.g., Ps 50:12–13, Acts 17:24–25). Nor am I arguing that the various referents designated as “sons” of God are all sons of the same kind or that they themselves are all divine. Additionally, I recognize that the father-son relational metaphor could be combined with other metaphors, though the rhetorical effects accomplished by these combinations lie outside the boundaries of this investigation.⁷ As I see it, there are four benefits that accrue to God as a metaphorical father: First, he enjoys the benefit of having a son who acts as his agent. Second, he enjoys honor and devotion from his son. Third, he experiences delight at seeing himself in his son and at what his son has become or accomplished. And fourth, he enjoys a heritage in the person of his son.

2.1. *A Father Benefits from a Son Who Acts as His Agent*

The first benefit that God enjoys as Father is that of having a son who acts as his agent. A father could expand his interests or extend his influence by having a son who acted on his behalf.⁸ Ancient Israelite texts describe three different entities

“Son of God,” *ABD* 6.128–37; Florentino García Martínez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” *Studia Philonica Annual* 19 (2007): 85–99; García Martínez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran: Between the Old and the New Testament,” in *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb*, ed. C. Hempel and J. M. Lieu, *JSJSup* 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 109–32; and Beatrice Wyss, “Vater Gott und seine Kinder und Frauen,” in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 165–97.

6. See Böckler, “Unser Vater,” 260: “Die Metapher ‘Gott als Vater’ umschreibt ein wechselseitiges Beziehungsverhältnis. Sie umschreibt einen Vergebungszuspruch und einen Gehorsamsanspruch.”

7. God is depicted as both father and mother in Deuteronomy 32 (vv. 6, 10–11, 18) and in Isaiah 40–66. On the latter, see Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*. God is both father and husband in Hosea 1–2, both father and potter in Isa 64:7, and both father and ruler (δέσποτα) in Sir 23:1.

8. We have accounts from Babylon, Greece, Persia, and Rome of sons who acted on behalf of their fathers in political negotiations and in military and civil matters. Nebuchadnezzar II, son of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar, conducted military campaigns early in the seventh century BCE on behalf of his father.

as both God's sons and as God's agents: divine beings subordinate to YHWH, Israel, and the Davidic king.

Curiously, the passages that speak of these three entities as God's agents do not use sonship language, and the passages that speak of them as God's sons do not explore their status as his agents. For example, it is clear that subordinate divine beings function as agents of YHWH in 1 Kgs 22:19–23, but this text does not use sonship language. Conversely, when these beings are called “sons of God,” their roles as agents are unclear. The **בני אלהים** are described in Job 1:6 as reporting to YHWH, which suggests that they perform tasks on his behalf, but this notion is not further developed in the text. Likewise, the divine beings called the **בני עליין** in Ps 82:6 are chastised for failing to uphold justice, but this psalm develops neither the nature of their position as sons nor the nature of their role as agents.⁹

Similarly, the notions of sonship and agency are not strongly combined when Israel is depicted as God's son. On the one hand, passages such as Exod 4:22–23 describe Israel as God's son but define Israel's responsibility in this role in terms of service to God: “Israel is my son, my firstborn. So I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve (עבד) me.’” There are contextual indications that this service is understood as cultic devotion.¹⁰ On the other hand, there are passages suggesting that Israel is God's agent that define this role in terms of practicing righteousness and obeying God's law (Gen 18:18–19; Isa 42:18–21; Jer 4:1–2), but none of these passages use the language of divine sonship.

The same pattern can be seen in ancient Israelite descriptions of the king, who could also be called God's son.¹¹ We see such a designation in 2 Sam 7:14 (in the

See Chronicle Concerning the Later Years of Nabopolassar, lines 5–12, 19–28; and Chronicle Concerning the Early years of Nebuchadnezzar II, lines 1–5 (A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 97–99). Polybius (*Hist.* 11.34) recounts that in 206 BCE, King Euthydemus sent his son Demetrius to negotiate a peace treaty with Antiochus III. Josephus (*B.J.* 4.11.5) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.5, 82) report that Vespasian's son Titus was instrumental in ending conflict between his father and Mucianus when they were governors of adjacent regions and was put in charge of the forces to suppress the Jewish rebellion when his father left for Rome. A son could also act as his father's agent in the domestic sphere; in the book of Tobit, Tobit is depicted as commissioning his son Tobias to go to Media and collect a deposit of money (Tob 4:20, 5:1–3).

9. For references to the **בני אלהים**, see Gen 6:2, 4; Deut 32:8 (in 4QDeutⁱ XII, 14); Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7. For references to the **בני אלים**, see Pss 29:1, 89:7. See also Ps 82:6 (**בני עליין**) and Dan 3:25 (**בר אלהין**). On divine beings as “sons of God,” see Werner Schliske, *Gottessöhne und Gottessohn im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973).

10. In addition to Exod 4:22–23, see Exod 3:12, where God tells Moses that when he has brought the people out of Egypt, they will serve (עבד) God on the mountain. See also Exod 10:24, 26. Note as well Exod 3:18, 5:3, where Moses is to say to Pharaoh, “Let us go on a three-day journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice (זבח) to YHWH our God.”

11. Claims that kings were sons of a deity were widespread in antiquity, though this was understood in different ways. In Egypt, the notion was communicated in the names of the pharaohs (see Alexandra von Lieven, “Father of the Fathers, Mother of the Mothers: God as Father [and Mother] in Ancient Egypt,” in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 25; and Ronald J. Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian*

context of an argument about care and discipline) and in Ps 2:7 (in the context of an argument about legitimation and protection). In neither case do we find an argument about agency. To be sure, the Davidic king was viewed as God's agent of justice, as we see in Isa 11:1–5, 16:5; Ps 45:7–8; and Ps 72, but these latter texts do not use explicit sonship language. This state of affairs can also be seen in Phoenician and Mesopotamian texts; it was entirely possible to talk about the king as the agent of the gods without linking this to the king's status as son of the gods.¹² In Egypt, however, it appears that the pharaoh's role as agent of the gods could be derived from his status as son.¹³

In later Jewish texts, we begin to see a shift. On the one hand, in 4Q174, the “son” language of 2 Sam 7:14 is applied to a royal eschatological agent, the “branch of David who will arise with the interpreter of the Law . . . in Zion in the last days” (4Q174 I, 11–12). This fragmentary text never really states (though it might presume) what the royal son will accomplish as God's agent. On the other hand, we find a clear linkage between agency and sonship in the writings of Philo. The language of divine sonship is used by Philo to speak of the Logos, whom he calls the “eldest son” (πρεσβύτατος υἱός) and “firstborn” (πρωτόγονος) of God (*Conf.* 62–63, 145–47; *Agr.* 51; *Somn.* 1.215; *Mos.* 2.134).¹⁴ Philo also describes the Logos as God's agent, the one who shaped things according to the patterns supplied by the Father (*Conf.* 62–63), the one who was appointed by God to govern creation (*Agr.* 51), and the mediator for humanity who procures forgiveness (*Mos.* 2.134; cf. *Her.* 205–206; *Somn.* 1.215). These tasks are described as bestowed upon

Royal Titulary [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013], esp. 18–19, 53, 55, 113, 117, 121). Note also the names of the Judean king Abijah (אבִיָּה/אֲבִיָּה, 2 Chr 13:1, 21) and the Aramean kings Bar-Hadad I and II (see KAI 201 in Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 5th ed. [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002], 47). These claims were also expressed as endorsements by the deity, e.g., of Amenhotep III: “He is my son on my throne according to the decree of the gods” (see Manfred Görg, *Gott-König-Reden in Israel und Ägypten* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975], 260). Plutarch (*Alex.* 2–3) tells of the belief that Alexander the Great was fathered by a deity. Coins bearing the likeness of Octavian were inscribed “Caesar divi filius,” the title that he claimed (see Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996], 17–18, 312–13).

12. In the prologue and epilogue to the laws of Hammurapi (cols. 1–5, 47–51), Hammurapi is repeatedly described as the agent of the gods to bring about justice. He is also said to be endorsed by the gods, beloved of the gods, and enthroned by the gods, but he is never called the “son” of the gods (see Martha Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed. [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 76–81, 133–40). Likewise, in a Phoenician inscription from Karatepe (KAI 26 in Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 6–7), King Azitiwada is called the “servant of Baal” (1.1–2), is said to act “for the sake of Baal” (1.6–8), and is commissioned by Baal to build a city (2.9–12)—but is never called Baal's “son.”

13. See the Building Inscription of Sesostri I (Pap. Berlin 3029), where Sesostri is described as begotten by Harakhty (= Horus) for the purpose of shepherding and ruling his people and conquering other people. For a translation, see Miriam Lichtheim, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, vol. 1 of *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 115–18.

14. See García Martínez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” 97–99.

the firstborn Logos by the Father in such a way that makes agency an aspect of divine sonship.¹⁵

In the New Testament, and particularly in the Gospel of John, we similarly encounter strong linkages between divine sonship and agency in depictions of Jesus.¹⁶ The Synoptic Gospels contain a parable about a landowner who rents out his vineyard to tenant farmers, then goes on a journey (Mark 12:1–9 // Matt 21:33–41 // Luke 20:9–16). After sending servants, the owner commissions his son to visit the vineyard, assuming that the tenants will respect his son. This parable suggests that Jesus (the metaphorical “son” of God, who is the metaphorical vineyard owner) stands at the end of a series of prophetic agents, the “servants” sent earlier.¹⁷ Similarly, both Matthew and Luke (Matt 11:25–27 // Luke 10:22) contain a prayer in which Jesus addresses God as his “Father,” stating that “all things have been handed over” to him by his Father and that the Son alone reveals knowledge of the Father.¹⁸

In his classic essay “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” Peder Borgen identifies parallels between statements about Jesus’s agency in John and statements about agency in rabbinic Judaism.¹⁹ These parallels are indeed helpful. However, none of the parallel examples he supplies are about sons as agents of their fathers. Yet, it is here in the Gospel of John where the link between divine sonship and agency is most apparent.²⁰ John’s distinctive contribution is to move traditional Son of

15. “For that man is the eldest son, whom the Father of all raised up, and elsewhere calls him His first-born, and indeed the Son thus begotten followed the ways of his Father, and shaped the different kinds, looking to the archetypal patterns which the Father supplied” (Philo, *Conf.* 62–63 [Colson and Whitaker]); “This hallowed flock [viz., creation] He leads in accordance with right and law, setting over it His true Word and Firstborn Son Who shall take upon Him its government like some viceroy of a great King; for it is said in a certain place: ‘Behold I AM, I send My Angel before thy face to guard thee in the way’ (Exod 23:20)” (Philo, *Agr.* 51 [Colson and Whitaker]).

16. See also Heb 3:2–6, which depicts Jesus as a son who was appointed over God’s house and has proved to be faithful in his charge. Likewise, 1 John depicts Jesus as God’s son sent to take away sin, destroy the works of the devil, and save the world (1 John 3:5, 8; 4:14). Of course, not all statements ascribing agency to Jesus use the language of divine sonship (e.g., Mark 10:45, Luke 19:10). Conversely, Luke 1:31–33, 35 calls Jesus the “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God,” but his function as son is described solely in terms of reigning over the house of Jacob as a Davidic king.

17. Note a similar parable in Sifre Deut. 312, which does not link agency and sonship.

18. On Matt 11:25–27, see Florian Wilk, “‘Vater . . .’: Zur Bedeutung der Anrede Gottes als Vater in den Gebeten der Jesusüberlieferung,” in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 211–16.

19. Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Religions in Antiquity. Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. J. Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 137–48. See, however, a more recent essay where Borgen compares sonship and agency in Philo and the Gospel of John (“Observations on God’s Agent and Agency in John’s Gospel, Chapters 5–10: Agency and the Quest for the Historical Jesus,” in *The Gospel of John: More Light from Philo, Paul and Archaeology: The Scriptures, Tradition, Exposition, Settings, Meaning*, ed. P. Borgen [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 193–218, esp. 197–201, 211–15).

20. On Jesus as agent, see Paul Anderson, “The Having-Sent-Me Father: Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship,” in *God the Father in the Gospel of John*, ed. A. Reinhartz, Semeia 85 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 33–57; John Ashton, *Studying John: Approaches to*

God language from the royal Davidic sphere into the sphere of familial relations: Jesus is the man from heaven, the heavenly Son of a heavenly Father.²¹ Fathers and sons share things that others do not. Thus Jesus is described as one who has a unique relationship to the Father: as the Son, Jesus works in the same manner as his Father (John 5:17); he does what his Father does (John 5:19); to see and know Jesus is to see and know the Father (John 14:7, 9, 10). This unique relationship becomes the basis for the descriptions of Jesus as God's agent, the Son who carries out the task of his Father: Jesus as Son is subordinate to his Father (John 5:30, 14:28), but as an agent of his Father he must be respected as such by others (John 5:22–23, 12:44). Jesus is “sent” by his Father (John 3:16–17, 5:23, 6:57, 10:36, 12:49–50, 17:18, 20:21), is given a task by his Father (John 5:21–22; 36; 13:3; 17:4), and does the works of his Father in his Father's name (John 10:25, 37). According to John, the mission that the Father entrusts to the Son as his agent is to give life (John 3:16–17; 5:21–22, 40; 6:37–40; 12:49–50; 17:1–3).²²

While Jesus's followers are also depicted as both sons and agents of God, it is less clear that their agency is explicitly derived from their status as sons. Such an idea may be hinted at in Matthew 10, where Jesus's commissioning of the Twelve to go out and proclaim the kingdom has been editorially broadened by the inclusion of verses 17–23.²³ The addressees are told not to worry about what they will say when brought before rulers, because “it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matt 10:20). The notion may also be hinted at in John, where the followers of Jesus are described as “children of God” (τέκνα θεοῦ) who are “born . . . of God” (John 1:12–13; cf. 3:3) and who share the same divine Father with Jesus (John 20:17: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God”). And just as Jesus is God's agent, his followers are also agents; just as the Father “sent” his Son Jesus, in the same way Jesus “sends” his followers (John 17:18, 20:21).²⁴

the Fourth Gospel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 71–89; Marinus de Jonge, “The Son of God and the Children of God in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Saved by Hope: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Oudersluys*, ed. J. I. Cook (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 44–63; James F. McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60–65, 80–102; Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘I Am the Door’ (John 10:7, 9): Jesus the Broker in the Fourth Gospel,” *CBQ* 69 (2007): 271–91; Marianne Meyer Thompson, “The Living Father,” in *God the Father in the Gospel of John*, ed. A. Reinhartz, Semeia 85 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 26–9; and Watt, *Family of the King*, 296–303.

21. In John 1:49, Nathanael's statement that Jesus is “the Son of God, the King of Israel” prompts Jesus's response that he will “see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:50; cf. 3:13, 8:28, 18:36–37). See also Jonge, “Son of God,” 44.

22. See Thompson, “Living Father,” 24–25.

23. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 275, 277; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 85–87.

24. On sonship and mission in the Gospel of John, see Frances Back, *Gott als Vater der Jünger im Johannevangelium*, WUNT 2/336 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), esp. 172–94; A. J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); J. Kuhl, *Die Sendung Jesu und der Kirche nach dem Johannes-Evangelium* (Sankt Augustin: Steyler, 1967); Juan Peter Miranda,

2.2. A Father Enjoys Honor and Devotion from His Son

The second benefit that God enjoys by virtue of being a father is the honor and devotion he receives from his son. This includes affection that a son shows for his father, deference to his father's wishes, obedience to his father's commands, acknowledgment of his father's status, and dependence on his father's generosity. Statements about these expectations are widely attested in ancient literature.²⁵

Because a son depends on his father's generosity, God as Father is depicted in Ps 2:7–8 as urging his son the Davidic king, "Ask of me, and I will give!" In Ps 89:27, the Davidic king shows his devotion to God by "cry[ing] out, 'You are my Father!'" And in verses 31–33, the same psalm promotes the obedience of the Davidic king to his divine Father by linking disobedience to punishment.

In Deut 14:1, the fact of Israel's status as God's son is the stated reason why the people are not to engage in rituals associated with the cult of the dead. But the theme of honor and devotion due to God as Father is most apparent in Israelite prophetic texts, where the divine father-son metaphor is used to accuse Israel of disloyalty. Isa 1:2–4 states that God has "reared sons and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Even ox and donkey acknowledge authority, but Israel does not; they are "offspring who practice evil, sons who act corruptly."²⁶ In Jer 3:19, God speaks as a father who cared for Israel as a son and imagined that they would reciprocate, calling him "Father" and not turning away from him. But in the surrounding context, the people are accused of addressing other gods as "father" (Jer 2:27–28) or calling YHWH "Father" only when convenient (Jer 3:4; cf. vv. 1–5) and are labeled as sons who are disobedient, faithless (**בָּנִים שׁוֹכְבִּים**), and stupid (**בָּנִים סִכְלִים**; Jer 3:13–14, 22; 4:22). Hos 11:1–4 depicts God recounting how he cared for Israel as a son but was repaid with rejection and disloyalty. The disputation speech in Mal 1:6 reports God noting, "A son honors a father. . . . But if I am a father, where is my honor?" before accusing priests of despising his

Die Sendung Jesu im vierten Evangelium: Religions- und theologischesgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Sendungsformeln (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977); and Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1–42*, WUNT 2/31 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988).

25. For a list of filial duties in Ugaritic literature, see the Tale of Aqhat (COS 1.103.344–45). For the devotion of Ramesses II to his father Seti, see the Great Dedicatory Inscription of Ramesses II at Abydos (RITA 2:162–74). For filial duty in ancient Israel, see David L. Baker, "The Fifth Commandment in Context," in *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies*, ed. J. K. Aitken, K. J. Dell, and B. A. Mastin, BZAW 420 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 253–67; also Exod 20:12; and Prov 6:20; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22; 28:24; 30:11, 17. In later Jewish literature, see Sir 3:1–16; 4Q416 2 III, 15–19; and Philo, *Decal.* 106–20. For Aristotle's argument that sons are perpetually indebted to their fathers, see *Eth. nic.* 8.14. On the duties and affections owed by sons to fathers in Roman culture, see Richard Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 102–32. Note Cicero's statement (*Planc.* 12 [Watts]) that "filial affection is the basis of all virtues" (*pietas fundamentum est omnium virtutum*).

26. See Darr, *Isaiah's Vision*, 56–59; and Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Traditions of Israel*, JSOTSup 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1981), 40–64. See further Isa 30:1, 9; 63:8, 10.

name.²⁷ Finally, the divine father-son relational metaphor plays an important role in Deuteronomy 32, where Israel is described as God's son but does not act as if he is their father (Deut 32:5–6, 18–20).²⁸

Later Jewish literature references the theme of loyalty and devotion to God as Father for more positive purposes. Tob 13:4 exhorts, "Make his greatness known there, and exalt him in the presence of all the living, because he is our Lord and God; he is our Father forever." 4Q418 frag. 81, 2–8 argues that because Israel is God's firstborn, given an inheritance, they are to love and obey God. Jub. 1:24–25 takes up the sonship language of 2 Sam 7:14 but extends it to all Israel, arguing that after God enables them to obey, they will be his sons.²⁹ Finally, in several places Josephus depicts God as the Father of all humanity who expects obedience from his sons (A.J. 1.20; 4.262).³⁰

In early Christian literature, the Synoptic Gospels depict Jesus as a submissive son who says, "Father . . . not my will, but yours be done" (Matt 26:39, 42 // Mark 14:36 // Luke 22:41–42). And in a recent monograph, Brandon Crowe has demonstrated how Matthew uses Deuteronomy to depict Jesus as God's obedient son.³¹ But as we might expect, it is in John where Jesus is most extensively depicted as a son who honors and shows devotion to his Father: Jesus defends his Father's interests (John 2:16), does the will of his Father (John 5:20, 8:28–29, 14:31, 15:10, 17:4–5), honors his Father (John 8:49), acknowledges his Father's superior status (John 14:28), and acts so that his Father may be glorified (John 14:13).

The Synoptic Gospels likewise depict Jesus's followers being admonished to depend on their Father in heaven and ask him to supply their needs (Matt 7:7–11). God as Father demands exclusive devotion: according to Matt 23:9, they are not to call others "Father," because they have a Father in heaven. And Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in an attitude of submission to God as Father: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, . . . your will be done" (Matt 6:9–10). There are also a number of texts in which Jesus's followers are enjoined to obey and love God their

27. See Karl William Weyde (*Prophecy and Teaching: Prophetic Authority, Form Problems, and the Use of Traditions in the Book of Malachi*, BZAW 288 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000], 114–18), who sees wisdom traditions behind this disputation.

28. On father-son imagery in Deuteronomy 32, see Böckler, *Gott als Vater*, 291–99; J. Luyten, "Primeval and Eschatological Overtones in the Song of Moses (Dt 32,1–43)," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, ed. N. Lohfink, BETL 68 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 341–47, esp. 343.

29. See Jacques van Ruiten, "Divine Sonship in the Book of Jubilees," in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 85–88.

30. Note in particular Josephus, A.J. 4.262, where God's negative response to those who dishonor their parents is grounded in the fact that he is Father of all. On God as Father in Josephus, see Mladen Popović, "God the Father in Flavius Josephus," in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 182–85.

31. Crowe, *Obedient Son*, 158–66. On Matthew's use of Deuteronomy, see in particular the story of Jesus in the wilderness: Matt 4:1–2 (// Deut 8:2), 4:4 (// Deut 8:3), 4:7 (// Deut 6:16), 4:10 (// Deut 6:13). See also Jesus's words in Matt 12:39 (// Deut 32:5, 20).

Father because they are sons (Heb 12:5–13; 1 Pet 1:14–17; 1 John 2:15–16, 3:9–10, 5:1).³² In addition to these, both Rom 8:13–17 and Gal 4:6, 9 argue that because Jesus’s followers have been adopted as sons, they owe God obedience. Phil 2:11–15—which describes God as Father and the recipients of the letter as “children of God”—likewise argues that obedience is owed to God.³³ Significantly, it does so by alluding to Deut 32:5–6, a text that makes heavy use of the divine father-son metaphor.³⁴

2.3. *A Father Experiences Delight Because of His Son*

The third benefit that God enjoys by virtue of being a father is the experience of delight in his son. One kind of delight is parental affection per se. For example, in Jer 31:20, God as Father delights in Israel as his son, a delight that tempers his punishment.³⁵ Similarly, Prov 3:12 and Heb 12:5–11 compare God’s discipline to that of a loving father who delights in his son. Here the Father’s delight is the motivation for the discipline. In Hodayot (1QH^a XVII, 35–36), we see the sentiment that God is a “Father to all the sons of your truth” and that he “rejoice[s] over them like a woman who has compassion on her child.”³⁶ However, there are other kinds of paternal delight, such as the pride and delight that a father feels at seeing himself in his son or at seeing what his son has become and has accomplished.³⁷

While God clearly delights in the Davidic king (1 Kgs 10:9, Ps 18:20; cf. Psalm 21), these texts do not use father-son imagery and do not depict God’s delight as a consequence of what the king has achieved or become. Likewise, while God as Father does delight in Israel as son (e.g., Jer 31:20), there do not seem to be statements that link this delight with Israel’s accomplishments.³⁸ Conversely, in his

32. See also Jan Gabriël van der Watt, “Ethics Alive in Imagery,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. J. Frey, J. G. van der Watt, and R. Zimmermann, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 421–28.

33. See in particular Reinhard Feldmeier, “Kyrios Christos und Gottvater: Christi Herrschaft und Gottes Vaterschaft im Philipperhymnus,” in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 255–75.

34. Compare Phil 2:15 (τέκνα θεοῦ ἄνωμα μέσον γενεᾶς σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης) to Deut 32:5 LXX (οὐκ αὐτῷ τέκνα [= MT בְּנִים] μωμητὰ γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη).

35. See also Hos 11:8.

36. See Lutz Doering, “God as Father in the Texts from Qumran,” in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 122–25.

37. There are a variety of ancient texts that speak of a father’s delight in his son and relate it to these two notions of formation and imitation or resemblance. For ancient Israelite statements about the delight that a father feels at a son’s moral formation, see Prov 3:12; 10:1; 15:20; 23:15, 24–25; 27:11; 28:7; 29:17. For a later Jewish text, see Sir 30:1–6, which comments on both the delight a father experiences at an educated and disciplined son (the envy of others!) and a father’s feeling that he can die happy because he has left behind a son who resembles him. For a father’s delight at a son’s beneficial actions, see Seneca, *Ben.* 3.32–38. For the Roman belief that sons should resemble their fathers, see Cicero, *Fin.* 3.8; and Catullus, poem 61.214–18, in Peter Green, ed., *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 123.

38. Ps 103:13 could be taken as an expression of God’s delight in moral formation: “Just as a father shows compassion to sons, so God shows compassion (חַסָּד) to those who fear him.”

treatise *On the Confusion of Tongues*, Philo ties moral formation to Israel's status as God's son, though he does not here expound on what God as Father feels at this (*Conf.* 145).³⁹ However, in Sir 4:10, we find the exhortation to "be like a father to orphans and like a husband to their mother; then you will be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than your mother does."⁴⁰ Here God as Father takes delight in his sons, who imitate his fatherly qualities to the needy.

In early Christian texts, God is depicted as a father who feels delight at the role Jesus has taken up. At Jesus's baptism, a heavenly voice endorses Jesus with the comment "You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased [εὐδόκησα]" (Mark 1:11 // Matt 3:17 // Luke 3:22 // 2 Pet 1:17; cf. Matt 17:5).⁴¹ In John 8:28–29, Jesus states that he "speaks as the Father instructs" and does "what is pleasing [τὰ ἀρεστὰ] to him."⁴²

Similarly, there are texts in which Jesus's followers are depicted as sons of a father who is pleased at what they do. In Phil 2:11–15, God is a father who enables his "children" to work "for his good pleasure (ὕπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας)." In Col 1:10–12, the recipients of the letter are to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing (εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκειαν), . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for the portion of the inheritance of the saints in light." In 1 John, the "children" of the "Father" are those who practice righteousness, keep God's commands, and love one another (3:1, 10; 4:7; 5:1–3); these things are "pleasing (ἀρεστὰ) in [God's] sight" (3:22).

This language of the Father's delight could be used to shape both individual and group identity. For example, in Jesus's parable of the prodigal son, the father responds with an extravagant display of delight (Luke 15:20, 22–24) at his son's return, an echo of the preceding statement that there is "joy in heaven" (v. 7) over a sinner who repents. Here, the focus is on the vertical relationship between God as welcoming Father and the individual repentant sinner. In contrast, Paul argues in 2 Cor 6:14–18 that God "welcomes" (εἰσδέχομαι) and stands in a father-son and father-daughter relationship with believers who separate themselves from unbelievers.⁴³ This argument is expressed in a series of rhetorical questions that use relational terms (e.g., μετοχή, "sharing"; κοινωνία, "partnership"; συμφώνησις,

39. Noting texts that describe God as Israel's father (Deut 14:1; 32:6, 18), Philo states that "they who live in the knowledge of the One are rightly called 'Sons of God.' . . . Indeed with those whose soul is thus disposed it follows that they hold moral beauty to be the only good" (*Conf.* 145 [Colson and Whitaker]).

40. In place of "you will be like a son of the Most High," the Hebrew text of Ben Sira 4:10 reads, "and God will call you a son."

41. The endorsement is a conflation of Ps 2:7 (describing the Davidic king as son) and Isa 42:1 (describing the servant of YHWH, empowered by his Spirit as his agent of justice).

42. On reciprocal love between God as Father, Jesus as son, and Jesus's followers as sons in the Gospel of John, see Watt, *Family of the King*, 304–17.

43. See also Felix Albrecht, "Dominus Deus, Pater Omnipotens: Die göttlichen Verheißungen von 2Kor 6:16–18," in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 277–92.

“harmony”; συγκατάθεσις, “agreement”) and culminates in the claim that “we are the temple of the living God.”⁴⁴ The delight that God as Father has in his children is the consequence of how they live out their identity in distinction from others. Unlike the parable of the prodigal son, this argument focuses not only on vertical but also horizontal relationships and reflects an attempt by one group to define itself in contrast to another group.⁴⁵

But there are also texts that highlight the resemblance of sons to their divine Father, and in these, God as Father is pleased at seeing something of himself in his sons. In Eph 5:1, Paul enjoins his audience to “be imitators of God, as beloved children.” In Matt 5:43–48 (// Luke 6:32–35), Jesus exhorts his listeners to love not only their friends but also their enemies. In doing so, they imitate God, who shows kindness to both righteous and unrighteous—and they become “children of [their] Father in heaven.”⁴⁶ It is not surprising that *imitatio Dei* is linked to sonship. After all, the idiom “son of X” is used for moral resemblance or alignment, as we see in the expressions “son of Belial” (Judg 19:22; 1 Sam 2:12, 25:17; 4Q174 1 I, 8; 4Q286 7 II, 6), “sons of light/sons of darkness” (1Q33 I, 1), “son of gehenna” (Matt 23:15), and “son of the devil” (Acts 13:10; cf. 1 John 3:10). As we would say, “Like father, like son.”

2.4. God as Father Gives and Constitutes an Inheritance—but Also Enjoys a Heritage

The fourth benefit that God enjoys as Father is related to the concepts of inheritance and heritage. Just as it was considered proper for fathers to pass on an inheritance to sons, so God as the metaphorical Father is often described as giving an inheritance (נחלה) to Israel, his metaphorical son.⁴⁷ This inheritance was typically identified as the land (e.g., Deut 4:21, 15:4; 1 Kgs 8:36; Ezek 36:12; Pss 78:55, 135:12).⁴⁸ For example, in Jer 3:19, God is described as purposing to make Israel his sons and give them a beautiful land as an inheritance. Likewise, in Ps 2:7–8, God as Father was understood to give “the nations” and “the ends of the earth” as an inheritance to his son the Davidic king. The idea of something valuable that fathers pass on to their sons could be metaphorically extended to other things.⁴⁹ Even God himself could be depicted as the inheritance of his people.⁵⁰

44. The argument in 2 Cor 6:16–18 is supported by a series of conflated allusions: Lev 26:11–12 + Ezek 37:27 + Isa 52:11 + 2 Sam 7:14 + Isa 43:6.

45. See also Phil 2:15, which distinguishes “children of God” from a “crooked and perverse generation.”

46. Note the strong parallels to Sir 4:10, cited above.

47. On sons receiving an inheritance, see Prov 13:22; 19:14. On God as giver of an inheritance, see Thompson, *Promise of the Father*, 116–32.

48. The begetting of sons could also be understood as an inheritance given by God. See Ps 127:3.

49. Other things that Israel inherits from God include protection and vindication (Isa 54:17), “the lot of the holy ones” (1QS XI, 7–8), and eternal life (4Q418 69 II, 12–14).

50. See Num 18:20–21; Deut 18:1–2; Josh 13:33; Ezek 44:28; 4Q418 frag. 81, 3. In Ps 16:5–6, the speaking voice uses a variety of images (יהוה מנת חלקי ובוסי אתה תומיך נדלי) to depict God both as his inheritance and as the one who guarantees his inheritance.

But humans also want to leave a legacy and be remembered, and thus it is natural for fathers to feel that, in some sense, they live on in their sons.⁵¹ While God is not mortal, he is nevertheless widely described as the one who possesses his people as a heritage.⁵² For example, Ps 33:12 states, “Fortunate is the nation whose God is YHWH, the people whom he chose for his heritage.” And in Deut 32:9 (cf. vv. 5–6, 18) and Isa 63:16–17, God is depicted as both the Father of Israel and as the one who possesses Israel as a heritage.⁵³ This is also the case in early Christian writings: in Eph 1:5, 11, 14, Jesus’s followers are said to be adopted as sons and given an inheritance, while in v. 18 they themselves are said to be God’s inheritance.⁵⁴ Thus God as Father is the giver of an inheritance, the object of Israel’s inheritance, and the beneficiary of a heritage.

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, father-son language entails a reciprocal relationship that includes benefits for both parties. It appears from the evidence surveyed above that the language for benefits enjoyed by actual fathers and sons was used to depict the relationship between God and his metaphorical son(s). The entities designated as “son of God” enjoy love, inheritance, and reward from God as Father. God as Father enjoys the extension of his influence, honor and devotion, delight, and a heritage by virtue of having a son. But what are the rhetorical gains of speaking about the benefits that accrue to God?

One obvious gain would be the endorsement of the entity referred to as the son. An example of this kind can be found in 2 Pet 1:17, where the reciprocal benefits (honor and glory for Jesus as Son, pleasure for God as Father) are explicitly noted and are mentioned in context (vv. 16–19) as an endorsement of the truth and authority of the gospel tradition. A similar argument can be found in the Gospel of John, where the depiction of Jesus as the Father’s agent constitutes an endorsement of Jesus (John 1:34; 5:19–20, 36; 10:37–38; 20:30–31).

A second rhetorical gain would be the creation of categories for facilitating the conceptualization of divine identity and agency. When Philo and the author of

51. Note ancient Israelite language about a father’s name “not being blotted out” or “being kept in remembrance” through the existence of a son (Num 27:4, Deut 25:6, 2 Sam 18:18; cf. Isa 14:21, Ps 109:13–15). Sir 30:4 speaks of a father “leaving one like himself” after his death. The use of filiation and patronymics in ancient naming conventions suggests the idea that one’s son could be seen as a legacy.

52. See E. Lipiński, “גִּזְרֵי, גִּזְרֵי,” *TDOT* 9:319–35, esp. 331; and G. Wanke, “גִּזְרֵי,” *TLOT* 2:731–34 (esp. 733). Note that the land is also referred to as God’s inheritance in, e.g., Exod 15:7; Pss 68:10–11, 79:1.

53. Also see, e.g., Deut 4:20; 9:26, 29; 32:9; Mic 7:18; Ps 78:71; Jub. 1:21; Pss. Sol. 14:5.

54. “That you may know . . . what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the holy ones” (εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι . . . τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις; Eph 1:18). See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 59–60. See also Col 1:12; 1 Pet 1:3–4.

the Gospel of John link agency and sonship, they are attempting to simultaneously account for divine transcendence and immanence (so Philo), or for divine unity and individuality (so John, with respect to the relationship between the Father and Jesus).⁵⁵ For Philo, it is necessary to speak of the firstborn Logos as the Father's agent in order to speak of God's creative activity. For the author of the Gospel of John, it is necessary to speak of Jesus as the Son in order to describe his identity and mission in relation to God. Note that while in Philo, the Logos is depicted as the agent of creation by virtue of being God's son, the same is not true in the Gospel of John. In John, Jesus is introduced as the divine Word of God who creates (John 1:1–3) *before* he is introduced as "Son" (John 1:18, 34). Jesus's agency as Son does not lie in his role as creator but in his role as one who brings life.

But the majority of the examples listed above are employed in service of shaping *human* identity. The use of divine father-son language shapes and reflects both one's identity vertically with respect to God and one's identity horizontally as a member of a group distinct from other groups.⁵⁶ The use of this language defines one's origin, relational attachments, behavioral expectations, penalties for failure to abide by such expectations, and mechanisms to repair and strengthen relational bonds.

While there are, of course, many ways in which individual and group identities are shaped, focusing on the reciprocal benefits entailed by the divine father-son relationship yields unique possibilities. Speaking of one's agency on behalf of the Father, of the Father's delight, and of one's inheritance from (and in) the Father strengthens relational bonds.⁵⁷ As Wayne Meeks has argued, to speak of oneself in relation to a heavenly Son who came from and returned to his Father is to shape

55. On this aspect of Philo, see Peter Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 73–78; and Roberto Radice, "Philo's Theology and Theory of Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. A. Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124–45, esp. 136–38. On this aspect of the Gospel of John, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 373–74; and McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology*, 126.

56. As Constantine Sedikides and Marilynn B. Brewer note, "Persons seek to achieve self-definition and self-interpretation (i.e., identity) in three fundamental ways: (a) in terms of their unique traits, (b) in terms of dyadic relationships, and (c) in terms of group membership" ("Individual Self, Relational Self, and Collective Self: Partners, Opponents, or Strangers?," in *Individual Self, Relational Self, and Collective Self*, ed. C. Sedikides and M. B. Brewer (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 1. On the role of kinship language in ancient Israelite and early Jewish texts for shaping identity, see Mengestu, *God as Father*, 91–158; in Pauline literature, see Mengestu, *God as Father*, 159–203; and in Johannine literature, see van der Watt, *Family of the King*, 264–96, 304–20, 436–37. On the role of self-designations in shaping group identity, see Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. 5–13. For the application of social identity theory to early Christian texts, see the essays in J. Brian Tucker and Coleman A. Baker, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2014).

57. On the depiction of relational bonds (through the language of loving, knowing, honoring, caring, etc.) in the Gospel of John, see Watt, *Family of the King*, 304–17, 323–59.

community identity in profound ways.⁵⁸ And we know that the use of the father-son relational metaphor did have an effect on community identity in ancient Israel, because we can observe it being aimed back at God in the mouths of the people as an appeal in the book of Isaiah (63:15–16, 64:7–8).⁵⁹

It should come as no surprise to note that most of the occurrences of this metaphor in ancient Israelite texts appear in Deuteronomy and prophetic literature—all texts that deal with the status of Israel's relationship with God. When prophetic literature depicts Israel as God's rebellious son, the use of the metaphor heightens the force of prophetic accusations by emphasizing the incongruity of filial disobedience against the backdrop of paternal care and upbringing.⁶⁰ Such language, charged as it is with disappointment and heartbreak, also provides the basis for God's claim on Israel's affections by grounding the accusations in the locus of a paternal authority figure who has a shared history with the son.⁶¹ Finally, the metaphor encapsulates the solution to the problem of filial rebellion by emphasizing the enduring bond between Father and son. This holds out the promise of an end to punishment and a welcome for the repentant son—a motif that is equally prominent in both Jeremiah's appeals to repent (Jer 3:14, 22) and in Luke's parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–24).⁶²

58. For how the language of the heavenly son shaped community identity, see Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72, esp. 69–70: "In telling the story of the Son of Man who came down from heaven and then re-ascended after choosing a few of his own out of the world, the book defines and vindicates the existence of the community that evidently sees itself as unique, alien from its world, under attack, misunderstood, but living in unity with Christ and through him with God."

59. See Darr, *Isaiah's Vision*, 76–79.

60. Darr notes how the sonship metaphor changes from what we see in, e.g., Isaiah 1 to what we see in Isa 57:3–4 (*Isaiah's Vision*, 69–70). Here, the addressees of the accusations are no longer considered God's rebellious sons; they are so wicked that they *cannot* be conceived of as God's sons and are instead called "sons of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer and a whore, . . . children of rebellion, offspring of deceit."

61. Cf. Amos 3:2: "You only have I known among all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities."

62. See Hermann Spieckermann, "The 'Father' of the Old Testament and Its History," in *The Divine Father: Religious and Philosophical Concepts of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity*, ed. F. Albrecht and R. Feldmeier (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 73–84, esp. 79–83 (and his comments on how the metaphor of God as father combines the divine attributes of discipline and mercy).