



The Eternal Sonship of the Messiah

The second point in Ariel Ministries' doctrinal statement regards the Godhead: "We believe that there is one God eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit. All three possess equally all the same attributes, nature, perfections, and characteristics of personality." Included in this statement is the doctrine of eternal Sonship.



This doctrine asserts that the Son of God has eternally existed as the second Person of the triune Godhead. In other words, within the Godhead, there has always been a Father-Son relationship. The Messiah did not adopt the title or function of Sonship upon His incarnation. Rather, His Sonship is the essence of the second Person of the Godhead. In short, the Messiah is and has always been the Son of God.

Even among more conservative teachers and scholars, there are some who would disagree with this statement. A very small minority claims that the Son ceased to be God at the incarnation. Others believe that the second Person was always part of the Trinity but that His Sonship only occurred with His incarnation. This article refutes both points.

Did Yeshua Cease to Be God?

In Philippians 2:5-8, the apostle Paul made the following statement about the Messiah:

⁵Have this mind in you, which was also in Messiah Yeshua: ⁶who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; ⁸and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.

The Greek word for “emptied himself,” *ekenosen*, is the basis of the theological term *kenosis*. When the Son became incarnate, some kind of “emptying” took place. Certain theologians have taught that Yeshua emptied Himself of His divine nature. When He became a man, the Messiah ceased to be God. The answer to this concept can be kept rather short: If it were possible for someone to give up being God, then that person was not God to begin with.

What *kenosis* really means is that somehow, in some way, humanity was added to His deity. This adjustment took place without the Son of God giving up any of His deity and, at the same time, without reducing any of His humanity. He did not divest Himself of His deity. Rather, He laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes by which the form of God expresses itself. Instead,

He took on and assumed human form, flesh, and nature by means of the incarnation and the virgin conception and birth. The self-emptying brought about a change of status. The Messiah exchanged His position of God to the position of a servant. In the exchange, He did not divest Himself of or give up His deity. In His human form, He retained all the attributes of His deity, but He never manifested His deity apart from the will of the Father. Thus, even in His earthly sojourn as a man, He was still God. With the incarnation, He became the God-Man. He now had two natures that existed side by side.

Incarnational Sonship

Many who teach “incarnational Sonship” base their doctrinal position on the following assumption: The passages of the Hebrew Bible that relate to the Sonship of the Messiah all deal with the Son of God from the time of His incarnation and not before. In other words, while the second Person of the Godhead is eternal, He took on the role of Son at a certain point in time. Those who believe in this doctrine use several passages to prove their point, one of which is Psalm 2. The anointed King is pictured as already being on His throne when the world rulers rebel against Him. The claim is made that His Sonship relates to the prophetic future (the Messianic kingdom) and not to eternity past. Verse 7 is interpreted as speaking of a moment when the Son is *begotten* or “fathered” by God the Father. The



connection between YHWH and this Son is recognized, but it is interpreted as being in the prophetic future. YHWH declares the Son as *begotten* by Himself in the sense of passing on the title of Son to the Messiah, who is the physical Son of David.

Another passage from the Hebrew Bible that is used in support of incarnational Sonship is Isaiah 9:6-7. Upon His birth, the Son will receive certain names, and the government will be placed upon His shoulder. The emphasis is again on the prophetic future. The Sonship is given to the Messiah at the incarnation.

In the New Testament, the primary verse that is used for the position of incarnational Sonship is Hebrews 1:5: *For unto which of the angels said*

he at any time, You are my Son, This day have I begotten you? and again, I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son? In the eyes of those who believe in incarnational Sonship, this verse describes a specific point in time when the Father begets the Son: “*This day have I begotten you*”; “*I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.*” The notion is that the term “begetting” typically refers to the origin of a person. In addition, sons are typically subordinate to their fathers. Given these concepts, the question is raised as to how an eternal Father-Son relationship could possibly be compatible with perfect equality and eternity among the Persons of the Trinity. Those who believe in incarnational Sonship conclude

that the Messiah voluntarily submitted Himself to the Father at His incarnation. As a cross-reference, they propose John 5:19: *Yeshua therefore answered and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father doing: for what things soever he does, these the Son also does in like manner.* Another cross-reference is the above-cited Philippians 2:5-8.

It must be stated that adherents to the incarnational Sonship do not deny the absolute deity and eternity of the second Person of the Trinity. They acknowledge that Yeshua is eternally God, but they believe that He assumed the role and responsibilities of Son upon His incarnation. They believe that by accepting the title “Son of God,” Yeshua willingly submitted Himself to the authority of the Father.

Response to the Incarnational Sonship from John 5:17-18

In the Scriptures, the title “Son of God” always refers to the Messiah’s inherent deity and total equality with God and never to His deliberate subordination. The religious leaders of first-century Israel understood this, as their response in John 5:17-18 shows:

¹⁷But Yeshua answered them, My Father works even until now, and I work. ¹⁸For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath, but also called God





his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Yeshua clearly proclaimed equality with God. To the first-century Jewish audience, this was so offensive that they sought to kill Him.

The doctrine of incarnational Sonship bases its premises on the assumption that a son is less than his father. Therefore, if Yeshua is the Son of God, He must be less than God. Yet that was not how the Jewish audience understood it. According to their reckoning, the firstborn son is equal to the father. So, this verse, like many others, has to be viewed against the backdrop of the Jewish mindset of the day. What did the people think Yeshua meant when they heard Him speak? When He said, “My Father works . . . , I work,” they clearly understood that He was claiming to be equal with God—hence their strong reaction. There was no ambiguity in the Jewish mind. Consequently, the religious leaders believed that Yeshua had committed blasphemy because He proclaimed to be of the same essence as God.

Yeshua defended Himself against these accusations by making four points. First, He pointed out that He was doing the works of the Father as His equal (Jn. 5:19-21). Their relationship is characterized by this equality, and what one does, the other does (Jn. 5:19a). The works of the Father are also the works of the Son (Jn. 5:19b). If it is the work of the Son, it is also the work of the Father. There is also equal love between the Father and the Son; both give rise to equally mighty works (Jn. 5:20). Furthermore, there is equal power, and the Son shares the Father’s power to

give life (Jn. 5:21). The giving of life was a divine ability (II Kgs. 4:32-35; 13:20-21); therefore, Yeshua must be divine. Because He does the work of the Father—works that only God can do—it means that He must be God.

Yeshua’s second defense was that He will judge all men (Jn. 5:22-23), for the Father *has given all judgment unto the Son* (Jn. 5:22). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the final judgment was the prerogative of God (Ps. 9:7, 8). If the Son is going to do the judging, He must also be God. This also means He has equal honor with the Father.

Yeshua’s third defense was that He has the power to provide eternal life (Jn. 5:24). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the one who had the ability to provide eternal life was God (Dan. 12:1-3). Therefore, if the Son has the power to provide eternal life, then He, too, must be God.

Yeshua’s fourth defense was that He would bring about the resurrection of the dead (Jn. 5:25-29). In the Hebrew Scriptures, only God brought about the resurrection of the dead (Is. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; Hos. 13:14). If the Son is raising the dead, it means He must also be God.

Therefore, Yeshua is the God-Man, and both facets are stated here in the form of titles. In verse 25, He is the *Son of God*, emphasizing deity; in verse 27, He is a *son of man*, emphasizing humanity.

In conclusion of the short study on John 5:17-18, if Yeshua’s Sonship signifies His divinity and absolute equality with the Father, it cannot be a title that only applies to His incarnation. In fact, the essence of what is

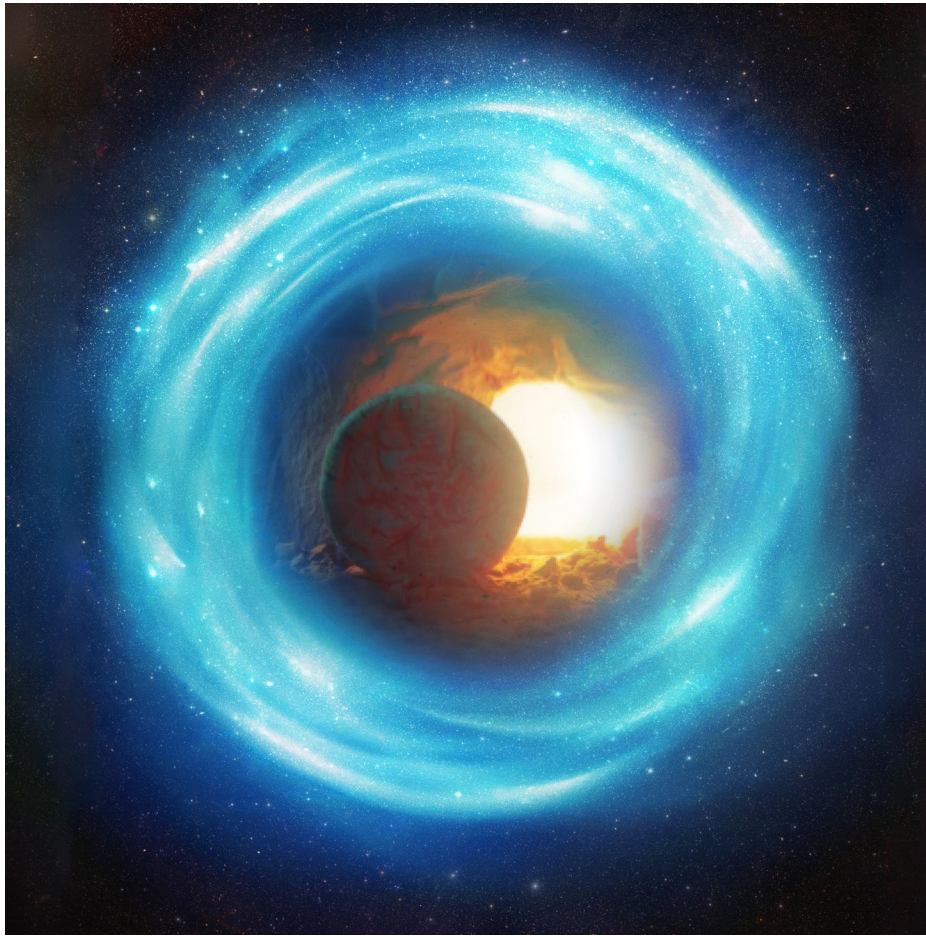
meant by “Sonship” must refer to the eternal attributes of the Messiah, not just the humanity He assumed.

The Response from John 10:22-39

In John 10:22-39, Yeshua responded to the challenge by some people over His Messiahship and in the process clearly proclaimed to be God.

According to verses 22-23, the encounter occurred during *Chanukah*, the Feast of Dedication. Yeshua was walking in a part of the Temple compound known as Solomon’s Porch. The Jewish people came to Him and charged Him with obscurity: *How long do you hold us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly* (Jn. 10:24). The charge was false because Yeshua had clearly stated more than once in the past that He was the Messiah, and they had no trouble then in understanding what He had said (Lk. 4:21; Jn. 5:10-18).

Yeshua denied the charge and reminded them that He had made His claim clear in two ways: by His words (Jn. 10:25a) and by His works (Jn. 10:25b). The real problem was not that He had been cryptic; rather, they were not His sheep and did not recognize Him (Jn. 10:26). In contrast, His sheep recognize and follow Him, so they have eternal life (Jn. 10:27-29). Finally, He said, *No one shall snatch them out of my hand . . . no one is able to snatch <them> out of the Father’s hand* (Jn. 10:28b, 29b). Then He proclaimed, *I and the Father are one* (Jn. 10:30). With these words, He proclaimed a unique, divine oneness with God the



Father, the oneness of the *Shema*: *Hear, O Yisrael, the Lord our God, the Lord is one* (Deut. 6:4). If God is one, and Yeshua is one with God, He is, therefore, God Himself.

The Jewish audience, understanding His words, *took up stones again to stone him* (Jn. 10:31). There was no doubt in their minds who He was proclaiming to be: the Messianic God-Man, who enjoyed a unique oneness with the Father.

As if to clarify further, Yeshua asked a question: *Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?* (Jn. 10:32). Their answer proves that the multitudes understood His meaning exactly: *For a good work we stone you not, but for blasphemy; and because*

that you, being a man, make yourself God (Jn. 10:33b). They understood that He proclaimed to be God Himself when He claimed oneness with the Father.

In response, Yeshua spoke in parables again (Jn. 10:34-38). He based His words upon the context of Psalm 82:6: *I said, Ye are gods, And all of you sons of the Most High*. In this verse, God addressed the judges of Israel, who were His representatives with His delegated authority. By personal direct mission, they did the works of God. As His representatives acting in His name, they were called *elohim* or “gods.” If these representatives were referred to as *elohim*, how could His claim to be the individual Son of God be blasphemous when

He had received not merely transmitted authority but also the direct and personal command to do the Father’s work? He asked them, “How could you say of me, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You blaspheme’? Is it because I said, I am the Son of God?” (Jn. 10:36). Moses was also called “god” in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Exodus 4:16, he was a god to Aaron, and in Exodus 7:1, he was a god to Pharaoh. Moses did not become a god, but he bore God’s message. If Moses, who was a man, could be as a god to Aaron and to Pharaoh, why could not Yeshua be the Son of God? He, like Moses, was God’s messenger, bringing His message. The children of Israel listened to Moses, so why should they not listen to Him? Yeshua professed to be the Messiah, and His works proved Him right, showing that He was more than just God’s representative. He was one with the Father.

The people’s response again showed that they knew who He claimed to be: *They sought again to take him: and he went forth out of their hand* (Jn. 10:39).

The contrast between John 5 and John 10 should not be missed. In John 5, the Jewish audience understood that Yeshua claimed to be equal to God. In John 10, they understood that He claimed to be God.

Response from Psalm 2, John 1, and Hebrews 1

In the Hebrew Bible, the main argument for the concept of incarnational Sonship comes from Psalm 2:7: *I will*



tell of the decree: Jehovah said unto me, You are my son; This day have I begotten you. The Hebrew term for “begotten,” *yalad*, means “to bear,” “to bring forth,” or “to beget.” The earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, rendered the term as *gennaó*, meaning “to bring forth.” This Greek term is also found in Hebrews 1:5. It comes from *genna*, meaning “descent” or “birth.” It is related to the term *monogenous* used in John 1:14: *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten [monogenous] from the Father), full of grace and truth* (cf. Jn. 1:18; 3:16, 18; Heb. 11:17). *Monogenous* combines the Greek terms *monos* (“alone” or “only”) and *genos* (“family” or “offspring”).

Against this backdrop, three terms need to be discussed in the context of Psalm 2:7, John 1:14, and Hebrew 1:5: “only,” “begotten,” and “today.”

The Expression “Only Begotten”

Regarding the term “only,” the claim is made that being called the “only begotten Son” means that the Messiah could not have eternally co-existed with God. This is an example of interpreting Jewish literature with a Gentile mindset. The term *monogenous* does not necessarily emphasize origin; it can emphasize uniqueness.

A good example is Genesis 22:2, where God told Abraham to offer up Isaac: *Take now your son, your only son.* The Hebrew term for “only,” *ya-*

chid, means “only one” or “solitary.” However, Isaac was not Abraham’s only son. He had a half-brother, Ishmael, and later, Abraham was blessed with six more sons. Therefore, in this case, the word “only” cannot mean origin. So, in what way was Isaac considered to be Abraham’s only son? In the sense of uniqueness, not of origin. Isaac was uniquely Abraham’s only son in that he alone was his father’s covenantal son.

In the case of the Messiah, He is not the only one referred to as the Son of God. Angels are called “sons of God” (e.g., Job 1:6, 38:7), Israel is called “the son of God” (e.g., Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). However, Yeshua is *uniquely* the Son of God because of His eternal preexistence. As long as the Father existed, He existed. He was in the beginning with God, and God existed for eternity past.

The Term “Begotten”

When the Scriptures state that Yeshua was *begotten*, it emphasizes His human, virgin birth. It does not say anything about His deity. However, when He is called “the only begotten,” the *monogenous*, His eternal relationship with God the Father and His uniqueness are emphasized. The term *monogenous* is specifically used to distinguish Yeshua, who is the eternal Son of God, from those who became sons by virtue of God’s creation (such as the angels, Israel, and believers). The term emphasizes Yeshua’s uniqueness as the Son of God. He had this relationship

through all of eternity. In regard to the title “Son of God,” it is used of the Messiah in three different senses in the New Testament. The first is in the nativistic sense that emphasizes the Messiah’s human nature as a product of the work of God (Lk. 1:35). Miriam conceived her child by the overshadowing work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, that *which is begotten shall be called the Son of God*. The second usage of “the Son of God” is as a Messianic title. This was one of the titles of the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible, and it is used as one of His Messianic titles in the New Testament as well (Mt. 8:29; 14:28-33; 24:36). The third way this title is used is in its Trinitarian sense, in which the Son of God is distinguished from the Father and from the Holy Spirit (Mt. 11:27; 16:16; 22:41-46; Jn. 5:18).

In summary, the three different usages of the title “Son of God” emphasize Yeshua’s virgin conception, His Messianic title, or His membership in the Trinity.

There were two particular occasions when Yeshua was declared to be the Son of God. This was not **when** He became the Son of God—He has been the Son of God for all eternity. But He was declared to be the Son of God on two occasions. The first occasion was at His baptism (Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-34). The second occasion was at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35; II Pet. 1:17).

Yeshua’s resurrection proved that He was indeed the Son of God. He was declared to be the Son of God by God the Father (Ps. 2:7), and He was proven to be the Son of God by



virtue of His resurrection (Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 1:3-4). In all eternity past, Yeshua has always been the Son of God. Thus, “begetting” refers to more than simply origin. In accordance with God’s design, each species reproduces “after its kind” (Gen. 1:11-12, 21-25). The offspring are of the same essence. The fact that a father produces a son ensures that the son has the same essence as the father. This is the meaning the Bible intends to convey when it discusses the begetting of the Messiah by the Father. The Messiah is not a created being (Jn. 1:1-3). He had no beginning and is just as timeless as God. Consequently, “begetting” has nothing to do with His origin but has everything to do with the fact that He shares the same essence as the Father.

The expression “only begotten Son” emphasizes the ultimate oneness of essence between Father and Son. In other words, the expression is not designed to suggest the concept of procreation; rather, it is meant to convey the truth about the inherent oneness shared by the members of the Trinity. Human father-son relationships are only earthly representations of an immeasurably larger reality in heaven. Within the Trinity, the one genuine Father-Son relationship exists forever. All other things are only earthly duplicates, imperfect because they are linked to our finitude yet illustrative of an essential, everlasting truth. The whole, undivided essence of God

is shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God possesses a single essence, but He resides in three Persons. The three Persons are co-equal, yet nonetheless different, and the primary distinctions are encapsulated in the properties represented by the titles “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit.” Theologians have labeled these properties as fatherhood, filiation, and spiration. Scripture makes clear that such distinctions are crucial to our understanding of the Trinity, but it also makes clear that all three

members of the Trinity have eternally coexisted. Therefore, the begetting of the Son does not refer to origin but to an eternal relationship with the Father.

The Term “Today”

The last term to consider is “today.” At first glance, Psalm 2:7 appears to employ words with temporal connotations (“*this day* I have begotten you”). However, this begetting is not





a temporal occurrence. The context of Psalm 2:7 speaks to God's eternal decree. By His very nature, God transcends time. When He says "today" or "this day," He is referring to eternity, not just the present. God includes the past and the future in his "today." Consequently, the begetting in Psalm 2:7 does not refer to a specific moment in time. So, the temporal language should not be interpreted within the earthly concept of time. The Father-Son relationship existed in eternity past just as it does in eternity future.

Response from Proverbs 30:4

The words of Agur in Proverbs 30:4 present a riddle: *Who has ascended up into heaven, and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established*

all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if you know? The riddle consists of six questions. The answers to the first four questions are obvious since only God Himself could accomplish these things. The fifth question is also easy since the name of God, YHWH, was revealed to men long before the book of Proverbs was written. It is the sixth question that is the tricky one: "What is the name of God's Son?" That God has a Son was stated twice in Psalm 2 (vv. 7, 12). Here it is stated again. What is not revealed, however, is the name of that Son—hence the teasing, "if you know." At this stage of progressive revelation, no one *could* have known the name of God's Son. It is only in the New Testament that His name is revealed as Yeshua—and no other name is given under heaven whereby you can be saved (Acts 4:12). What Proverbs 30:4 shows is that believers already knew that God has a son. The un-

known factor is the name of this Son. In the context of the doctrine of incarnational Sonship, Proverbs 30:4 makes clear reference to God's Son. Yet it cannot be claimed that the verse is merely prophetic. Normal and natural interpretation of this verse leads to the conclusion that God already has a Son, not that God will have a Son in the future. As the British theologian Charles Bridges (1794–1869) put it,

There is a Son in the Eternal Godhead; a Son, not begotten in time, but from eternity (Prov. 8:22-23); his name therefore, not as some would have it, a component of his humiliation, but the manifestation of his Godhead: co-existent with his Father in the same ineffable nature, yet personally distinct.¹

¹ Charles Bridges, *Proverbs* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968; reprint), pp. 591-592.



Ariel's
Bible Commentaries ...
*understanding Scripture from a
Messianic Jewish perspective.*

Find these and other Messianic
Jewish Bible study resources at

ariel.org

