

Delicate Issues in Mission

Part I: Explaining the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts

by Rick Brown

The Problem for Muslims

In some languages and people groups, sonship terminology is used almost exclusively for direct biological relationships, i.e., it means the same as 'offspring' in English. In Classical Arabic, for example, the counterparts for 'son' and 'father' mean biological son and biological father. These terms were not used metaphorically for other interpersonal relationships, not even for a nephew, a step-son, or an adopted son.¹ One did not normally call someone else *ibnī* "my son" as a term of endearment, because it could suggest a claim of paternity, with all that this entailed.

The Arabic usage contrasts significantly with the situation in Hebrew and Aramaic (and Akkadian), where one could address his son, grandson, nephew, son-in-law, and neighbor's son as *bni / bri* 'my son' and the female counterparts as *bittī / brati* 'my daughter'. (The plural of 'son' was gender inclusive.) The disciples of a prophet, rabbi, or craftsman could be called his "sons." The citizens of a kingdom could be called the king's "sons," and a paramount king could refer to his vice-regent or viceregal king as his "son." Speaking through the prophets in language the people could understand, God called his people his "son" and his faithful servants his "sons." He was their king and the king of kings, so when he set David over them as his viceregal king, he called David his "son," and similarly with King Solomon and a King he said would arise from their lineage. The king's appointment is described as begetting a son.²

There is a remarkable disparity between the breadth of usage of sonship terms in the Hebrew tradition and the narrowness of the usage in Classical Arabic. So it is not surprising that these Hebrew idioms were misunderstood by the Arabs in classical times, even by some Arab Christians, as referring to biological descent. The Qur'an treats this idea as blasphemy. It criticizes Christians who claim they are God's offspring (5:18), who claim that the prophets of old were God's offspring (21:26; 9:30), and who claim that Jesus was born from a sexual union between God and a woman (6:101). This claim of biological descent from God is condemned in the Qur'an as being so insulting to the majesty of God as to almost cause the heavens to burst and the earth to

Rick Brown is a Bible scholar and mission strategist. He has been involved in outreach to the Muslim world since 1977.

Seekers and believers from Muslim backgrounds regularly single out the term 'Son of God' as the biggest obstacle to reading the Gospel.

split and the mountains to collapse (19:88-92). Against this claim the Qur'an asserts that God has neither a female consort nor a child (72:3; 6:101), that he is unbegotten and does not beget others (112:3). It solemnly warns that anyone who even calls Jesus "son of God" is an infidel against whom God will fight (9:30). Thus the distorted view of divine sonship which these ancient Arab Christians held has been enshrined in the Qur'an, and from there it has been conveyed to Muslims throughout the world.

As a result, Muslims everywhere have been taught that Christians believe this blasphemous biological claim, namely that Jesus is the offspring of a sexual union between God and a woman, although only Mormons actually teach such a doctrine. Muslims have been repeatedly taught that this claim insults God so gravely that he curses and damns to hell anyone who attributes offspring to him or dares to call anyone his "son." Their teachers often present this "blasphemous" teaching as the main evidence proving that Christianity and its Bible are corrupt and should be avoided. So when Muslims hear Christians call Jesus or themselves "sons of God," they are horrified. If Muslims are given a Bible or booklet to read and accidentally read aloud the phrase 'son of God', they can become quite angry. Some of them fear that they have blasphemed God and endangered their souls. Sometimes they will throw the book down or tear it up as an act of contrition. In some cases they may attack the person who gave it to them, hoping that acts of righteous anger will gain them God's forgiveness.

When a cable television service in one country played the Jesus film on one of its channels at Easter, with 'son of God' translated literally, over a third of the clients cancelled their cable subscriptions in outrage. In fact, it is

often difficult to find Muslim voice actors who are willing to dub parts in the Jesus film which require them so say the words 'son of God'. Most Muslims are willing to say everything in the script, whether they agree with it or not, except for that phrase. They know that the Qur'an (9:30) pronounces damnation on anyone who even says that Jesus is the son (*ibn*) of God.

Not surprisingly, seekers and believers from Muslim backgrounds regularly single out the term 'Son of God' as the biggest obstacle to reading the Gospel. Some will not even touch a Bible because they fear this blasphemous term is in it. So obviously it is important to explain what the phrase means and what it does not mean. Unfortunately, explanations do not remove the nasty connotations of the phrase; they just mitigate them. Even Muslim background believers (MBBs) are reluctant to say the phrase because of its repulsive connotations. One put it this way:

You could prove to me that 'son of a bitch' was a title of great distinction in Hebrew, but I would still be unable to call Jesus "a son of a bitch" in my own language.

What this shows is that the phrase retains its negative affective meaning (i.e., its repulsive effect) in their own language, even if the semantic meaning of the original Hebrew has been explained to them.

The biological meaning of this phrase and its blasphemous connotations are so deeply entrenched in the minds of most Muslims that it is impossible simply to erase it from their minds and hearts. From a neurolinguistic perspective, we know that one cannot easily break the neural connections which encode lexical meaning and word associations. Additional connections can be added to encode new meanings when they are learned, but the use of the word in suitable

contexts will continue to activate the previous synaptic connections and meanings. If the synaptic connections were strong (i.e., deeply entrenched), then the former meaning will come to mind for a long time, even if the reader wishes to forget it. So while some Muslims are able to accept explanations of the Bible's use of divine sonship terminology to the extent that they can continue reading the Gospel, many others refuse to continue reading or listening or watching. As a result they get no opportunity to know and consider the claims of Christ. A literal translation of the term simply cuts them off from the message of salvation before they have had a chance to hear it.

Persistent meaning, however, is just part of the problem. Most Muslims are also suspicious of the explanations that Christians provide. They have grown up being taught to revere the Qur'an and that to question its veracity is apostasy. And the Qur'an declares that this phrase is a damnable insult to God. So Muslims are hesitant to believe Christian explanations of the term that conflict with the Qur'an. Some accept the sincerity of the explanation but still fear to say the phrase for fear of insulting God or scandalizing their friends. Others, however, suspect that the explanation is a trick to get them to blaspheme. There is a widespread belief that infidels try to trick Muslims into insulting God so they will be sent to hell, and some Muslims imagine duplicity in even the most unlikely places. In 1997, for example, Nike introduced a line of air-sole shoes with a fiery 'AIR' logo on the heel. Muslim firebrands claimed it was really a stylized version of the name 'Allah', designed to cause people to commit mortal sin by stepping on God's name. A similar claim was made with regard to the tire treads introduced by Yokohoma Rubber Company in 1992, namely that the tread said 'Allah'. There was no truth to these claims, but in both cases the companies were forced to change their product line and recall the products which they had already released.

So whether they believe the explanation or not, most Muslims recoil from

the phrases 'Son of God' and 'children of God'. This is the case whether the term is in reference to Jesus, prophets, angels, kings, or the saints. The phrase presents a linguistic stumbling block to them, and most of them stumble over it. It is not our fault, of course, if people stumble over the truth, but if they stumble because of our stubbornness, because we insist on using a phrase that evokes the wrong meaning and is deemed insulting to God, then it might be better if a millstone were hung around our necks and we were thrown into the depths of the sea (Luke 17:2)!

Some exegetical notes on 'Son of God'

This is not the place to rehearse the scholarly literature on the subject of divine sonship terminology. For that one can consult contemporary academic commentaries or academic Bible dictionaries.³ But the principal senses of the phrase 'son(s) of God' can be summarized as follows:

person created by God

"the son of...Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38)

See also Isa. 45:11?; Luke 1:35?; Acts 17:28; cf Deut. 32:6; Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10.

inhabitants of heaven, supernatural beings

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6)

"for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36).

See also Job 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; 89:6; ITP⁴.

God's covenant people (collectively)

"Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son" (Ex. 4:22b)

See also Ex. 4:23; Deut. 32:18; Ps. 80:15; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1.

God's covenant people (individually or plurally)

"You are the sons of the Lord

your God" (Deut. 14:1a)

"for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26).

See also Deut. 14:1; Isa. 43:6; 63:8; Jer. 3:19; ITP; John 1:12; 12:36(?); Rom. 8:14, 16, 19; 9:6, 8; Gal. 3:26; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 3:1, 2, 10; 5:2; Heb. 12:6; cf. Mark 2:5; 5:34.

disciple of God, godly person

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you

*It is not our fault,
of course, if people
stumble over the
truth, but if they
stumble because of our
stubbornness...*

will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish" (Luke 6:35).

See also the ITP literature; Mat 5:9, 44–45; Mark 15:39 (= Luke 23:47).

leaders of God's covenant people

See Ps. 82:6; Eze. 21:10; ITP literature.

God's chosen vice-regent over his people and the nations

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. 7:14, originally of Solomon).

See also 1 Chron. 17:13; Ps. 2; Ps. 89:26–27.

the Messiah: God's holy and eternal vice-regent who saves his people and rules the nations

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob

for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32).

"Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49).

See also Isa. 9:6–7 (cf. John 3:16); prophetic interpretations of 2 Sam. 7:14 (cf. Heb 1:5), Psalm 2; 89:27 (cf. Rev. 1:5); ITP literature; NT passim.

God's eternal Word incarnate as God's vice-regent, who alone reveals God to mankind

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 NRSV).

"No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18).

"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true" (1 John 5:20).

"... no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matt. 11:27)

See also Luke 10:22; John 1:1–18; 10:35–36; 17:1–8; cf. John 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:4–6; Col. 1:15, 19.

In most of the occurrences in which 'Son of God' is used for Jesus, the usage is Messianic, meaning the focus is on Jesus' role as Lord and Savior. But as Jesus progressively reveals what it means to be the Christ, this concept enlarges to divine proportions. *The Messiah is revealed to be the eternal Word and Wisdom and Image of God incarnate as Lord of all and Savior of the world.* But let's look at some key passages.

The royal and messianic 'son of God' passages in the OT are applied to Jesus in the NT. 2 Samuel 7:14 (= 1 Chronicles 17:13) is applied to the

Messiah in the ITP literature and is applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:5. Psalm 89:27 is reflected in Rev. 1:5, and Isaiah 9:6 is reflected in John 3:16 and elsewhere. The sonship verse at Psalm 2:7 is applied to the Messiah in Jewish literature and to Jesus in many NT passages, including the baptism and transfiguration.⁵ The begetting mentioned in Psalm 2:7 is quoted in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5 as having been fulfilled in the resurrection, ascension, and heavenly enthronement of Jesus. Romans 1:1–4 says much the same thing but without quoting the psalm.

There are also passages in various segments of the intertestamental literature which show that the Jews were using the term 'Son of God' for the Messiah and his "begetting" for his empowerment. Many passages in the NT reflect this as well. In the passage at Luke 1:31–33, for example, the angel Gabriel says that Jesus will be called "Son of the Most High" because he will fulfill the role of the awaited Messiah.

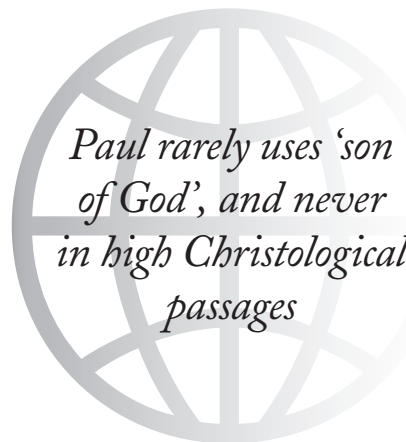
As it happens, there are also some biblical passages that demonstrate linguistically that Jesus and the Apostles used 'the Son of God' as a synonym for 'the Christ' (regardless of the meaning). The three Synoptic Gospels highlight Peter's confession of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi. Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, recorded Peter saying in full, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus agreed and then told the disciples "to tell no one that he was the Christ." From a linguistic point of view, Jesus must have intended the term 'the Christ' to include the full meaning of 'the Christ the Son of the Living God'. This establishes that Jesus and Matthew saw these as synonyms.

What about Mark and Luke? As we saw earlier, Mark and Luke translate Peter's whole confession with simply 'the Christ' or 'the Christ of God'. From the perspective of canonical exegesis, which acknowledges the divine inspiration and intertextuality of the Gospels, these expressions must all be semantically equivalent. So 'the Christ'

must have been adequate to carry the semantic content of 'Son of God'.

In Luke 4:41, Luke quotes the phrase 'Son of God' literally in a quotation but immediately paraphrases it as meaning 'the Christ'. From a linguistic perspective, this demonstrates that Luke wanted his audience to understand that the meaning of 'the Son of God' is included within the meaning of the term 'the Christ'. Again, this is enough to establish that they are synonyms.

Acts reports the early proclamation of Jesus, usually as the Christ and the Lord. Besides the quotation of Psalm



2:7, Jesus is referred to as Son of God only once, where it is paralleled by 'the Christ':

And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, "He is *the Son of God*".... proving that Jesus was *the Christ*. (Acts 9:20, 22)

This shows that proving that Jesus is the Christ is adequate to proclaim him to be the Son of God.

The title 'Son' occurs more often in John's Epistles than in the rest of the New Testament, 24 times, largely because John uses it in place of the title 'Lord', which never occurs in his Epistles. Nevertheless, he makes it clear that it is synonymous with 'the Christ':

Every one who believes that *Jesus is the Christ* is a child of God.... Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that *Jesus is the Son of God*? (1 John 5:1,5)

There are additional passages in John and the Synoptics (Matt. 16:16; Mark

14:61 par.; John 11:27; 20:31) where we find the extended title 'the Christ the Son of God'. From a linguistic perspective, both noun phrases must have the same sense in this usage, i.e., they are fairly synonymous. (The doubling serves to give linguistic prominence to the phrase, show the importance of the statement, and also to highlight multiple components of meaning.) Jesus accepted this title at his trial, and the subsequent comments show that it was understood as Messianic. "And they began to accuse him ... [of] saying that he himself is Christ a king" (Lk. 23:2), which Pilate understood to mean "King of the Jews" (Lk 23:3; Mk 15:2; Mt 27:11; Jn 18:33), as did his soldiers (Mark 15:18 and parallels). This is the charge they posted on the cross (Mark 15:26), and the chief priests themselves taunted him with it, "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32).

Paul rarely uses 'son of God', and never in high Christological passages, but he provides us with a passage that shows that he sees the term as synonymous with 'the Christ':

...the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel, ...but it came through a revelation of Jesus *Christ*. ... [God] was pleased to reveal *his Son* to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, (Galatians 1:11-16)

The paralleling of 'Son of God' with other Messianic titles underlines this point, as in John 1:49: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Over the centuries, of course, Christians have come to use both these terms with narrowed meanings different from those employed in the Scriptures, so that 'Son of God' is often treated as though it were primarily ontological or relational (depending on the tradition) and 'Christ' is treated as a mere name. In the original languages and culture, however, and in the Bible itself, both of these terms have equivalent ethical, functional, relational, and ontological components of meaning. These mean-

Worse yet, many Muslims are so frightened of this term that they refuse to read or listen to any text that asserts it.

ings could easily be explained in the introduction, notes, and glossary of a Bible or Gospel.

Explaining the meaning

So we see that the term ‘son(s) of God’ has a broad range of meanings. For most Muslims, however, this term has one meaning only, and that is God’s offspring by a sexual union. Worse yet, many Muslims are so frightened of this term that they refuse to read or listen to any text that asserts it. Thus they lose the opportunity to read the Gospel accounts of Jesus, even though the Qur’an commands them to believe in the Gospel (4:136; 3:3).

Many believers and evangelists simply avoid using the term ‘Son of God’ in their descriptions of Jesus. This avoids putting people off and thereby grants them time to study the Old Testament and build confidence in the Bible. But all Muslims have heard that Christians call Jesus the “offspring of God”, and this has been presented to them repeatedly as exhibit A in the case against Christianity and its “corruption” of the Bible.⁶ So there is a dire need to correct these misunderstandings and to invalidate the accusation in a timely manner. This can be done in communications of every sort, but by all means it should be done in the Scriptures.

It is helpful if the Gospels or the New Testament have an introductory section that explains the most vital and misunderstood key terms, as well as mentioning them in the glossary. If portions of the New Testament are recorded, then this part of the introduction can be recorded as well. It is also helpful to provide a footnote explaining ‘son(s) of God’ in most places where it occurs. It is helpful to the audience if the explanation tells them at least two things:

1. *What the term does not mean*, i.e., biological offspring of God.

2. *What the term does mean* in the context concerned.

In passages where the term is used messianically with regard to Jesus, it can be reassuring to Christian readers if a third point is added to the footnote, affirming the deity of Jesus:

3. *Who Jesus is*, i.e., God’s eternal Word (John 1:1; Rev 19:13),⁷ through Whom he created the world (John 1:3,10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2; 11:3) and who was born as a human being (John 1:14; 8:42; Col. 2:9; Phil. 2:5–7; Rev 22:13) to reveal God’s holy characteristics to mankind (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18; 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col 1:15a; Heb 1:3).

Of course, one does not need to list all of these verses; perhaps just two or three from books by the same author. This can also be discussed in the introduction or in an introductory mini-article, as in Mazhar Mallouhi’s recent commentaries on Luke and John.

It is equally important to explain the meaning of ‘Christ/Messiah’. Whereas ‘Son’ is used of Jesus quite sparingly in the New Testament, except in John’s writings, the term Christ/Messiah is used over 500 times. This is a term that is accepted by Muslims as a unique title that applies to Jesus alone, but they do not know its unique meaning. They will pick up some of the meaning as they hear or read how the term is used in the Bible (if it is translated as a title and not just as a name), but explanations are helpful as well. The glossary can list components of this term’s meaning in four domains:

- ethical (he is righteous and holy, exhibiting the moral characteristics of God),
- relational (he is close to God, beloved of God, and the way to God),
- functional (he is appointed by God to rule and save his people

- forever and to be their advocate), and
- ontological (he is pre-existent, eternal, and consubstantial with God⁸).

These are all elements of the term ‘Messiah/Christ’. They are also components of the term ‘Son of God’ in its Messianic sense. Similarly the term ‘Word of God’ needs to be explained, along with ‘Wisdom of God’ and ‘Image of God’. These are biblical terms for the second person of the Trinity prior to the incarnation, but they also have some functional components, particularly ‘Word’, since God creates and intervenes through his Word and reveals truth and wisdom through his Word.

Note on the deity of Jesus

It is worth bearing in mind that the doctrine of the deity of Jesus is not based primarily on his being called any of these titles nor on his being called “God”, although these are supporting factors. Rather it is based on what Jesus revealed about himself, supported by what the Apostles revealed about him, all of which was confirmed by the miracles which Jesus and the apostles did. Most of all it is the self-revelation of Jesus which has proven convincing to people through the ages. Jesus does unique miracles: he heals the deaf and mute, he restores sight to those born blind, he walks on water, he stills the storm, and he rises from the dead with an immortal body. These signs confirmed Jesus’ statement, “I proceeded forth and have come from God” (John 8:42 NASB; cf. 13:3; 16:28; 17:8). “For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36 NIV).⁹ Jesus further declares his status above all men and angels (Mark 13:32 = Matt. 24:36) and his position between the Father and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Thus Jesus declares his consubstantiation with God.

Of particular significance is the fact that Jesus does things that no normal God-fearing man would dare to do,

The fact that Jesus performs the functions and prerogatives of God seems to pass over the heads of many Western readers, but it is not lost on Muslim readers.

because they belong to God alone: He creates matter from nothing, he controls the forces of nature, he orders angels, he issues commandments, he reads thoughts and hearts, he judges the nations, he forgives sins, he bestows eternal life, and he condemns to hell—all on his own authority! He even accepts worship and prayer. If Jesus were not God, then he would be a blasphemer to do such things, but if he were a blasphemer he would be unable to do such miracles! “We know that God does not listen to sinners... If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9:31, 33 NIV).

The fact that Jesus performs the functions and prerogatives of God seems to pass over the heads of many Western readers, but it is not lost on Muslim readers. They are astonished to discover that Jesus reveals himself to be so much more than a prophet! **IJFM**

Editor's note: Part II of this paper will appear in the next issue of IJFM.

Endnotes

¹The frozen phrase *ibn sabil* ‘son of the road’ was used for born travelers like gypsies. In modern Arabic, *ibn al-nil* ‘son of the Nile’ is used for someone born near the Nile. But neither phrase denotes an interpersonal relationship, and both of them involve a place of biological birth.

²Ps. 2:7 (cf. Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5); Ps. 110:3 (some versions); Isa. 9:6. References substantiating the other claims are provided in the course of this article.

³See especially Jarl Fossum, ‘Son of God’, in David Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 6; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 128–137; also J. W. Drane, ‘Son of God’, in R. P. Martin & P. H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the later New Testament and its Developments* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 1997); D. R. Bauer, ‘Son of God’, in Joel Green and Scot McKnight (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992); L. W. Hurtado, ‘Son of God’, in Gerald F Hawthorne, Ralph P Martin, and Daniel

G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Fuller, Reginald, ‘Son of God’, in Paul J Achtemeier (ed.), *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985); Evans, Craig A., ‘Son of God’, in Craig A. Evans and Stanley Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Thayer, Joseph Henry, *Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Complete and Unabridged (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1889).

⁴‘TTP’ stands for the Jewish literature of the intertestamental period. This body of 660 works provides important evidence for the usage of terms like ‘Son of God’, ‘Messiah’, ‘Son of Man’, etc.

⁵Scholars agree that part of Psalm 2:7 is quoted at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, along with Isa. 42:1.

⁶There are other exhibits as well, such as the accusation that Christians claim that Mary and Jesus are gods alongside Allah, objections against the statement that Allah is Jesus, objections against Paul’s perceived antinomianism, offense at biblical passages that describe sexual misbehavior or which attribute sin to the prophets, as well as other differences of doctrine and fact between the Bible and Islamic teaching, such as the death of Jesus on the cross, his resurrection, his atonement for sin, his bestowal of salvation, and his lordship over all.

⁷There are additional Word/Wisdom identifications in Matthew, Luke, John, Hebrews, and the Epistles of Paul, John, and Peter, but the identifications are too subtle for citation in a footnote.

⁸First-century Jews had a well-defined concept of the living Word of God and various concepts of the Messiah. There is no evidence, however, that they expected the Messiah to be God’s Word incarnate, so this was not part of the meaning of ‘Messiah’ as they used it until Jesus revealed as much. Nevertheless there are Old Testament hints of this (Isa 55: 10–13) and many passages that talk as if YHWH or his “arm” would be the one to come as the Savior-King (Ps. 45:6; Isa. 24:21–23; 40:3–11; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; Eze. 34:11–17; Micah 4:6–7; Zech. 14:5, 9; Mal. 3:1; 4:5; Dan. 7:13 (LXX text)).

The NT authors affirm a messianic interpretation of these passages.

⁹For a fuller development of this theme, see Rick Brown, Presenting the Deity of Christ from the Bible, *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19(1): 20–27 (2002). See especially Richard Bauckham, *God crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1998) and also Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

The article in Christianity Today in its first part explains a major issue about Bible translation in Muslim contexts. Muslims have been taught that the expression "Son of God" for Jesus is blasphemous, because, it is alleged, it means that God the Father had sexual relations with Mary in order to father Jesus. The issue presents a major barrier for Muslim understanding of the Bible. "Son of God" in many circumstances is a taboo expression, and Muslims superstitiously avoid a book containing it. The article in Christianity Today also indicates that there is disagreement among missionaries and The title "Son of God" makes one final appearance, in the scene following Jesus's death, this time in the mouth of a Roman army officer: Mark 15:39 Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" [33]. With this comment, Mark signals once again that Jesus, not Caesar, is the divine son who deserves worship. For Jesus's followers who saw in him the divine son of Psalm 2, the son's opponents in the psalm must be the persecutors of Jesus and his church. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. 11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. While the number of Old Testament references to Son [of God] are nowhere near as numerous as that in the New Testament, they are extremely significant and have helped Christians recognize that Jesus Christ is indeed this Son of God and what the Bible means by this phrase. The following chart is a list of nine passages from the Old Testament with brief commentary. Reference. Comments. Along the same lines, see also the articles by D. Richard Brown, "Explaining the Biblical Term 'Sons(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts," International Journal of Frontier Missions 22/3 (Fall 2005), pp. 91-96; and "Translating the Biblical Term 'Sons(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts," International Journal of Frontier Missions 22/4 (Winter 2005), pp. 135-45. All Bible translators realize that their translation work is never done in a vacuum, that language is colored and defined by its environment. This paper will attempt to deal in some measure with one problem of translation in a specific setting: "Jesus, Son of God" in an Islamic context. In Greek thought Son of God is not a legal, but a "physical" title, indicating an actual physical relation to the deity. In biblical times, Jewish people who could not make a pilgrimage to the city were supposed to pray in the direction of it. According to the Quran, Jerusalem was also the last place the Prophet Muhammad visited before he ascended to the heavens and talked to God in the seventh century. Before that, he was flown from Mecca to Jerusalem overnight by a mythical creature. Both this miraculous night journey and his communion with God are important events in Islam. During the night journey, Muhammad was purified in preparation for his meeting with God. Once in heaven, God told Muhammad that he should