

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXXI

August 15, 2021

No. 34

Jesus: The Son of man

By (Jerry Fite)

Jesus asked His disciples, “*Who do men say that the Son of man is?*” (*Matthew 16:14*). “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets,” were the different replies. When Jesus directed His question to His disciples with Him, Peter spoke up declaring, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (*Matthew 16:18*). Eminent Jews from the distant past, such as Elijah and Jeremiah, or more recent, John the Baptist, could have come back from the dead in the person of Jesus in the thoughts of many which shows how illustrious Jesus was viewed. Peter, directed by God the Father, confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. Jesus here identifies Himself as the Son of man.

“Son of man,” Son of God, which is correct? Most believers see no contradiction, for both identities are consistent with the person of Jesus according to the Scriptures. Jesus was God in the flesh (*John 1:14*). He has always been the eternal Son of God. Before coming in the flesh, Jesus was “*the Word*” equal to God, for He “*was God.*” But He was also distinct from God, the Father, being God, but eternally “*with God*” (*John 1:1*). Coming in the flesh, Jesus identified with human beings. He therefore is the Son of man. Being eternal with the Father, He was also the Son of God.

About eighty times in the New Testament, Jesus referred to Himself as “the Son of man.” Why would Jesus do this when all could see He was man in the flesh? Was there another reason for Jesus identifying so often as the Son of man? We know after Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus emphasized that He was not a mere spirit appearing before potential witnesses of His resurrection, but was “flesh and bones” (*Luke 24:36-43*). Was He emphasizing being the Son of man, to establish a future bodily resurrection for man? We also know that false teachers at the end of the first century would deny that Jesus came in the flesh. The spirits who would confess that Jesus “*is come in the flesh,*” were of God. But those spirits denying this fact regarding Jesus were not of God and as antichrists, were against Christ and the truth (*I John 4:2-3*).

But could there be something in the past that caused Jesus to call Himself the “Son of man?” Did he want to identify with Ezekiel in some way? Ezekiel is a prophet who more than ninety times is addressed as the “Son of man.” Jesus would fulfill Ezekiel’s prophecy regarding the coming Messiah. God’s servant, David, would come to be Israel’s king and be the one shepherd of God’s people (cf. *Ezekiel 34:23-28; 37:24*). But Jesus is identified with King David in these passages, not Ezekiel.

Ezekiel, in the first chapter of his book, reveals the glory of the one true God. It is then, beginning in chapter 2:1, that he is addressed as “the Son of man (3:1, 4:1, 5:1, 6:1, etc.). While God’s prophet was inspired with God’s word, Ezekiel was not God. He was man. The Book of Ezekiel distinguishes the all-knowing God from limited man. Ezekiel is the Son of man, not Deity. He just delivers Deity’s message for man.

There is another use of the “Son of man” in the Old Testament which Jesus fulfilled. In a prophetic night vision Daniel saw that “*there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall never pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*” (*Daniel 7:13-14*).

Jesus would confess He was the Son of God when it was time for Him to be delivered up to die, but He also fulfilled Daniel’s prophecy as being the Son of man who would exercise his power in His everlasting kingdom including His judgment on Jerusalem in A.D.70 (cf. *Matthew 26:63-64*).