

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SON OF MAN

“I continued to observe the night vision - and look! - someone like the Son of Man was coming, accompanied by heavenly clouds. He approached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him dominion was bestowed, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and languages are to serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion - it will never pass away - and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).

The meaning of ‘the Son of Man’

Jesus was the name given by Mary to her baby, meaning ‘the Lord saves’. Earlier we saw that Jesus was also known as the Messiah, or the Greek form ‘Christ’, meaning ‘the anointed one’. In this chapter, we will look at another title that Jesus used for himself, the ‘Son of Man’. This is a messianic title taken from Daniel 7, and it is used only by Jesus, except for Acts 7:56 where Stephen, at his martyrdom, saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which immediately reminded him of the Son of Man vision in Daniel, and so he called Jesus the Son of Man. Jesus used the title to speak of himself in the third person, enabling him to speak about the Messiah without explicitly claiming to be the Messiah himself. He used the ‘Kingdom of God’ expression in the same evasive way. Unfortunately, the church at times has missed the significance of Jesus being the Jewish Messiah. ‘Christ’ has become a personal name, and Jesus’ future reign on earth gets interpreted in a vague, heavenly or spiritual, non-literal manner. He is no longer the eagerly awaited Jewish king. The terms ‘Messiah’, ‘Kingdom of God’, and ‘Son of Man’ are pervasive throughout the Gospels and cannot be ignored. To do so is to miss the point of why the Gospels were written (Jn 20:31).

‘Son of Man’ itself is a vague expression. What could ‘Son of Man’ refer to? It is Jesus’ most common title for himself and used 81 times

in the Gospels. It is obvious from Mk 8:38 that Jesus used the title to refer to himself, and he meant it as a messianic title.

“If anyone is ashamed of *me* and *my* words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the *Son of Man* will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father’s glory.”

And again in Mt 16:13, 15

“When Jesus had come to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the *Son of Man* is? ... He asked them, “But who do you say *I* am?”

The Greek word for ‘man’ is ἄνθρωπος which means human being rather than a male. John Piper, in a paper called “Why is Jesus called "Son of Man"? makes the following observations: “Let me give a common understanding and then a more sophisticated historical understanding. The common understanding is that "Son of God" implies his deity—which it does—and that ‘Son of Man’ implies his humanity, which it does too. He was a son of man, that is, a human being. And he is the Son of God, in that he has always existed as the Eternally Begotten One who comes forth from the Father forever. He always has, and he always will. He is the Second Person of the Trinity with all the divine nature fully in him. The more sophisticated and important historical insight is that the term ‘Son of Man’ doesn't merely align him with humanity. It is taken from Daniel 7 to which chapter John alludes frequently and where the Son of Man is a very exalted figure. It was Jesus' favorite self-designation.”

Jesus didn't refer to himself often as the Son of God, but rather, as the Son of Man. He said, for example, that even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people (Mk 10:45). He frequently called himself the Son of Man. The reason he did so was that ‘a son of man’ is a phrase that could be interpreted as ‘a human being’ and would cause no offense. But those with ears to hear could hear Dan 7, in which he was claiming a very exalted role in the history of redemption. And he meant to do it.

Jesus’ conversation with the man born blind is an example (Jn 9). After healing him, he heard that he had been thrown out of the synagogue. Jesus knew that he must have expressed some faith in him, so he

sought him out and asked him if he believed in the Son of Man? The man asked who he was so that he might believe in him. He had already told the Pharisees that he believed Jesus was a prophet, but he didn't know more than that. When Jesus told him that he was speaking to the Son of Man, the man born blind immediately believed in him, called him Lord, and worshipped him.

Jesus was very subtle in that he was always revealing his identity to those with eyes to see and ears to hear, but he wasn't revealing it so blatantly that everybody would come and make him king. He had to be very careful in disclosing his identity. He performed miracles and then told people not to tell anybody. He would make claims that were explicit in certain settings and implicit in others. Only when he was on trial for his life, and the Jewish high priest asked him in Mt 27:63 if he was the Messiah, the Son of God, did Jesus respond, saying: "You have said so. Nevertheless, I tell you, from now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" He confessed his deity and messiahship before the Jewish Sanhedrin even though he knew he would be crucified for it.

Jesus is the king in the Kingdom of God, but in the Gospels, he did not want to openly declare that he was a king, until he did so before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (Mt 27:11). Rather he spoke about the Son of Man, a veiled way of talking about himself.

The Son of Man in Daniel 7

The messianic prophecy from which this title sprang is certainly Daniel 7:13-14 quoted above. This prophecy is about a world ruler whose kingdom, given to him by God, would last forever. By using the title 'son of man', Jesus was claiming to be this exalted person. The Greek expression is definite, he was *the* Son of Man, the son of man that people had heard about, the one spoken about by Daniel, the one whom many interpreted to be the Messiah. This is a remarkable passage because it refers to a human being who is given great authority, a person whom people of every language would serve and worship, and it is implied that he will have an everlasting earthly kingdom.

The context of Daniel 7 is apocalyptic. Daniel describes four beasts which are interpreted as kingdoms, and especially the last beast, which by comparing Dan 7:25 with Rev 13:5-7 can be identified as the Antichrist and his kingdom. In the interpretation of the dream, we are told that the saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom and possess it forever – yes, forever and ever (Dan 7:18). Then the angel interpreting the vision for Daniel said that the court would convene, and the authority of the fourth beast would be removed, annulled, and destroyed forever. *Then the kingdom, authority, and magnificence of all nations of the earth would be given to the people who are the saints of the Most High.* His kingdom would endure forever, and all authorities would serve and obey him (Dan 7:26-27).

By designating himself as the Son of Man, Jesus identified himself as the coming Messiah who would rule the world with his saints. Compare this passage from Daniel with what John saw in Revelation 20. John saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge. He saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and the word of God, namely those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

The Coming of the Son of Man in Matthew

Daniel 7:13 is not only about the Son of Man, it is about the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. The following seven verses from Matthew are all in the context of the Messiah, Jesus, coming down from heaven to rule on earth at the end of the age.

Mt 13:41, 43 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from *his kingdom* everything that causes others to sin and those who practice lawlessness. Then the righteous will shine like the sun (cf. Dan 12:3) *in their Father's kingdom*. The harvest at the end of the age begins with the Great Tribulation, a time when a good percentage of the world's unbelieving population will be killed through warfare and God's judgments. Receiving the mark of the beast will distinguish the evildoers from the righteous, including nominal Christians. When the wicked are removed, the resurrected righteous will be glorified in their

Father's kingdom. The Father's kingdom is the Kingdom from God, the earthly messianic kingdom.

Mt 16:27 The Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and he will repay everyone according to what he has done. The righteous will be rewarded during the Messiah's reign, according to how each one faithfully served the Lord during his life. The wicked will be punished at Armageddon and at the Last Judgment.

Mt 19:28 When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne *in the renewed creation*, his disciples will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel. Reigning with Jesus is a reward conferred on his disciples. The renewed creation is literally 'the rebirth', as the world will be almost destroyed during the Great Tribulation. In Acts 3:21 it is called 'the restoration of all things.' In Rev 3:21 the promise is given to those who conquer. The conquerors will share in Jesus' throne (rule), just as he conquered and shared in his Father's throne.

Mt 24:27 Just as lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus' coming will be observed in the sky. Every eye will see him (Rev 1:7). It may be what Ezekiel saw in Ezek 43:2.

Mt 24:30-31 The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all 'the tribes of the land will mourn' (ISV following Zech 12:12) when they see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven', with power and great glory. He'll send out his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they'll gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another. These verses hardly need interpretation, but the bewildering interpretations in some commentaries make a comment necessary. The expression 'Son of Man' taken from Dan 7:13 confirms that this is a description of the second coming. Dan 7:14 says that he will be given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All people, nations, and people of every language will worship him. The elect (cf. Mt 24:22), are God's chosen ones; the righteous, the church. This accords well with what Paul said in 1 Thess 4:15-17:

"We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.... The dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to

meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.”

This gathering of the elect by the angels from the four corners of the earth is Jesus’ picturesque way of portraying the resurrection of the righteous and the simultaneous rapture of the living saints.

Mt 26:64 Jesus told the Jewish high priest that from now on he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven. Jesus here brings together messianic prophecies from Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13-14. It is a claim to both deity and messiahship. The members of the Sanhedrin will see him in these roles on judgment day.

Son of Man verses

The title ‘Son of Man’ was used by Jesus to show himself to be the Messiah of Daniel’s prophecy. It is a term that lays claim both to a divine pre-existence and a true humanity. In each context it either points to the Messiah’s present lowliness or his future glory. In the vision that Daniel saw, God gives glory and the kingdom of the earth to him who appears before him in human form coming in the clouds of heaven so that all people and nations might honor him.

In the following ‘Son of Man’ verses, ‘he, the Messiah’ is substituted for ‘the Son of Man’ and pronouns are added to show that Jesus was talking about himself. Those with discernment would have understood Jesus as referring to himself like that, while those who didn’t believe that he was the Messiah might have thought that he was talking about someone else. Parallel verses are not repeated, and sometimes only the relevant sentence is given. I am not suggesting that Bible translations follow this format; Jesus expressed himself like this for a reason.

Mt. 8:20 Jesus said foxes have holes and birds have nests, but ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, has no place to rest.

Mt 9:6 So that the scribes might know that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* had authority on earth to forgive sins, he told the paralyzed man to get up, pick up his stretcher, and go home.

Mt 10:23 Jesus told his disciples that when they were persecuted in one town, they should flee to the next, because they will not have

gone through the towns of Israel before ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah* comes.

This verse implies that because of the persecution, described in 10:17-22, the towns of Israel would never be fully evangelized.

Mt 11:19 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, came eating and drinking, and people said he was a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!

Mt 12:8 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, is Lord of the Sabbath.

Mt 12:32 Jesus said whoever speaks a word against ~~the Son of Man~~ him, *the Messiah*, will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the one to come.

Mt 12:40 Jesus said, just as Jonah was in the stomach of the great fish for three days and three nights, so ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

Mt 13:37 Jesus said the person who sowed good seed is ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*.

Mt 13:41 Jesus said, ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah* would send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes others to sin and those who practice lawlessness.

Mt 16:27-28 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, was going to come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to what he has done. He said some standing there would not experience death before they saw ~~the Son of Man~~ him, *the Messiah*, coming in his kingdom.

This refers naturally to the transfiguration which occurred six days later.

Mt 17:9 Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about the vision until ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, had been raised from the dead.

Mt 17:12 Jesus said Elijah had already come, yet people did not recognize him and treated him just as they pleased. In the same

way, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to suffer at their hands.

Mt 17:22 While they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus told them that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to be betrayed into human hands.

Mt 19:28 Jesus said when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, his followers will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Mt 20:18 Jesus said they were going up to Jerusalem, and ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would be handed over to the high priests and scribes, and they would condemn him to death.

Mt 20:28 Jesus said that was the way it was with ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*. He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mt 24:27 Just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* coming be.

Mt 24:30 Then ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land will mourn as they see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Mt 24:37 Just as it was in Noah's time, so it will be when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes.

Mt 24:39 They were unaware of what was happening until the flood came and swept all of them away. That's how it will be when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, appears.

Mt 24:44 So you, too, must be ready, because ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will come at an hour you are not expecting.

Mt 25:31 Jesus said when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes in his glory and all the angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

Mt 26:2 Jesus said the Passover would take place in two days, and ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would be handed over to be crucified.

Mt 26:24 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going away, just as it had been written about him. How terrible it will be for that man by whom ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, is betrayed!

Mt 26:45 Jesus told them to keep on sleeping and resting. The time was near for ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Mt 26:64 Jesus told the high priest that from then on, he would see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Mk 8:31 Jesus began to teach them that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would have to suffer a great deal and be rejected by the Jewish leaders. Then he would be killed, but after three days he would rise again.

Mk 8:38 Jesus said if anyone is ashamed of him and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory.

Mk 9:9 On their way down the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, had risen from the dead.

Mk 9:12 Jesus told them that Elijah was coming first and would restore all things. Then he asked them why ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, must suffer and be treated shamefully.

Mk 14:62 Jesus said, "I am" (ἐγώ εἶμᾱί), and 'you will see ~~the Son of Man~~ *me, the Messiah*, seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.

Lk 6:22 Jesus said his disciples were blessed whenever people hated, avoided, insulted, and slandered them because of ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*!

Lk 11:30 Jesus said, just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be a sign to his generation.

Lk 12:8 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* will acknowledge before the angels everyone who acknowledges him before people.

Lk 17:22 The time will come when the disciples will long to see ~~the Son of Man's~~ *he, the Messiah's* reign, but they won't see it.

Lk 17:24 Just as lightning flashes and shines from one end of the sky to the other, so will ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* be at his coming.

Lk 17:30 The day when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* is revealed will be like that (sudden destruction).

Lk 18:8 Jesus asked whether when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes, will he find faith on earth.

Lk 18:31 Jesus said that everything written by the prophets about ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, will be fulfilled.

Lk 19:10 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, came to seek and to save the lost.

Lk 21:36 Jesus told his disciples to be alert at all times so that they might stand before ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Lk 22:48 Jesus asked Judas if he was betraying ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, with a kiss.

Lk 24:6-7 Jesus told his disciples that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, must be handed over to be crucified and rise on the third day.

Jn 1:51 Jesus told his disciples they would see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Jn 3:13-14 Jesus said no one has gone up to heaven except him, the one who came down from heaven, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* who is in heaven. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, be lifted up.

Jn 5:27 Jesus said God gave him the authority to judge because he is ~~the Son of Man~~ *the Messiah*.

Jn 6:27 Jesus said his disciples should not work for food that perishes but for food that lasts for eternal life, which ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will give them.

Jn 6:53 Jesus said, unless his disciples eat ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* flesh, and drink his blood, they won't experience eternal life.

Jn 6:62 Jesus asked his disciples what their reaction would be if they saw ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, ascending to heaven where he was before.

Jn 8:28 Jesus said when they have lifted ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, up, then they will know that he is the I AM and that he does nothing on his own authority.

Jn 9:35 When Jesus heard they had thrown the beggar out, he found him and asked him if he believed in ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Jn 12:23 Jesus told them the hour had come for ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, to be glorified.

Jn 13:31-32 Jesus said, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was now glorified, and God had been glorified by him. If God had been glorified by him, God himself also would glorify ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, and he would do it quickly.