

## Who or What is the Son of Man?

**Mk. 2:10 ESV** <sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"-- he said to the paralytic--

The phrase "Son of Man" is one which has produced a HUGE amount of scholarly ink. To this day, there are many thoughts about the phrase. I'm going to try to give you the mile-high overview.

Most likely, we are to understand the phrase from the Old Testament background.

**Ps. 8:4 ESV** what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

In Psalm 8:4 the phrase is used in parallel to the Hebrew word *enosh* (אִנוֹשׁ), a mostly poetic word for "humanity/people/mankind". In Hebrew to say "son of" is to put someone into the class or group of whatever word that follows. For instance, the Israelites are referred to repeatedly in the OT as "the sons of Israel." Obviously it's not intentionally excluding daughters, it simply means all people who are part of the family of Israel.

This verse is specifically connected to Jesus in the New Testament

**Heb. 2:5-9 ESV** For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. <sup>6</sup> It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?" <sup>7</sup> You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, <sup>8</sup> putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. <sup>9</sup> But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The logic of this connection is important. Just as God called Israel (the whole people) His Son, and then these same words are applied to Jesus who is explicitly called God's Son at His Baptism, and so we see Jesus Israel reduced to one (that is, Jesus) who is standing in the place as the true representative and ideal for all of Israel, so also in this connection Jesus is humanity reduced to one, standing in the place, not merely of Israel, but of all humanity. Because of the Incarnation, He is a perfect and true representative for all humanity.

**Exod. 4:22 ESV** Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son,

**Mk. 1:11 ESV** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The other really important place the phrase "son of man" is found in Scripture is in the Book of Daniel.

**Dan. 7:13-14 ESV** "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.<sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

This is from a vision Daniel is given that ultimately promises that all other kingdoms will fall and all authority, power, and glory will be given by God to "one like a son of man" whose dominion is described as eternal and invincible. In the vision the Ancient of Days is likely a reference to the Heavenly Father (the First Person of the Trinity), while the "one like a son of man" refers to the Messiah, who was promised to reign as the Davidic King (1 Sam. 7:12-16), enthroned beside the Ancient of Days. In the interpretation of the vision, it is said that the saints will possess the kingdom, leading some to identify them as the "one like a son of man."

**Dan. 7:18 ESV** But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

But the saints are not the same thing as the son of man (in 7:21-22, the little horn defeats the saints, but in Daniel 7 the son of man is never linked with suffering and defeat). Ultimately it is the heavenly court, of which the son of man is an enthroned member, who defeats the little horn.

The real identity of the "one like a son of man" is rather the Messiah. Jesus Himself makes this connection for us when he quotes the Daniel passage and applies it to the Messiah, that is, to Himself.

**Mk. 13:26 ESV** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

**Mk. 14:62 ESV** And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." [see also Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64 and Luke 21:27]

If Jesus' own witness wouldn't be enough, others in the Gospels make the connection between the identity of the Messiah and another "coming" one, which is the language used of "one like a son of man" in Dan. 7:13-14.

**Matt. 3:11 ESV** "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**Matt. 8:29 ESV** And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

**Matt. 11:3 ESV** and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

**Jn. 1:30 ESV** This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'

**Jn. 4:25 ESV** The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."

The Book of Revelation also connects Jesus with the imagery of this "one like a son of man."

**Rev. 1:7 ESV** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

**Rev. 1:13 ESV** and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

**Rev. 14:14 ESV** Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.

## How Does Jesus Use the Term “Son of Man”?

When Jesus uses “the Son of Man,” He **confirms His Messianic authority on earth.**

**Mk. 2:10 ESV** But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”— he said to the paralytic—

**Mk. 2:28 ESV** So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

When Jesus uses “the Son of Man,” He applies it to Himself and refers to **how He is fulfilling the OT prophecies about the Messiah.**

**Matt. 26:24 ESV** The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

**Mk. 14:21 ESV** For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

**Lk. 22:22 ESV** For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"

When Jesus uses “the Son of Man,” **He speaks of His suffering and death.**

**Mk. 8:31 ESV** And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

**Mk. 9:9 ESV** And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

**Mk. 9:12 ESV** And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

**Mk. 9:31 ESV** for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise."

**Mk. 10:33-34 ESV** saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.<sup>34</sup> And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

**Mk. 10:45 ESV** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

**Mk. 14:21 ESV** For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

**Mk. 14:41 ESV** And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

When Jesus uses "the Son of Man," **He talks about His return in glory to save and judge.**

**Mk. 8:38 ESV** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

**Mk. 13:26-27 ESV** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.<sup>27</sup> And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

**Mk. 14:62 ESV** And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

## Why Does Jesus Use the Term “Son of Man” referring to Himself?

This is probably the million dollar question. Jesus never explains WHY He uses this term, but even critical scholars of the New Testament agree that it must be original to Jesus and significant. Probably the most common answers given revolve around Jesus' attempt to speak clearly referring His identity without falling into the inherent dangers of calling Himself the Messiah.

In Jesus' day there wasn't a single Messianic picture that filled the minds of the Jews. There were MANY ideas and the majority of those ideas were completely incompatible with what Jesus really came to do. The main thoughts and focus of the Jews at that time was for a temporal, physical, earthly kingdom. With the promise of a future Davidic King, the people's minds drifted to the picture of another Davidic Kingdom. This was especially captivating at this time because the Jews were currently living under the authority of the Roman Empire and it had been several centuries since they exercised their own real sovereignty. But Jesus did not come to bring an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). Consequently, if people thought Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, they would have certainly flocked to Him and followed Him. Many would have taken up swords, ready to fight the Roman legions. But all of that would have been in vain. They would have been following their own conception of the messiah, rather than the true Messiah in Jesus.

The same kind of reasoning lies behind the reason why Jesus didn't simply walk around claiming, "I'm God, I'm God!" He certainly could have done so and He was well within His rights to say such a thing, but it would have been misleading in the sense that people had their own conceptions and ideas about who God was, that Jesus' words would largely have been ignored. It also would have been so utterly radical for Jesus to speak like this that very few would actually have listened to Him and the ones that would likely have stoned Him to death on the spot for committing blasphemy (because in their minds God could not be a human, which Jesus clearly was).

**Jn. 10:31-33 ESV** The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.<sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?"<sup>33</sup> The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

When Jesus uses the term “Son of Man” in reference to Himself, He uses a unique term in the Old Testament that speaks both to his humanity (“son of man” is synonymous with “human/person”), but also divine (from Daniel 7). This term, though not widely used or understood in the way that Jesus applied it to Himself, is perhaps more clear and truthful than the word Messiah about Jesus' identity. But in its obscurity, it would give Jesus an opportunity to fill the term with His own meaning and significance.

Jesus, both God and Man, would truly fulfill the prophecy/vision of Daniel 7 by receiving all authority, power, glory and dominion from God to rule for all eternity, but He would do so in a way that almost no one could fathom: by becoming not just like a human, but a human in all respects, yet without sin, all while never abandoning His divinity, and ultimately identifying Himself with the sins of all humanity and taking the full penalty for those sins by dying on the cross, only to rise again from the dead on the third day. Jesus' mission was absolutely clear to Him, but no one else understood it until it was accomplished. Even then it was only through the Holy Spirit opening their eyes and hearts to Scripture that people finally understood that the Son of Man was the very Messiah who had been promised from the very beginning, the Suffering Servant and now their glorified Lord. It is through faith in Jesus that we become part of His kingdom and so we too receive dominion and authority to rule with Him.

**1 Cor. 6:1-3 ESV** When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?<sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

**2 Tim. 2:12 ESV** if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

**Lk. 22:28-30 ESV** "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials,<sup>29</sup> and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom,<sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.