

**The meaning of δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in Paul—
an intertextual suggestion**

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Richard Hays suggested some time ago that Romans 1:17 is informed by Psalm 98:2-3 (97:2-3 LXX).¹ On first considering this claim, I rejected it as unlikely.² I have since, however, reversed that judgment and now hold the suggestion to be

¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 36-37. Others have since noted some sort of connection, apparently independently of Hays: cf. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Volume I: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII* (London: T & T Clark International [Continuum], 1975 [2004]), 96 (parenthetically and without further comment); Robert Jewett, *Romans, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007), 143; who cites Klaus Haacker, *Der Brief Des Paulus an Die Römer*, Thht, vol. 6 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999), 41; also Robert Morgan, *Romans, New Testament Guide* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 20-21. Seifrid cites this text as central to the broader debate but never connects it with Rom. 1:16-17 (*Christ, Our Righteousness* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 38-40). To my knowledge, only Grieb notes Hays's initial suggestion directly: cf. A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans. A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (London & Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 2002), 10-11). However, none of these interpreters develops the observation very extensively.

² One of the mistakes in my *Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992); see 165.

both probable and highly significant. To note the issue of significance briefly: if this intertext lies behind 1:17, then it may well nuance Paul's strategic first use of δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in Romans. But in order to generate this significance, the suggestion must of course first prove true, and our subsequent discussion will address this challenge in two stages.

First we must revisit the specific question of the echo itself that was posed initially by Hays: does Romans 1:17 demonstrably echo Psalm 98? Many have not detected this connection in the past. But if we conclude that it is likely, then we will have to explore the further semantic consequences of this realization—the broader echo chamber of the initial sounding, so to speak—since these have been largely overlooked. And I will suggest, in a move beyond Hays's initial work, that this echo generates a broad and rich resonance through Romans in terms of the ancient discourse of kingship. It is *this* particular chord that Paul is sounding with the strategic phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ, mediated by the text of Psalm 98, which is a psalm of divine kingship. δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ denotes for Paul nothing less than the decisive saving act of deliverance by the divine King of his royal appointed representative—that is, the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus (the) Christ. The connotations of this royal discourse then underlie and color the more general semantic notions that we have already uncovered.

The first stage in this demonstration—the detection of the initial echo—can be dealt with relatively quickly. However, the second—its orchestration in terms of the discourse of kingship—is more complex and controversial and will take us a little longer.

(1) *An echo of Scripture in Romans 1:17*. The detection of scriptural echoes is a delicate matter.³ But an accumulation of various indicators suggests to me that Hays was absolutely right to assert that Paul is echoing the opening verses of Psalm 98 in Romans 1:16-17—an echo that encloses the critical phrase in which we are currently interested. The Psalm reads (in the LXX):

ἐγνώρισεν κύριος τὸ σωτήριον αὐτοῦ ἐναντίον τῶν ἐθνῶν.
ἀπεκάλυψεν τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ.
³ἐμνήσθη τοῦ ἐλέους αὐτοῦ τῷ Ἰακώβ
καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτοῦ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ.
εἶδοσαν πάντα τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

Paul then writes in Romans 1:16-17:

δύναμις γὰρ Θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι,
Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι.
¹⁷δικαιοσύνη γὰρ Θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται
ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν κάθως γέγραπται κ.τ.λ.

³ Hays's own initial treatment of the methodological issues in *Echoes* (esp. 29-32) is difficult to better; his criteria for detecting an echo are presented again and revised in his "Who Has Believed Our Message? Paul's Reading of Isaiah," *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 25-49. Some helpful recent refinements are undertaken by Leroy Huizenga, in dialogue in particular with the semiotic theories of Umberto Eco and Stefan Alkier: see esp. "Chapter 1: Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, and the Model Reader," in Leroy Huizenga, "The Akedah in Matthew" (Ph.D. thesis; Duke University, 2006), 43-101.

There are three distinguishable indicators that underpin this judgment: phraseological, lexicographical, and thematic. There is, first, an echo of a clause (i.e., of a potentially self-sufficient phrase) and not merely of isolated words here; compare δικαιοσύνη γὰρ Θεοῦ... ἀποκαλύπτεται in the target text and ἀπεκάλυψεν τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ from the source text. Although these syntagms are not precisely the same, they are essentially so—the same substantive, δικαιοσύνη, with a genitive denoting the same subject, God (Θεοῦ/ αὐτοῦ), being developed by the same verb, ἀποκαλύπτω, although in different tenses and voices. It is worth noting, moreover, that this basic clause and association in the two texts is *unequaled in its proximity whether elsewhere in Paul or the LXX*.⁴ Second, this essentially phraseological echo is accompanied in both texts by a parallel to δικαιοσύνη constructed with “salvation,” the word σωτηρία occurring once in Romans 1:16 and its cognate twice in Psalm 98.⁵ So a close lexical association seems to confirm the initial syntagmatic echo.⁶ But, third, a series of broader thematic similarities is apparent as well. Both texts discuss an

⁴ Intriguingly, the Hebrew texts Isa. 56:1 and CD 20:20 are close to this clause, as Haacker notes (*An die Römer*, 41), but the LXX blunts the echo of Isaiah in the Greek, translating *tsedeqah* with ἔλεος, and Paul’s reproduction of a clause from Qumran directly is of course unlikely. Romans 3:21-22 is also a partial exception to this claim, although there, as we have already seen, the verb has changed to a synonym—φανερῶω.

⁵ Strictly speaking, the LXX uses the neuter adjective τὸ σωτήριον at this point.

⁶ This correlation is very significant because it limits the relevant background texts to those that speak of *iustitia salutifera*. Moreover, this particular action occurs (as Morgan points out in *Romans*, 20-21) primarily in the Psalter, although Isaiah supplies a significant cluster of such instances as well.

antithesis between Jews and pagans (Ἰουδαίος καὶ Ἕλληνας/τὰ ἔθνη, Ἰακώβ and οἶκος Ἰσραήλ), in relation to which God is acting.⁷ Moreover, in both texts God is acting to make something known, this point being made in Psalm 98 by further verbs of knowledge and of sight.⁸ Finally, the aorist tenses in the psalm corroborate Paul's later temporal emphases in Romans 3:21-26 that the divine saving event has taken place "now," in the sense of the immediate past and the present, as against in the future. God *has* acted. So the unusual temporality of the two texts—which, as we have seen, is a crucial argumentative point in Romans for Paul—is identical as well.

In my view, this is an impressive accumulation of evidence, the force of which is difficult to deny. Phraseological, lexical, and three thematic echoes all reinforce one another in suggesting a connection, and more general considerations seem only to enhance these implications.⁹ In view of all this

⁷ This emphasis is apparent in the context preceding Rom. 1:16-17 as well, where Paul has been speaking of his apostolic commission (to) Ἕλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις.

⁸ And there is even a hint of priority of action toward Judaism in Psalm 98, as God is said to have remembered his mercy and fidelity to Israel, something the pagan nations there "see." This arguably echoes the overt statement of Jewish priority in Romans 1:16b—Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι—although I would not want to press this point. (See more in this relation when Romans 10 is treated in more detail in *DOG*, chapter **nineteen**.)

⁹ It is widely conceded that Paul quotes and alludes to Scripture repeatedly through Romans. Within this practice, it is also evident that he makes extensive use of texts from the Psalms (cf. especially 3:10-18 and 20a in the immediate setting). And the later 3:21-22, which is so closely constructed to 1:17, is little more than a pastiche of scriptural texts—except, that is, at *this* point, where the disclosure of the δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ is stated, so this lacuna has now been

evidence, some relationship between Psalm 98:2-3 and Romans 1:16-17 looks almost certain. Hays's initial perception was therefore, in my opinion, profoundly right. We will need to consider in due course why Paul does not mark this quotation explicitly, as he does his other key intertexts in Romans;¹⁰ this particular scriptural usage is allusive rather than overt. But I will suggest an explanation for this reticence shortly. It is important at this juncture in our analysis, rather, to investigate the semantic implications of this intertextual linkage further—the moment at which previous exploration of this connection has tended to falter. And here we enter the second, more complex phase in our intertextual exploration.

(2) *Paul and the ancient discourse of kingship.* Psalm 98 is a psalm of divine kingship,¹¹ and contains (as we will see in more detail shortly) terminology and thematology characteristic of that ancient Jewish discourse—a discourse that interwove in turn with broader conceptions of kingship, both divine and human, throughout the ancient Near East. The discourse of kingship had profoundly ancient roots but was also very much alive—sometimes in new variations—in

addressed. Admittedly, this last argument might be a little opaque in the present setting, but it is, I would suggest, ultimately quite significant. If 3:21-22 is demonstrably a pastiche of intertexts elsewhere, then we might expect some intertext to emerge here as well, as indeed Ps. 98:2-3 does.

¹⁰ That is, with a quotation formula—usually γέγραπται.

¹¹ Hays does not develop this point, referring rather to lament and exile (which are not to be excluded from the interpretation either of Paul or of Romans but do not seem so directly relevant here); cf. *Echoes*, 38. Seifrid is sensitive to this connotation but, as noted above, does not connect it directly to the key texts and phrases in Romans; cf. *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 39.

Paul's day. And this raises the possibility that the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ is operating within that broader discourse and is colored by its distinctive concerns. A number of subordinate issues become immediately apparent, however, and need to be addressed in turn if this possibility is to be sustained. There are five in particular:

- (i) the general contours of the ancient discourse of kingship
- (ii) the meaning(s) of "right" actions by a king
- (iii) the presence (or absence) of this discourse in Romans
- (iv) the probable particular meaning of δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in Romans 1:17
- (v) the implications for the construal of δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in relation to the covenant

In navigating these last questions, we will be drawing upon certain recent scholarly advances in relation to Jesus' messiahship, resurrection, and lordship, some of which have recently been pressed through Romans, although in a fairly preliminary way.

(i) *The ancient discourse of kingship*. Psalm 98 is part of a widespread ancient discourse concerning kingship and its particular ascription by pious Jews to their God.¹² (It is one of the classic expositions of this discourse as identified by Gunkel

¹² Keith W. Whitlam provides an excellent summary and bibliography in "King and kingship," *ABD* 4:40-48; cf. also J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (London: SCM, 1976); James Luther Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster

and Begrich in 1933. They pointed in particular to Psalms 47, 93, and 96–99, texts that all name God explicitly at a certain point as “king,” and so here in v. 6.)¹³ Psalm 98 is typically theocentric throughout, speaking primarily of acts by God on his people’s behalf in terms thought appropriate for the divine ruler—acts of salvation, deliverance, order, and judgment. These acts are accomplished by God’s “right hand” or “holy arm.” The people then respond with rejoicing and thanksgiving, and this response is typically hyperbolic; it is literally orchestrated, and other facets of creation join in as well (presumably because they are also ruled by God the King)—the sea and its contents, the world and all who dwell in it, the rivers, and the mountains. Significantly, because the scope of the divine King’s rule is cosmic, these acts are visible to and indeed affect the pagan nations in addition to Israel.

Numerous other texts, both within and outside the Jewish scriptural tradition, freight this discourse in various ways.¹⁴ But the complex data can be

John Knox, 1994); and J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image. The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2005). A brief account more directly relevant to our concerns here is Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified. Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 9-13.

¹³ Denoting them “Enthronement Psalms” (as noted by Whitelam, “King and Kingship,” 43). Significantly, S. Mowinckel had earlier worked with a much more extensive range of texts, so the Enthronement Psalms provide a very minimalist data pool. Mowinckel includes Psalms 8; 15; 24; 29; 33; 46; 48; 50; 66a; 75; 76; 81; 82; 84; 87; 114; 118; 132; 149; and Exod. 15:1-18; and the data can arguably be broadened still further.

¹⁴ And the Hellenistic and Roman data should not be ignored: cf. esp. Aristotle, *Politics*, III.14-18; V.10-11; Seneca, *De Clementia*; and Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 1–4 (cf. also *Discourse* 62); cf. E. R. Goodenough, “The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship,” *Yale Classical Studies* 1

simplified (as is necessary here) by the recognition that much of it is characterized by a root metaphor concerning God—the metaphor precisely of God as a king.¹⁵ The content of that image was generated largely by historical, human kingship, although presumably in the form of ideal types. God the King and the ideal human king were images that mutually interpreted one another, and this draws other illuminating texts into the elaboration of the discourse (especially Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, and 110).¹⁶

We learn from these texts (supported by studies of ancient iconography, etc.), that ancient kings, and ancient gods conceived of as kings, had a fundamental duty of care in relation to their people.¹⁷ This could unfold in two basic ways.

(1928): 55-102; and Bruno Blumenfeld, *The Political Paul* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Drawing here again on the term and method of Lakoff: see esp. George Lakoff, *Moral Politics. How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, 2nd ed. (London & Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001 [1996]); see also his earlier classic study George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 2003 [1980]). His work has already been introduced and discussed earlier in *DOG*, chapters **one and seven**.

¹⁶ Strong boundaries in the evidence should not be drawn between Jewish, ancient Near Eastern, and more recent Hellenistic and Roman discourses.

¹⁷ Cf. the later medieval and aristocratic notions of both *royaume* and *noblesse oblige*; cf. also, most importantly, Psalm 72, where this duty is often spelled out explicitly. Whitelam states more discursively (in relation specifically to human kingship) that “[t]he justification of kingship with its centralized social structure was based upon a guarantee of order, security, prosperity, fertility, etc., in return for loyalty and subservience” (“King and kingship,” 42).

First, if a king's people were in some sort of difficulty, then it was the monarch's duty to resolve that difficulty. If they were oppressed or invaded, then the king was obliged to deliver or defend them. But this function was often narrated in the ancient Near East in cosmic terms (partly no doubt to underwrite the need for a king in the first place). Indeed, it was frequently in the first instance the divine king's duty to establish cosmic order, slaying or controlling the monsters of chaos that threatened the cosmos with instability or dissolution.¹⁸ Alternatively, it was the chaotic waters bordering the world that needed to be controlled (and so on). Cosmic and more recognizably political activities thus intertwine throughout this discourse—and entirely deliberately. However, all of these actions, whether concretely political or more mythical and ritual, revolve around the basic notion of a ruler acting to save his people from disorder and oppression and to establish them in (relative) freedom and safety, whether that ruler is divine, human, or an alliance of the two.

Complementing this principal type of saving and ordering activity is the second broad duty incumbent on the divine and human monarchs, namely, sustaining a condition of peace and prosperity. Once order has been established, or reestablished, it is the duty of the divine monarch and/or the divinely appointed monarch to preserve it. It is worth noting that the “being” of kings, whether divine or human, consequently seems inseparable from their activity.

¹⁸ The need to control the forces of chaos was widespread in the ancient Near East, although in different local forms: see, e.g., the Egyptian ideology of the pharaoh as the Lord of *ma'at*, as against the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, where Marduk establishes a right to rule by defeating the sea monster Tiamat. Ugaritic material evidences similar notions as well. (For references, see Whitelam, “King and kingship,” 45.)

Kings are what they do; character and activity are correlative notions in this relation.¹⁹ We can now note some further common elements in this discourse that are relevant to our unfolding concerns.

As has already been intimated, an important alliance generally holds between the divine king and an appointed earthly representative, who is also a king, although in a derivative sense. Numerous variations on this basic dynamic are observable, including the strand in the Old Testament that rejects this relationship altogether (“no king for Israel but God”). Yet even in this radical variant, divine kingship is effected through appointed earthly agents or representatives who act with authority that they receive by way of delegation from the divine ruler, often as they are inspired by the divine Spirit. Usually, however, such figures are royal and part of a divinely ratified dynasty, “the Lord” establishing “the lord.” (This alliance cries out for an ideological analysis, but this is not our present concern.) The earthly king, then, is usually involved in the fulfillment of his duties in both sacral and overtly political and military activities, although these interpenetrate in ancient societies. The establishment and preservation of cosmic and political order are his responsibility, so cultic and political capacities are developed to carry out his duties in those respective spheres. Accordingly, there is an important observable relationship between palace and temple (not to mention the military), one that influences much of the

¹⁹ A deliberately sustained methodological emphasis in this chapter (i.e., in *DOG*, chapter seventeen).

Old Testament.²⁰ David and Solomon dominate the kingly ideals as they are presented by the Old Testament, David acting overtly more as a deliverer of his people, the one who creates order, and Solomon as the establisher of a suitably impressive cultus over which he presides (cf. esp. 1 Kings 3:1-2; 5-6; 7:13-51; 8-9), thereby sustaining that order and prosperity. But he is also of course the archetypally wise ruler (cf. 1 Kings 2:6, 9; 3:9, 12, 16-28; 4:29-34; 5:7, 12; 10:23-24). The key symbols of scepter, crown, and throne—especially this last—are plainly evident in much of this material.²¹

(ii) *“Right” actions by a king.* We must now ask the critical question in the present relation: what is a “right” action by a divine king or his appointed human representative? It can be seen almost immediately that the answer depends very much on the particular setting of a given action within the broader discourse. A “right” action could be a dramatic act of intervention that saves or reorders—a fundamentally liberative action, which presumably would have a corresponding oppressive effect on any opposing, hostile forces that were defeated. Alternatively, it could be an ongoing act that sustains peace and/or prosperity or

²⁰ The celebration of the human king as the “son of God” at an annual enthronement festival in ancient Israel has been much debated. Fortunately, this question does not have to be decided here.

²¹ See Whitelam, “King and kingship,” 42, although arguably he overlooks the emphatically gender-coded symbolism of multiple beautiful wives and concubines as well: cf. esp. 2 Sam. 16:20-22 and 1 Kings 2:13-25.

an act that judges a given situation accurately in terms of the ethical rectitude of parties contending at law, thereby maintaining social order.²²

Furthermore, because the ancient king combines in his person executive and judiciary functions, right actions can be described using terms drawn from either of these fields, although here the most important semantic crossover is probably the deployment of more strictly forensic terminology in relation to executive activity, the language of the law court being used to describe what a modern person would view as an executive political action. Hence, if a right action by a king is described using forensic terminology and imagery such as a “verdict” or “judgment,” we might nevertheless be speaking of an essentially performative, oppressive or liberative event (and these two acts often go together), as against a more strictly retributive procedure (i.e, that is also performative but includes an indicative dimension predicated on appropriate retribution). A military victory, a proclamation of the Jubilee, and an arbitration of a difficult civil case could all be described as “judgments” by the king, and certainly all of these ideally ought to be “right” as well, but they would be “right” in very different senses.²³ (Such language is still detectable in modern

²² All of these actions are widely attested, in relation to both God and human kings, in the Old Testament.

²³ These are distinguished in more detail in *DOG*, chapter **sixteen**. In forensic-nonretributive actions, the rectitude of the parties being judged is irrelevant; the action is usually grounded in the right action—and hence character—of the primary actor—God or the king. In forensic-retributive actions, the rectitude of those being judged is relevant and needs to be assessed accurately by God or the king, so that the resulting judgment rightly reflects that prior ethical calculus.

political discourse, although not as frequently, so an election result might be characterized as a “judgment,” not meaning by this a retributive action.) The immediate context must therefore tell us what kind of activity is in view at any given moment. The language of “rightness” is often deployed in the Old Testament, and in the specific setting of kingship, in all of these specific senses.

Excursus: the relationship between right action and kingship in the Psalter

The densest concentration of this terminology is in the Psalter: cf. especially (LXX) Pss. 44:5, 8; 47:11; 49:6; 71:1, 2, 3, 7; 88:15, 17; 95:13; 96:2, 6; 97:2 (Paul’s allusion in Romans 1:17), 9; 98:4; and 117:19. The liberative notion of δικαιοσύνη occurs in many other psalms as well, so the former semantic field overlaps with the discourse of kingship but is not coterminous with it. For God’s liberating righteousness, cf. in addition (LXX) Pss. 5:9; 7:18; 9:9; 21:32; 30:2; 34:24, 28; 35:7, 11; 39:10, 11; 50:16; 68:28; 70:2, 15, 16, 18, 24; 84:11, 12, 14; 87:13; 102:17; 110:3; 111:3, 9; 118:7, 40, 62, 75 [?], 106, 123, 138 [?], 142 [2x], 160, 164; 142:1 [this reference also being especially significant for Paul], 11; and 144:7 But this is hardly a problem for my case here. It simply suggests that this perception of the character of God was widespread (and maybe also that the discourse of divine kingship was more widespread than is often recognized—perhaps either tacitly or as a hidden transcript).

In sum, about 80 of the 336 instances of δικαιοσύνη in the LXX occur in the Psalter—around 25 percent. Approximately 50 of those 80 instances describe God, and then almost invariably in a liberative, salvific sense. Half a dozen of those instances, and several more important instances describing the human king in the same terms, also occur in texts that are indisputable enthronement psalms or texts denoting some other aspect of ancient kingship. This is where the lexical and thematological fields overlap especially clearly. Psalm 97 (LXX) operates within that intersection.

The correlation with various salvific terms is also worth noting, because it reinforces these claims. δικαιοσύνη occurs in close relation to salvific terms in the LXX almost entirely in the Psalter and Isaiah. See the strong connections between liberation, salvation, and δικαιοσύνη in Pss. (LXX) 16:1, 15; 39:10, 11 and 17 (cf. also vv. 14 and 18); 50:16 (a psalm traditionally linked to David and his repentance for his adultery with Bathsheba); 70:2, 15, 16, 18, and 24; 71:1-4 (a psalm of ideal human kingship); 84:8, 11-14 (a psalm oriented more toward the land); 97:1b-2, 9 (the psalm that launched this entire investigation; cf. also v. 3); 117:14, 19, and 21; and 118:40-41, 121-23, 169-76.

The links with both salvation and kingship are, however, perhaps even more overt in Isaiah: see (LXX) 39:8 (where King Hezekiah is grateful for δικαιοσύνη—prosperity—in his day); overt royal instances of God triumphing through a rehearsal of the ancient combat myth in 51:5-11; 59, esp. vv. 14 and 17; 62 (cf. esp. vv. 1 and 2); and 63:1-6 and 8-9—here the liberative sense of δικαιοσύνη (the related thematology of “father” is also prominent in 63:7–64:11). But the *maintenance* of prosperity, in part through “due process,” is apparent in 60:17 and 18, and intermingled with the liberative sense in 61:8 and 11 (and in this relation cf. also the closely related Amos 5:7, 24; cf. also 5:12, 15; 6:12).

Most importantly for our discussion here, δικαιοσύνη not infrequently denotes a liberating or delivering act—an action when it is “right” for either God the King or his appointed king to set someone free. Previously, some interpreters have referred to this particular subset of the data of δικαιοσύνη in the Old Testament as *iustitia salutaris*, because of the frequent occurrence of notions of salvation in context (and these have of course assisted our recognition of this usage as fundamentally liberative).²⁴ But possibly we now have a better explanation of just

²⁴ This data was emphasized by H. Cremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhange ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (2nd edn; Gütersloh: Bertelsman, 1900). A

why the term functions in this way on occasion. It is “right” in certain circumstances for the king to act to deliver, especially if a client or his people are in some sort of difficulty. It is his duty to set them free—to save them. Similarly, God the King could act in such terms to deliver his appointed human king, provided that this king has done nothing heinously wrong (or, alternatively, that he has repented sufficiently of any such sins). Again, in these circumstances, it would be “right” for God to act to save.²⁵

It might be objected here that this ancient discourse is not especially significant for the New Testament—after all, by the first century CE Israel had not been ruled by one of her Davidic kings for a very long time. However, vigorous New Testament debates unfolding along various axes suggest that although the specifics of the discourse are far from clear, its presence is both significant and undeniable. The current discussions of the relevance of the Roman Imperial cult and Augustan ideology to the New Testament (especially to Paul), and the widespread data—especially in the Synoptic Gospels—concerning the “kingdom of God” (or its close equivalent), suggest this conclusion almost

useful brief overview is supplied by J. J. Scullion, “Righteousness (OT),” in *ABD*, 5:731-34; see esp. “E. God’s *sedeq-sedaqa*: Saving Action.”

²⁵ The conviction seems to be widespread in the Old Testament that God “cares” and hence can be appealed to directly for help in all sorts of difficult circumstances, irrespective of any claim on that help that might be generated by the appellant’s ethical state. Sometimes that putative basis for a claim is introduced, but often it is not, and at times it is even directly disavowed in a repentant mode.

immediately.²⁶ This discourse was still very much in play—in all its subtle local variations—in the New Testament era.

With these broader observations in place, we can turn to consider an important contextual question in relation to Paul. Is a discourse of divine kingship operative in Romans?

(iii) *Divine kingship in Romans and the early church.* This specific query touches on several important debates that are currently unfolding within New Testament studies.

Essentially since the seminal work of Wilhelm Bousset,²⁷ theological development in the early church has been viewed by many interpreters panoramically as a slow progression from limited, theologically primitive, Jewish, particular notions to a liberated, theologically mature, Hellenistic, universal gospel, perhaps best exemplified by John. And this famous paradigm has greatly influenced the reconstruction of almost every New Testament

²⁶ Many other debates could be added to these two—for example, the stilling of the storm pericopes, which arguably present Jesus as the Divine Warrior; the triumphal entry; and so on. Wright gives an especially vigorous account of the presence of royal thematology in Jesus' life: N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), esp. chs. 6–13 (198–653); the relevant data is listed in an appendix, "'Kingdom of God' in Early Christian Literature," 663–70. An interesting application to a Pauline text of thematology especially associated with the Divine Warrior is Timothy G. Gombis, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 403–18.

²⁷ W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos. A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. [from the 4th German edn] J. E. Steely (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1970 [1st edn 1913; 4th 1965]).

question, figure, and text, whether Jesus, the pre-Pauline church, Paul himself, or the figures that wrote after him like the authors of the Gospels. There have consequently been strong methodological tendencies to detach Paul's understanding of Jesus from "early," "low," and Jewish christological categories like messiah and to interpret it instead in terms of "later," "higher" (although not necessarily "high/ the highest"!), and Hellenistic categories, within which stratum the apostle's use of "lord" is generally included. This is often combined with emphases on a spiritual rather than a bodily resurrection and a supposed disinterest in the teaching and life of the historical Jesus. (I would add that this agenda also integrates in certain useful ways with the individualism, the sense of liberation from the crabbed constraints of the law, and the view of the atoning death of Christ advocated by Justification theory.) All these concerns have of course influenced the interpretation of Paul's most discursive letter, Romans, leading to a certain myopia at key points that we must try briefly in what follows to redress.²⁸

Various scholars have for some time been attempting to roll back the broad agenda of Bousset, and with some success.²⁹ To point to one particularly

²⁸ An accessible overview of this and related trends can be found in Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1-26. For more detailed engagements see the following note.

²⁹ Among others in this relation, see esp. Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*; J. F. Fitzmyer, "The Semitic Background of the NT Kyrios-Title," in *The Semitic Background to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 115-42; J. F. Fitzmyer, "New Testament Kyrios and Maranatha and Their Aramaic Background," in *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998 [1981]), 218-35;

useful representative in the present relation, N. T. Wright has vigorously reemphasized the Jewishness and messianism of Jesus, his bodily resurrection, and his exalted lordship (which ought to be understood, furthermore, in a thoroughly Jewish sense). He is in the process of pressing these emphases through the thought of Paul, the argument of Romans, and the general theological development of the early church.³⁰ It is of course not necessary to endorse all the details of Wright's various claims and arguments—which are numerous—in order to find these basic corrections to Bousset's paradigm plausible.³¹ (Indeed, arguably they participate in a new paradigm that is

Martin Hengel, "Christological Titles in Early Christianity," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992), 425-48; Martin Hengel, "'Sit at My Right Hand!' the Enthronement of Christ at the Right Hand of God and Psalm 110:1," in *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 119-225; Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (London: T & T Clark International [Continuum], 1998 [1988]); *Lord Jesus Christ*; and Kavin Rowe, "Romans 10:13: What Is the Name of the Lord?," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22 (2000): 135-73. (For N. T. Wright see the following note.)

³⁰ Wright's principal treatments are N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991); *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992); *Jesus and the Victory of God*; "The Letter to the Romans"; and *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003). He references numerous shorter studies, many on Romans, in these major works.

³¹ Arguably, there are insensitivities in certain aspects of his work, not to mention occasional gaps; for a slightly different account of the resurrection, for example, cf. Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (London & New York:

gathering momentum within New Testament studies, at least in certain quarters.) But his principal corrections are of great moment for our present discussion.

If interpreters approach Paul and Romans with ears freshly attuned to the importance and integration of Jesus' messianism, resurrection, and exaltation to lordship, then the textual surface of the letter begins to shift in some interesting new directions. Initially, it becomes apparent that these themes have simply been underemphasized by much previous interpretation. So, for example, resurrection is a much more prominent theme in Romans than most commentators seem to have realized, as is Jesus' Davidic descent. But following these realizations it rapidly begins to emerge that the various recovered motifs are not just isolated points of emphasis for Paul—spots where his authentic Jewishness is gratifyingly apparent, and/or his continuity with the thinking of the early church. They are tightly integrated concerns that fulfill important argumentative and theological roles (and sensitivities to narrative and intertextuality are vital here, creating a direct link again with some of Hays's assertions). I would suggest, however, that while Wright and others have begun the resulting process of reinterpretation,³² the addition of one or two more insights can bring still greater clarity and cogency to our reappropriation of the letter's argument.

I recommend that these recovered emphases be correlated in a significant interplay with the ancient discourse of kingship, which in Romans is now

T & T Clark International [Continuum], 2005). I am assuming here, however, that his basic claims are plausible.

³² The work of Daniel Kirk is also of significance in this relation: Daniel Kirk, *Resurrection in Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

focused on—and in a real sense *realized by*—Jesus Christ. Indeed, an entire theological complex constructed in these terms is discernible within Romans, although subtly. This integrated program is signaled in nuce by Paul’s famous opening statements in 1:1b-4 (a text we begin to recognize as programmatic for much of the rest of Romans).³³

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ’s messiahship and lordship are here affirmed by his resurrection from the dead, which functions, furthermore, *as a heavenly enthronement*. This enthronement is effected by the Spirit of sanctification, who in the Old Testament sanctifies the cult and the people of God, and anoints the king. And, equally importantly, this event is widely attested by the Jewish Scriptures—both Torah and Prophets. Moreover, it is an explanation of Jesus’ sonship. He is the Son of

³³ Wright makes this point clearly: “The Christology of 1:3-4 is by no means an isolated statement attached loosely to the front of the letter but not relevant to its contents. It is the careful, weighted, programmatic statement of what will turn out to be Paul’s subtext throughout the whole epistle (see also 9:5; and 15:12, the final scriptural quotation of the main body of the letter)”; later he also points to 5:12-21 and “all the elements of chaps. 6–8 that follow from it” in this relation (“The Letter to the Romans,” 10:413, 415-19, quoting from 417 and 418). Robert Jewett provides a nuanced analysis in full dialogue with the extensive secondary discussion (*Romans*, 96-98, 103-8).

God because, as for any divinely appointed king, God has now become his Father. So he is the King of Israel not only by descent, as a “son of David,” but by royal enthronement; his “coronation” has taken place. As a sanctifying act, this must somehow implicitly effect the broader reconciliation of God with creation and his people, presumably overcoming the oppressive and even chaotic forces that seek to disrupt that relationship. Order should be established and prosperity realized and preserved. So, entirely predictably, the appointed ambassadors of that reconciliation, like Paul, are sent out to establish the appropriate submission and fidelity to this ruler in the rest of the world by way of their delegation (“apostleship”) and proclamation (“gospel”)—so vv. 1b and 5-6.

This is an essentially narrative account—a story—rich with theological import that links Jesus’ messiahship, resurrection, and lordship. And clearly, numerous Old Testament texts that speak of divine and human kingship will resonate with it. Scholars debate many further aspects within these broad assertions, but most of those debates do not concern us at this point.³⁴ What matters here is more limited—namely, the implicit evidence that this basic narrative is mobilized by Paul through a great deal of the rest of Romans. We can note five points of conspicuous emergence (followed by two further, supplementary pieces of evidence).

³⁴ It is not, for example, immediately apparent how “high” this Christology is. Paul’s use of “lord” here could be divine, entirely human, or roaming somewhere in between. But this question is best addressed in relation to Romans 10:9-13 (see *DOG*, chapter **nineteen**, and cf. esp. Rowe, “What is the Name of the Lord?”). And it ought to be asked in due course whether this material represents Paul’s thought exhaustively, or is presupposed by him in relation to his auditors.

1. In Romans 5:1-11 God *reconciles* a hostile world to himself through the Christ event (see esp. vv. 10-11), Paul here describing the divine act in quite distinctive language that resonates with the language of diplomatic, political, and royal circles (and invariably so whenever a delegate is involved, as indicated by the presence of πρεσβευ- language).³⁵ There is, moreover, a complementary use of royal “access” language in v. 2, in relation to which this reconciliation takes place. Then, in 5:14, an emphatic use of the terminology of government begins, Paul speaking repeatedly of what are in effect two kingdoms, with two “rules,” respective services, and even enslavements, and a military relationship of hostility and/or victory (these emphases continuing through subsequent chapters in the letter).³⁶
2. In Romans 8 the thematology of heavenly enthronement and glorification of Christ signaled in 1:2-4 reemerges. In 8:15-17 those who cry “Abba Father” receive “sonship” or “adoption” (υιοθεσία), become

³⁵ Jewett surveys the “reconciliation debate” in Paul in *Romans*, 364-66, noting that detailed studies by F. Hahn, M. Hengel, and C. Breytenbach support the reading being suggested here. Jewett also discusses “access” on 347-49, although without linking the two debates.

³⁶ So, for example, Paul uses the verb [συμ]βασιλεύω a total of only ten times, but six of those are in this section of Romans: cf. 5:14, 17 [2x], 21 [2x]; 6:12 (also 1 Cor. 4:8 [3x] and 15:25, where the royal connotations of this term are explicit). In 8:15 and 21 he uses δουλεία, and elsewhere only in (the closely similar) Gal. 4:24 and 5:1. In 8:37 he speaks of ὑπερνικάω, a hapax legomenon. And so on.

“children of God,” “and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” Paul affirms here (and in Gal. 4:6) this cry’s appropriateness for Christians, who participate in the “firstborn,” namely, Jesus (cf. Rom. 8:29-30). His resurrection, understood also as a heavenly enthronement (cf. esp. 8:34: ...ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ Θεοῦ), explains the access that Christians now have “in him” to the inheritance that he has received, their status as children of God, like him, and the consequent appropriateness of their cry to a God now characterized as “Father.” And such father-son language and affirmations, in the context of adoption, inheritance, and glorification, seem best explained by texts like Psalm 89 and the broader discourse of divine kingship.³⁷ The preserved Aramaism in Romans 8:15 is meanwhile a marker of this christological tradition’s antiquity within the early church. We seem to be in touch here, then, with an early explanation of the resurrection—as the heavenly enthronement and glorification of Jesus, and as his consequent affirmation as Messiah and Lord, who will rule

³⁷ αὐτὸς ἐπικαλέσεται με Πατήρ μου εἶ σύ, θεός μου καὶ ἀντιλήμπτωρ τῆς σωτηρίας μου· κἀγὼ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς (Psalm 89:26-27 [LXX 88:27-28]). Note also the use of δικαιοσύνη to describe benevolent and salvific acts of God in vv. 14 and 16 (LXX 15 and 17), in parallel also with κρίμα, ἔλεος, εὐδοκία, καύχημα and ἀλήθεια. It may also be legitimate to detect an influence from Ps. 110 at this point in the reference to God’s right hand—another royal enthronement psalm of course, and one much used by the early church: cf. Donald H. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation in the Old Testament and Early Christianity*, new ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1998 [1988]), 135-50.

the cosmos on behalf of his divine Father. Yet Paul, characteristically, interprets this tradition in Romans 8 in participatory terms.³⁸

3. Kavin Rowe has pointed out that Paul's repeated affirmations of lordship in Romans 10:9-13 draw on important Old Testament intertexts and are rooted in the entirely Jewish monotheistic veneration of Yahweh as the only true God. Moreover, the affirmation of Jesus' lordship, which is included unavoidably here by Paul in this central Jewish confession, is confirmed by his resurrection—a connection illuminated best by the interpretation of the resurrection as the enthronement of the Messiah, Jesus, *as* Lord.³⁹ (Paul's unusual reference to "the Christ" in 9:5 is also now comprehensible in part as an anticipation of his later use of this narrative.)⁴⁰
4. Although it is often overlooked, Romans 15:12 effects the closure of the main letter body by affirming Jesus' Davidic lineage through a citation of Isaiah 11:10 (cf. also [LXX] 42:4, which is closely accompanied by the divine King's δικαιοσύνη in v. 6). With this reference to "the root of

³⁸ Cf. Douglas A. Campbell, "The Story of Jesus in Romans and Galatians," in *Narrative Perspectives on the Pauline Gospel*, ed. B. W. Longenecker (Louisville, Kent: Westminster John Knox, 2002), repr. *The Quest for Paul's Gospel* (London: T & T Clark International [Continuum], 2005), 69-94.

³⁹ Rowe, "What is the Name of the Lord?"

⁴⁰ Indeed, this subsection of Romans is arguably replete with various messianic and royal connotations, and most notably perhaps of wisdom. For more details see *DOG*, chapter **nineteen**.

Jesse,” which resumes the Davidic claims of 1:3, Paul not only concludes his substantive discussion but fashions a messianic inclusio around most of the letter’s discursive material.⁴¹

5. Although almost entirely unnoticed, Romans 16:20—Θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης συντρίψει τὸν σατανᾶν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν ἐν τάχει—echoes both 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 and underlying messianic readings of Psalms 8 and 110 ([LXX] 8:7 and 109:1b).

Both Psalms 8 and 110, when applied to Christ, speak of his messianic enthronement, implicitly through the resurrection, followed by a further process of subjugation in relation to all Christ’s enemies, which will be consummated at his second coming “so that God might be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28b; and this royal reading resumes the language of Gen. 3:15, along with the surrounding narrative⁴²). Hence,

⁴¹ The discourse’s connotations are arguably detectable to an even more significant degree if the contexts of the three other texts quoted are explored—Ps. 17:50 (LXX) (certainly) and Deut. 32:43 (a book that generally assumes the kingship of God). Psalm 116:1 (LXX) seems too brief to set up any such resonances. For some elaboration of these claims see Hays, *Echoes*, 70-73; see also his “Christ Prays the Psalms: Paul’s Use of an Early Christian Exegetical Convention,” in *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leanders E. Keck*, ed. A. J. Malherbe and W. A. Meeke (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 122-36, esp. 134-35; and Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” 10:733, 744-49, esp. 748.

⁴² There are no direct linguistic signals of a connection between Rom. 16:20 and Gen. 3:15; hence, the echo, if it exists, must be fundamentally narrative. Nevertheless, Dunn suggests that Gen. 3:15 was a staple of Jewish hope, citing Ps. 91:13 (LXX 90:12); *Testament of Simeon* 6:6; *Testament of Levi* 18:12 [to which we should add *Testament of Zebulon* 9:8]; and Luke 10:18-19 (a

not only does 16:20 echo the royal discourse, but it even seems to deploy that discourse—via Psalm 8—opposite the Adamic thematology that is so important to Paul in much of Romans.⁴³

These five texts all develop the clues that are supplied by Paul in Romans 1:2-4. We can see in each of these other places a narrative of Jesus' heavenly enthronement informing Paul's argument—a narrative that describes Jesus as Son, Christ, "firstborn," and Lord, because of his enthronement by the resurrection. At this point he has entered his inheritance (and in Paul's view this now also opens up that inheritance for all who indwell him, whether Jew or

text that includes a note of joy, like Rom. 16:19-20); and supported by *TDNT* 5:81, Michel, Käsemann, Stuhlmacher (*Der Brief an die Römer* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989], 223), and Cranfield. Cf. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1988), 905-7.

⁴³ Wright, like Dunn, points rather to Ps. 91:13 (LXX 90:12), which is actually a markedly less apposite intertext. (In particular, there is no connection with 1 Cor. 15:25-27.) Somewhat curiously, he nevertheless detects the Adamic allusion, routing that through Luke 10:17-19 (cf. Rev. 12:10-11). The strongest intertextual echo in this subsection for Wright is the evocation of the Jesus saying recorded in Matt. 10:16 by 16:19b, which does not disturb the set of resonances being suggested in v. 20 ("The Letter to the Romans," 10:764-65). These connections are all clearer in 1 Cor. 15:25-27, and are further affirmed and explained by Eph. 1:20-22 and Heb. 1-2 (see esp. 1:13; 2:6-8a). See A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Michigan & Cambridge & Carlisle: Eerdmans & Paternoster, 2000), 1230-36. Hays also puts these points succinctly, introducing Mark 12:35-37 into the mix for good measure!: Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1997), 265-66. The future tense of the verb inclines me to suspect that Psalm 110 (LXX 109) is to the fore in the echo in v. 20, but probably only marginally. Moreover, Satan is presumably one of the enemies who will eventually be placed under the feet of God.

pagan). But this description of the Christ event rotates around the resurrection and interprets it in terms of the discourse of divine and human kingship.

If it is granted that these five texts are points of conspicuous emergence, where a robust narrative Christology developed in terms of ancient kingship protrudes into Paul's argument, it seems plausible to detect other points where such a discourse is operative in Romans, if not so overtly. At least two further texts are worth noting.

6. Paul cites Psalm 143:2 (LXX 142:2), suitably modified, rather pregnantly in 3:20a: διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ. This quotation is of course interesting in and of itself, but, as several scholars have noted, Psalm 143 speaks repeatedly of God's δικαιοσύνη (cf. esp. vv. 1 and 11), and this contextual material can hardly be coincidental when Paul is about to resume that motif emphatically in Romans 3:21, 22, 25, and 26.⁴⁴ It seems, then, that the rest of the psalm is implicit within Paul's allusion—at least, in some sense. Perhaps less obvious is the way the psalm echoes many of the key themes in the discourse of divine kingship. It does not itself function within that discourse, but it does articulate an element that functions within it, and this seems entirely deliberate.

⁴⁴ Classic studies are Richard B. Hays, "Psalm 143 and the Logic of Romans 3," *JBL* 99 (1980): 107-15; and William S. Campbell, "Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter," *NovT* 23 (1981): 22-40.

Psalm 143 is a prayer for help grounded overtly in the goodness of God and his works that also specifically disavows help from God in response to the supplicant's piety. That is, this psalm *specifically repudiates retributive activity by God*, acknowledging that this would result in condemnation rather than assistance. So the psalmist observes (quite rightly in the view of much of the Christian tradition) that no one is entitled to help from God couched in such terms, because "no one living is righteous before you." The ground for any divine assistance must therefore be the divine character, which must in turn be compassionate and should result in liberative—and corresponding oppressive! (cf. vv. 3 and 12)—actions. Such behavior is directly compatible with either the divine or the human king rescuing one of his charges, as he ought to, merely by virtue of his own duty of care. This dyad of intertextual echoes in Romans 1–3 thereby reproduces the much broader pattern of such echoes in the Psalter itself. Both are informed by a basic perception concerning the goodness of God.

7. Finally, we should recall that in 1:17b a messianic reading of Habakkuk 2:4 foregrounds Christ's resurrection and eternal life in relation to the gospel as it is disclosed by the δικαιοσύνη of God: "the righteous one, through fidelity, will live." The letter's auditors are thereby prompted to find some connection between the gospel (i.e., the announcement of the divine King's good news through his appointed representative), Jesus' resurrection, and God's δικαιοσύνη.

(iv) *The meaning of δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in Romans 1:17, in relation to Psalm 98:2.* We should recall now the insight that catalyzed this localized investigation—Richard Hays’s observation that the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ and its immediate development in Romans 1:17 echoes Psalm 98. If we supplement that insight by the additional observations that Psalm 98 is a psalm of divine kingship, and that Romans itself develops the ancient discourse of kingship in relation to Christ explicitly from its outset, and repeatedly throughout its body (contra Bousset et al.), then the conclusion seems to follow ineluctably that the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ is best interpreted in the light of that discourse as well. Such a reading fits Paul’s local argument perfectly, resumes the opening concerns of 1:2-4 neatly, and integrates with the contextual hints we receive from the specific lexical data elsewhere in Paul.⁴⁵ And in the light of this broader frame, we can now invest this phrase with the meaning appropriate to its particular function within that broader discourse—here in relation to a decisive saving and delivering act of power by God, the divine King,⁴⁶ on behalf of his royal representative, Jesus. That is, Christ is not being judged by God here (or oppressed); he is being resurrected! So δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ must mean in 1:17 “the deliverance of God,” or something closely equivalent.⁴⁷ This is the specific content of the righteous act

⁴⁵ See especially the discussion of the preceding subsection.

⁴⁶ And this sets up another resonance with 1:4, which also speaks of δύνάμεις.

⁴⁷ So “the salvation of God” or “the redemption of God.” At this point my recommendations overlap with an insightful study by Peter Leithart, “Justification as Verdict and Deliverance: A Biblical Perspective,” *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007): 56-72.

that God has just undertaken on behalf of his messianic agent, Christ—the act of resurrection, empowerment, and heavenly enthronement after his oppression and execution by evil opposing powers. It is “right” for God to act in this way on behalf of his chosen Son, who has been unfairly executed. It remains, then, only to ask why the psalm is present allusively rather than overtly.

I suggest that it is precisely the allusive activation of this broader discourse, and the critical enthronement narrative within it, that seems to underlie Paul’s subtle use of the actual text of Psalm 98 in Romans 1:17. The words of Psalm 98:2-3 are *mediating* this construct—a discourse composed out of scriptural texts, which now operates at one remove from those scriptures, as a distinguishable theological entity. Hence, the detection of this particular scriptural text plays no overt rhetorical role in the broader argument; the Roman Christian auditors are not supposed to be impressed by Paul’s citation here of an authoritative Jewish text (as they are by his citation of Habakkuk 2:4 in 1:17b). They are merely meant to understand what he is talking about in more general terms, and they should be able to do so insofar as they inhabit this Jewish Christian discourse concerning Jesus’ resurrection and kingship. Paul is merely using the words of Psalm 98:2-3 to say here what he wants to say (and presumably in a way that other Christians have already formulated and so can recognize)—that God the King has acted to save his messianic Son.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ This rhetorical qualification should serve to meet some of Stanley’s concerns with Hays’s methodology as expressed in Christopher Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul*. (London & New York: T & T Clark International [Continuum], 2004).

An explanation of the similar reticence of Paul with respect to this discourse in the rest of Romans is hinted at here as well. As my detailed argumentative analysis of Romans continues to unfold, it will become apparent that the ancient discourse of kingship is not so much elaborated as presupposed. Paul does not seem intent to describe or to justify it so much as to interact with and exploit it in support of various contingent goals in relation to the Christians at Rome. It seems to be traditional theology that the Roman Christians share with both Paul and the Jerusalem church—an integrated, Jewish, and perhaps surprisingly “high” christological narrative that smoothly links Jesus’ messianism, sonship, resurrection, and exalted heavenly lordship. Paul then builds from this shared theology toward his more specific rhetorical points in Romans.

We turn now to consider the implications of this reading for the possible covenantal resonances of the phrase, because these have recently been proposed by many as the invariable central content of δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ (not least by N. T. Wright and, as we have already seen in some detail in chapter **twelve**, by J. D. G. Dunn). This phrase means for many nothing more nor less than “the covenant faithfulness of God.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Wright, esp. “The Letter to the Romans,” 10:397-406, 413, 464-78. Hays himself endorses this reading at times as well—see, e.g., “Justification,” 3:1129-33, although he tends to speak of Christ’s death and resurrection in the same breath, which links up with my recommendations here. Somewhat curiously, although J. D. G. Dunn finds himself on the opposite side of many questions from Wright and Hays, he concurs on this issue; see his *CR1*–8, 40-42, (and this point is discussed in more detail in *DOG*, chapter **twelve**).

(v) *The relationship to the covenant.* If the phrase *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ* is located within the broader discourse of divine kingship, then covenantal associations are clearly not far away, and any such reading is not far from the truth. The earthly king was ratified at times by a particular covenant, and the divine King could structure his relationships with Israel directly in terms of a covenant, as the book of Deuteronomy perhaps most overtly attests.⁵⁰ It is certainly fair, then, to detect a covenantal strand within this discourse and hence possibly also in relation to this phrase, which operates within it. Indeed, there is something profoundly right about any such assertion, because it grasps and emphasizes that *God's fidelity is intrinsic to any act of salvation; for God to save implies necessarily and immediately that God has, in that act, acted faithfully.*⁵¹ However, broader covenantal associations—that is, in terms of a more elaborate arrangement—are not always central and hence determinative or invariable. They may or may not

⁵⁰ Weinfeld suggests that it is modeled on an Assyrian suzerainty treaty and hence fundamentally covenantal: cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). So construed, it is also arguably generous, although it remains conditional. The royal covenant evident elsewhere in the Old Testament looks unconditional. This potential concession to contractual theology in certain covenantal forms is further cause for caution with the interpretation of *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ* in this sense; the dangers lying here have already been noted carefully in *DOG*, part **one**.

⁵¹ The order of this set of predications must be noted carefully. *We* know that God is faithful *because* he has acted to save. Hence, we do not *ground* that act of salvation *on* his faithfulness, as if these two dispositions could be prioritized, humanly speaking, and the latter made the basis of the former. Rather, we grasp two complementary aspects of God's personhood, which is now disclosed definitively in Christ. Some of the important salvation-historical implications implicit here are sketched in *Quest*, 63–68.

be present in an act by a divine or human king in the Old Testament, which can take various more specific senses depending on its context, as we have seen, and are not always directly linked to a *covenant* (as in fact Psalm 98 demonstrated earlier). Covenantal connotations are consequently *possible* but not *necessary* semantic resonances of the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ, and we would need contextual information to activate them in Paul.

That is, δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ *might* denote a righteous act by the divine King in fidelity to his covenant with Israel—an act of covenant faithfulness (so perhaps an act that is πιστός or in terms of ἀλήθεια). However, it might denote a dramatically liberating act on behalf of Israel (σωτηρία/σωτήριον) that might—or might not—then be syntactically elaborated as—among other things—an act of covenant faithfulness. Or it might denote a saving act undertaken without reference to the covenant, or even in defiance of Israel’s repeated violations of the covenant, and so be rooted merely in God’s benevolence (ἔλεος). It might, moreover, denote an oppressive act against enemies—a righteous action—that has nothing to do with a covenant with them (a κρίμα). Alternatively, it might denote a retributive act that has nothing to do with a covenant but is oriented by the perception of an innocent person or group being accused or the guilty being acquitted (again a κρίμα, although here of a different sort). And so on.⁵²

It is not surprising, then, that the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ or its close equivalent is sometimes found in the same textual locations as covenantal

⁵² That is, many further semantic variations are conceivable. The phrase might denote a right but wrathful action by God against Israel. Or it might denote a judgment or a posture within a trial between God and Israel—a more retributive scenario.

notions in the Old Testament (and the same considerations apply to links with creation). Both are elements within the discourse of divine kingship,⁵³ and so the phrase may possess legitimate covenantal resonances. In any later usage, however, these have to be established explicitly and not merely assumed. The covenant was not a central, standard, or invariable element in the discourse of divine kingship and hence in the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ. We must let Romans itself tell us how this complex discourse is being activated.

In the immediate location of 1:16-17, and its particular allusion to Psalm 98, I see nothing that activates such specific resonances explicitly. The phrase seems there, rather, to be oriented in a fundamentally *christocentric* direction. It speaks not of the covenant with Israel—although it has implications for that!—so much as of the inauguration of the age to come by way of Christ’s enthroning resurrection. It therefore speaks of a liberating act that has implications for all of humanity (Israel of course included). Romans 3:21-22 and 23-26 confirm these suspicions rather strongly, as the claims of those later, related texts point ahead to universal arguments in Romans 4–8. The “right” act of God in relation to Christ, resurrecting him from the dead and enthroning him on high, has implications for all of creation—something that Israel is implicit in without exhausting its implications. (And indeed here we perhaps need to emphasize precisely the *eschatological* nature of this “right” act, again in continuity with Ernst Käsemann’s classic study;⁵⁴ a new creation has been inaugurated.)

⁵³ And similar observations apply to any resonances with Roman imperial ideology.

⁵⁴ Ernst Käsemann, "The Righteousness of God in Paul," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969 [1965]), 168-93. Hence, my suggestion here should be viewed as an attempt to build on Käsemann’s central insights and not to overthrow or deny them.

Somewhat ironically, the psalm that Paul echoes in 1:17 makes this point nicely. While in v. 2 Psalm 98 speaks of the saving deliverance that is being effected by God in plain view of the pagan nations, v. 3 goes on to articulate in a syntactical development that this action is an act of fidelity to the house of Israel. And just the same considerations seem to apply to the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ when Paul deploys it later in Romans with specific reference to Christ. Christians suggest of course that the resurrection of Christ is ultimately also an act of fidelity toward Israel and so is the supreme expression of covenant loyalty and fulfillment by God. But these claims are not implicit in the semantic content of the phrase itself; they are further related theological claims that must therefore be argued for (and of course in certain respects they are by no means obvious). So Paul himself goes on to attempt to make, in Romans 9–11, an extensive case that his christological claims *should* be so understood (cf. also 15:8)! And as his argumentative maneuvers unfold there, it becomes increasingly obvious that these implications are far from uncontested. Hence, to claim that he is merely semantically unpacking δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in so doing is to overstrain his language (as well as to ignore what he does syntactically and argumentatively).

It needs to be emphasized that this reading does not exclude Israel from the Christ event for Paul—far from it. We have merely reached a semantic judgment that when Paul deploys the phrase δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ, and especially in the early argumentative stages of Romans, he is not speaking of something overtly and fundamentally covenantal and hence rooted in the past and in a certain conception of history. He is discussing a liberative and eschatological act of God in Christ—a fundamentally present and future event rooted in the

resurrecting God (which therefore arguably introduces a reconceptualization of history). In sum, it seems that—on internal grounds—δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ in Paul denotes a singular, saving, liberating, life-giving, eschatological act of God in Christ. The intertextual echo of Psalm 98:2 (LXX 97:2) detected in Romans 1:16-17—in combination with other clues—then nuances this act in terms of the rich and powerful ancient Near Eastern discourse of divine kingship. And it connotes here in particular Christ’s heavenly enthronement by God after his faithful death at the hands of his enemies—one of which was Death—as God’s appointed messianic agent and the cosmos’s κύριος (which is clearly a singular, saving, liberating, life-giving, eschatological act by God). In undertaking this act in Christ, God is operating as the divine King ought to, delivering his captive creation from its bondage; he is therefore doing the “right” thing, acting as his character and role demand. And δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ is, as a result and in essence, the deliverance of God. These realizations afford an important new perspective on 1:16 and its possible anticipation of later argumentative developments in the letter, especially in Romans 10.