



"Jesus - The Son Of Man?"

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'In my vision, there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.'

Although Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God, His favorite self-designation by far was 'Son of Man.' How do we know that Jesus actually referred to Himself as the Son of Man and what does it mean?

When we ask how we know that 'Son of Man' was a title Jesus claimed for Himself (rather than a legendary title later ascribed to Him by the Gospel writers), we ask this for the benefit of the sceptic. The sceptic is one who does not accept the Bible by faith. He is the one who wants 'just the facts.' It is for this person that we ask the questions, 'Can we know whether Jesus actually referred to himself as the Son of Man?' And 'What does it mean?' So we begin.

Many sceptical scholars believe that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man, because it is unlikely to have been an invention of the early Church. For example, in the Gospels, 'Son of Man' is Jesus' favourite self-designation. Yet in the epistles, it is never used of Jesus. In fact, the term appears in the New Testament only 4 times outside of the Gospels and never in extra-biblical Christian writings during the first 120 years following Jesus. The point is: How likely is it that the Church originated the title Son of Man as Jesus' favourite self-description, when the Church itself did not refer to him in this manner?

So what did Jesus mean when He called Himself the Son of Man? Some surmise that the term places an emphasis on Jesus' humanity compared

to 'Son of God' which places an emphasis on His divinity. But this fails to take into account the significant historical context in which Jesus uses the term and how He understood it. How Jesus understood the term 'Son of Man' is important, since He used it of Himself more than any other term.

To find the answer, let us go back to the Old Testament and look at what the prophet Daniel said.

'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.' (Daniel 7:13-14)

Daniel speaks of the 'son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. . . . He was given authority, glory and sovereign power . . .'

With this in mind, consider these statements of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels:

'For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.' (John 5:27 [italics mine])

'At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.' (Matthew 24:30 [italics mine])

'So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.' (Mark 13:24-27)

'At that time they will see the Son of Man coming

in a cloud with power and great glory.' (Luke 21:27)

§ It seems obvious from these scriptures that when Jesus spoke of Himself as being the Son of Man, He had Daniel 7 in mind.

§ In addition, some first century Jews identified the Son of Man as also the Christ or Messiah.

§ Jesus had just spoken of His death by crucifixion as being 'lifted up.' The crowd responded, 'We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up?' Who is this 'Son of Man?'"

§ Jesus also believed the Son of Man, the Son of God, and the Messiah (Christ) were the same person. Not only did He claim to be all three separately, but in an interesting passage He responds in the affirmative to the Jewish leadership's linking both Son of God and Christ, then adds Son of Man:

'The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God:

'Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death,' they answered.' (Matthew 26:63-66)

Finally, Jesus understood the Son of Man to exist prior to His human birth:

'No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man.' (John 3:13)

'What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!' (John 6:62)

In summary, Jesus' favourite term to refer to Himself was 'Son of Man.' He understood the designation to refer to the divine Son of Man of Daniel 7 who would rule with glory and power. Moreover, He understood the Son of Man also to be the pre-existent Son of God and Messiah. Who did Jesus think He was? Clearly He thought He was the divine Son of Man.