

*From Messiah to Preexistent Son.* By Aquila H. I. Lee. *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/192.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

The present study is a slightly revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation, completed at the University of Aberdeen under the supervision of I. Howard Marshall. I will provide a reasonably detailed summary of the contents of each chapter and then analyze the significance of Lee's work for scholarship on the subject.

In the first chapter, the author discusses the development and origin of Jesus' pre-existence. He includes brief surveys of Paul's wisdom Christology, John's pre-existence Christology, divine agent or divine identity Christology, angelic/angelomorphic Christology, and first-century Jewish monotheism. He also discusses Jesus' self-consciousness of divine sonship and early Christian exegesis of the Old Testament.

Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to a study of Jewish divine presence/action traditions. Chapter 2 deals with personified divine attributes such as "wisdom of God" (Job 28; Prov 1–9; Sirach; Baruch; Wisdom of Solomon; 1 Enoch 42; and Philo), "Word of God" (Old Testament; Wisdom of Solomon; Philo; Memra), and "name of God" (Old Testament, esp. Deuteronomy). Chapter 3 treats exalted angels and the pre-existent Messiah. The former subject includes the Old Testament understanding of angels, the angel of the Lord, and principal angels, the latter Septuagint passages such as Is 9:5; Am 4:13; Lam 4:20; Num 24:17; Jer 23:5; Zech 3:9; 6:12; Ps 72; and 110:3.

Chapters 4 and 5 ponder the foundation for pre-existent Son Christology, discussing Jesus' self-consciousness of divine sonship and of his divine mission. Topics include Jesus' references to God as his Father, his self-revelatory statements (e.g., Matt 11:25–27/Luke 10:21–22; Mark 13:32; Matt 16:17; Mark 12:1–12; and Mark 1:9–11), and the "I have come" and "I was sent" sayings (e.g., Mark 2:17; Mark 10:45/Matt 20:28; Luke 19:10; Luke 12:49–51/Matt 10:34; Matt 15:24; Mark 9:37/Matt 10:40; Luke 9:48).

This is followed by a discussion of the catalyst for pre-existent Son Christology in Chapters 6 and 7, focusing on the early Christian exegesis of Ps 110:1 and 2:7, respectively, and of the essence of pre-existent Son Christology, treating wisdom Christology in Paul (1 Cor 1:24, 30; 8:6; 10:4; Rom 10:5–8; 11:33–36).

The author's thesis is that the early Christian understanding of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God is the result of early Christian exegesis of Ps 110:1 and Ps 2:7 in the light of Jesus' self-understanding of himself as the Son of God, rather than Second Temple conceptions of angelic intermediaries and personified divine attributes. He shows that Jewish wisdom traditions never issued in personified divine attributes taking on divine hypostases separate from God. Rather, these enabled Second Temple Jews to speak of God's activity in the world without sacrificing the notion of his transcendence.

The author also shows that neither Jewish angelology nor the pre-existent Messiah ever exerted sufficient influence on early Christology to serve as ready-made categories for viewing Jesus as a divine and pre-existent being alongside God.

With regard to Jesus' consciousness, Lee concludes that Jesus indeed viewed himself as sustaining a unique personal relationship to God as his Father. Jesus was the Messiah because he was the Son of God, and his consciousness of divine sonship played a very significant role in the development of early Christology. In fact, Jesus' self-understanding is foundational for the early Christian conception of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God. The parable of the wicked tenants makes clear that Jesus was God's Son sent into this world from above.

Jesus' consciousness of divine sonship, in turn, laid the foundation for the early church's messianic exegesis of Ps 110:1 and 2:7 with reference to Jesus (rooted, again, in Jesus' own usage). Through its messianic exegesis of these two Psalms passages, so Lee, the early church came to confirm what it was already beginning to believe on the basis of Jesus' own self-consciousness and his resurrection. In Ps 110:1, the early church found biblical grounding for Jesus' resurrection as his exaltation to God's right hand. Importantly, the early Christians did not view Jesus' resurrection as conferring on him a new status but as essentially confirming the status he already possessed.

The early Christian understanding of Jesus as Lord finds an important point of departure in Jesus' treatment of Ps 110:1 with reference to himself as David's Lord who stands and exists before David. This implies Jesus' claim of pre-existence, which is also confirmed by his statement before the Sanhedrin in Mark 14:62. Psalm 2:7, likewise, was understood by the early church as a prophecy concerning Jesus' divine sonship which was decisively fulfilled at his resurrection and exaltation. Jesus did not become God's Son at the resurrection; he already was God's Son prior to the crucifixion, and his resurrection and exaltation merely confirmed his status as Son of God which he already possessed.

Hence the roots of pre-existent Son Christology are found in Jesus' self-consciousness of divine sonship and mission and the subsequent early messianic Christian exegesis of Ps 110:1 and 2:7 with reference to Jesus' status as the exalted Son of God. The impact of the resurrection and the concept of Jesus being literally enthroned at God's right hand led the early church to see Jesus as the pre-existent Lord and Son of God.

Lee's study is rounded out by his study of Paul's references to Jesus as wisdom. Against much recent scholarship on the subject, Lee concludes that wisdom Christology is not clearly present in Paul's writings. Rather, the early Christian understanding of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God, aided by its messianic exegesis of certain psalms, led it to express this conviction by using Jewish wisdom traditions. Hence the church expressed the implications of its conviction that Jesus was the Son of God, namely that Jesus was active in creation and co-eternal with God the Father, in terms provided by Jewish traditions surrounding wisdom. Thus Jewish wisdom tradition was not the source for the church's understanding of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God but rather one way of expressing the implications of this conviction at which the church had arrived on different grounds (i.e., Jesus' divine self-consciousness and its messianic exegesis of Ps 110:1 and 2:7).

The author concludes by claiming that he has provided a more cogent explanation of the origin and development of the early Christian understanding of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God than much of recent scholarship on the subject which emphasizes the influences of Jewish angelology on early Christology.

Has the author proven his point? If so, this would be of momentous, almost revolutionary, significance in scholarship on the subject. I believe Lee has in fact delivered what he promised and find myself in hearty agreement with his thesis, without major reservations. I applaud this courageous, original, and groundbreaking study and hope that it will be widely influential in correcting what I have long considered to be a wrongheaded, anachronistic way of dealing with the evidence.

For instance, in his discussion of John's prologue, in fact, the entire Gospel of John, Ben Witherington strongly emphasizes what he calls "John's Wisdom" (the title of his commentary on the Gospel of John). If Lee is correct, however, and I believe there is strong evidence that he is, John did not derive his Christology from Jewish wisdom traditions, but rather chose to

contextualize his understanding of Jesus' pre-existence and divine sonship by couching some of the implications in Jewish wisdom categories, which is an entirely different procedure altogether.

Lee's work also necessitates taking another closer look at the work of Larry Hurtado, who has written extensively on the subject, including *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Eerdmans, 2003).

Overall, Lee's contribution may be compared to that of Seyoon Kim's *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* on Pauline studies. If Lee's work fails to exert the influence it deserves, I believe it is not because his thesis lacks compelling force, but because paradigm shifts in scholarship such as the one necessitated by Lee's work (if accurate) are not always a function of superior evidence but can be expected to be resisted by those who have invested a significant amount of scholarly capital in the currently-reigning paradigm. In any case, this is highly recommended reading on an extremely important subject. What could be more important than the grounds for the church's belief in Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God?

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