

SON OF MAN

0. INTRODUCTION

The term "Son of Man" occurs many times in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. Even Jesus himself used this term quite often. Yet even Christians in the 21st century usually do not know who he is and what exactly this designation means.

1. LEGAL CONCEPT

Eze 2:1	<i>"He then said to me: 'Son of man, stand up on your feet that I may speak with you.'" [NWT]</i>
Da 8:17	<i>"... He said to me: 'Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end.'" [NWT]</i>

In biblical terminology, the term "Son" is a legal term referring to an heir. The heir of the father's estate was usually the firstborn son (Mt 21:37,38). In this sense, terms such as "Sons of Israel", "Sons (daughters) of Jerusalem", "Sons of the Covenant", "Sons of the Prophets" etc. appear in the Bible (Ac 3:25).

The term "Son of Man" must therefore also correspond to an inheritance, namely the inheritance of man. It is the inheritance we have received from our father Adam.¹ He and his sons were entrusted with this planet and given the task of filling and dominating it. Today we know that this task is not at all as simple as it may seem at first sight.

It takes a lot of knowledge and ability to truly take over the Earth. For the Earth to be truly fulfilled, human society must reach maturity and be able to govern itself, or have successful "governance".

Moreover, our inheritance is burdened with a huge "debt", mainly in the form of genetic damage to the entire population by hereditary sin. The Son of Man has, therefore, the additional task of completing the process of restoration. The prophets Ezekiel and Daniel are addressed as the **Sons of Man**. This can be explained by the fact that they were men of great wisdom, and they were not only aware of the condition of man's inheritance, but also worked for the sake of that inheritance. They proved themselves to be true Sons of Man (Pr 4:3,4). The most prominent Son of Man was undoubtedly Jesus Christ. By his life and work as a man, he provided the necessary conditions for the goals of our inheritance to be achieved. Jesus was aware of this role and spoke openly as the Son of Man. However, Jesus himself spoke of the Son of Man yet to come in the future. Was he talking about himself? As we know, Jesus Christ has long since ceased to be a man. Moreover, he voluntarily gave up the right of the Son of Man by his sacrifice on behalf of Israel and all mankind. In order for Jesus Christ to legitimately come again as the Son of Man, he would hypothetically have to be born again as a man (which would be a violation of legal principles). And if he spoke of himself in this way in a figurative, symbolic sense, there would have to be irrefutable evidence for it. After all, he could not be fooling us with such an unambiguous legal concept.

2. PARALLEL FULFILLMENT OF BIBLICAL PROPHECIES

Before proceeding to interpret the biblical passages concerning the identity of the Son of Man and his return, it will be necessary to explain the more general principle of Bible prophecy.

Eze 28:1-16	<i>"The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, This is what the Sovereign LORD says: In the pride of your heart you say, I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas. But you are a mere mortal and not a god, ... You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; ... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. ... So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, ...'" [NIV]</i>
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This prophecy can be used to illustrate the Bible's method of prophesying. Since the development of human society to date has followed an imaginary spiral, and events on Earth continue to repeat themselves in rough outlines and on a higher developmental level,² God has significant and typical social events recorded and set as prophetic patterns or precedents. Moreover, if God himself influences the course of things, he always acts according to the same principles.

¹The term "Son of Man" (Son of Adam) is a translation of the Hebrew term "ben-adham". The name Adam means man.

²Ecclesiastes 3:15.

Note: Now imagine how comprehensive the Bible is and how many prophecies it contains. If you realize that virtually every prophecy can have not one, but several fulfillments, you will realize that the information potential of the Bible is truly enormous!

We know that the king of Tyre could not have been in Eden, and certainly not a cherub, unless we want to operate with the idea that he was a reincarnation of Satan. Since there are in fact many similar parallels in the Bible, and it is not just the similarity of individual beings but of whole nations, political situations and complex social laws, the interpretation using reincarnation can be ruled out here in good conscience.³ The king of Tyre was so similar in character to his “prehistoric pattern” Satan that he was identified with him in this prophecy. A similar identification occurs in the case of the Son of Man and his other roles, as we shall now see.

3. MOSES AND ELIJAH

In addition to acting as the Son of Man, Christ acted in a role (function) comparable to that of Moses during his life on Earth. In the words of the Apostle Peter:

Ac 3:22,24	<i>“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.’ Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days.” [NIV]</i>
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And Jesus put it this way:

Joh 5:46	<i>“If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was about me that he was writing;” [NJB]</i>
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According to YHWH’s original plan, which is also followed by the higher heavens, the management of society rests on two pillars. In antiquity, the first pillar was represented by anointed king (1Sa 1:13), the second pillar by anointed priest (Ex 29:7). The Bible has been communicating with us ever since using this terminology. In biblical symbolism, Moses corresponds to the function of king and Elijah to the function of high priest. Now notice that even Jesus (in the function of Moses) actually had a “working” partner (John the Baptist) in the function of Elijah during his lifetime.

Mt 11:11,14	<i>“Truly I say to you, among those born of women, there has not been raised up anyone greater than John the Baptist, ... and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” [NWT]</i>
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Note: Aaron, the high priest and Moses’ partner, was as a precedent “excommunicated” for his embezzlement (De 9:20).

The appearance of these prophets, according to earlier precedents, is foretold in the last book of the Old Testament in Malachi.

Mal 3:1,2	<i>“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty. ‘But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap.’” [NIV]</i>
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This “Moses” is announced as the messenger of the covenant. And indeed, like Moses, Jesus was the mediator of the covenant between God and his people.

Mal 3:23,24	<i>“Look, I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the great and awesome Day of Yahweh comes. He will reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents, to forestall my putting the country under the curse of destruction.” [NJB]</i>
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And this is “Elijah”. But how does this relate to the Son of Man?

3.1. Transfiguration

Mt 16:28 - Mt 17:3	<i>“Truly I say to you that there are some of those standing here who will not taste death at all until first they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom.’ Six days later Jesus took Peter and James and his brother John along and led them up into a lofty mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone as the sun, and his outer garments became brilliant as the light. And look! there appeared to them Moses and Eli’jah conversing with him.” [NWT]</i>
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³Although reincarnation is possible in principle, and in the case of Jesus, there was an incarnation in some sense, the Bible denies the spontaneous mechanism of reincarnation in many ways. For example, the future resurrection, which will not be available until the 3rd covenant. This does not mean that many people in biblical times did not believe in reincarnation (Lu 9:7,8). Ancient Alexandria was the crossroads of world philosophy, and Eastern doctrines were well known in Palestine in Jesus’ time, for example. Satan will only be “reincarnated” on Earth after his overthrow from the 1st heaven.

On this mountain, then, the apostles saw the Son of Man. Was it Jesus? Jesus ascended in this transfiguration in a radiant form, thus the heavens made it clear that at the time of the second coming of the Son of Man, Jesus would be back in the body of a cherub (Re 1:13-16).⁴ He will no longer be a man.

Note: The spirit being, later known as Jesus Christ, is a cherub during the period of our civilization. His description in Revelation chapter 1 corresponds to that of a cherub. He is also referred to by the symbol of the morning star (Re 22:16). Just as he descended from the level of the 2nd heaven to the Earth, in the time before its creation, he also descended to this 2nd heaven from a higher level. This fact is mentioned in the last common prayer (Joh 17:5). Notice that he did not ask to be restored to the glory he had before his human birth. He asked for a return to his glory in the level of his Father, which he had before the world was. This descent explains why Christ was designated as the firstborn of all creation, of all three heavenly levels (Re 3:14). According to Paul, Christ passed through the heavens (Heb 4:14).

The remaining two beings in the vision, however, were human! They were introduced as “Moses” and “Elijah,” people in the highest positions, symbolizing king and high priest. These two men would therefore fulfil the same role as Moses with Aaron and Jesus with John the Baptist. These are identical functions pervading all covenant periods and identical inheritances of the Son of Man. Therefore, the title Son of Man merges in the Gospels, and quite deliberately so. For the Apostles would not have been able to bear such information and the other facts which follow from it (Joh 16:12).

Note: There is one more important concept that runs throughout the New Testament texts: not only the Son of Man, but also the anointed one, or christ. It is deliberately spelled with a lower case “c”. This is because it is a function which, due to the influence of Christian tradition, has become perceived as the surname of Jesus. In the Orient, however, the surname is the name of the father, which in the case of Jesus was officially Joseph. In fact, the full name of Jesus was correctly rendered as “Jesus ben Joseph”.

Let us realize that Jesus revealed a very important piece of information to the disciples through this transfiguration. Yet the importance of this event is underestimated and not much talked about.

3.2. Is More Evidence Needed?

Mt 20:20-23	<i>“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ... She said, ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.’ ‘You don’t know what you are asking,’ ... ‘You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.’” [NIV]</i>
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What are the positions that his Father is preparing by Christ’s side? Why was Zebedee’s family so interested in them? And most importantly, why does Jesus say he does not know what he is asking for? What is certain is that Jesus must have discussed two very important positions with the apostles. However, the Gospels capture only these reactions to that discussion.⁵ From Jesus’ response we can draw the stunning conclusion that these two roles will be extremely challenging. They will be even more challenging than the position of the apostles. After all, Jesus says, you do not know what you are asking for! The position of apostleship has already been promised to James and John (Mt 19:28). Is the existence of such positions even possible? How is it possible that after centuries of studying the Scriptures, mankind has not yet noticed such serious and important information? But is not the Bible sealed until the appointed time (Da 12:4,9; Joh 16:12,13)? Please note one more interesting fact. James and John, those who were present at Christ’s transfiguration on the mountain and saw the Son of Man in his kingdom, were interested in places by Christ’s side. They could logically assume that Christ was making a point to them. They probably did not take Peter seriously. According to the Gospels, he was so terrified of the transfiguration that he did not know what he was doing, as James and John must have testified. The book of Revelation provides further details.

⁴John’s statement that he is like the Son of Man does not mean that he is the Son of Man. John is only announcing that cherubs are humanoid. As in the case of Ezekiel (Eze 1:26) or Daniel (Da 10:16), where it was even an angel from the 1st heaven who is physically almost identical to man.

⁵This was probably the reason for the many arguments and disputes among the apostles as to which of them was the greatest.

3.3. Two Witnesses

Re 11:3,4,6	<i>"And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." They are 'the two olive trees' and the two lampstands, and 'they stand before the Lord of the earth.' If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want." [NIV]</i>
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Here Moses and Elijah appear to us again. Their deeds reveal them. For Elijah had the authority "to shut up heaven" (1Ki 17:1) and Moses the authority to "turn the waters into blood" at the time of the exodus from Egypt.

Note: This connection has been noted by many other scholars, e.g., the authors of the 1979 edition of the Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible (footnote to Zec 4:14).

However, the book of Revelation refers us back to the prophet Zechariah for more detailed information.

Zec 4:2,3	<i>"Then he said to me: 'What do you see?' So I said: 'I see, and look! a lampstand entirely of gold, with a bowl on top of it. There are seven lamps on it, yes, seven, and the lamps, which are at the top of it, have seven pipes. And next to it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one on the left.'" [NWT]</i>
Zec 4:12-14	<i>"Again I asked him, 'What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?' He replied, 'Do you not know what these are?' 'No, my lord,' I said. So he said, 'These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.'" [NIV]</i>

3.4. Identity of the Son of Man

The two anointed ones cannot, according to ancient precedents, mean anything other than the offices of king (Moses) and high priest (Elijah). They stand beside the Lord of all the Earth, which would be (if the apostles' request was correctly worded) at his right and left. These are the two posts which the sons of Zebedee requested for themselves. It is the pair they saw at the transfiguration of Jesus on the mount.

Note: The Son of Man is spoken of as an individual. Is there not a contradiction, then, if there are two at once? No. It is not the only instance of such a statement. In the first century there were also two anointed ones. John the Baptist was also referred to by Jesus as the Son of Man (Mr 9:12,13). Even more interesting is the statement of the prophet Zechariah (Zec 6:13). This is probably a type of sealing; nevertheless, this wording could also be a reflection of a very important event that was to take place in the 2nd heaven. After Satan "fell" during Jesus' earthly life, Jesus Christ assumed Satan's priestly office. Thus, a unique situation arose, the merging of the offices of king and priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:20).

The difficulty of these roles is obvious. Not only are God's people (the candlestick supplied with oil) spiritually, and in the 3rd covenant physically⁶ dependent on the activity of the two witnesses, but so is all future humanity.

3.5. The Source of His Power

This Son of Man will represent Jesus at his second coming. According to the precedent set by Jesus, he may even act on his authority and in his name.

Joh 5:19	<i>"In all truth I tell you, by himself the Son can do nothing; he can do only what he sees the Father doing: and whatever the Father does the Son does too." [NJB]</i>
Joh 5:36,37	<i>"But my testimony is greater than John's: the deeds my Father has given me to perform, these same deeds of mine testify that the Father has sent me. Besides, the Father who sent me bears witness to me himself." [NJB]</i>
Joh 14:10	<i>"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." [NIV]</i>
Joh 17:4	<i>"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." [NIV]</i>

Similarly, Jesus bears this testimony about the Son of Man:

Joh 14:26	<i>"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." [NIV]</i>
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⁶Religious acts are only models of real but higher and in their time unattainable spiritual values. At a given time, the things outlined by religious acts take on their real form and symbolic acts lose their meaning. This was the case, for example, in the transition from the 1st to the 2nd covenant. Similarly, in the transition from the 2nd to the 3rd covenant, the Bible and its message (the truth Jesus spoke) will be stripped of the ballast of tradition and will come to fruition in real life. By applying the laws (especially social laws) that the Bible and science describe, the repair of our world will be accomplished.

Joh 16:12-15	<i>"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."</i> [NIV]
Mt 23:39	<i>"for, I promise, you shall not see me any more until you are saying: 'Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord!'"</i> [NJB]

This is another example of the transfer of power. For he who overcomes will sit down with Jesus on Jesus' throne, just as Jesus sat down with his Father on the Father's throne (Re 3:21).

3.6. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

This anointed one (or christ), whose identity is as yet unknown to the world (hence the spirit),⁷ is the promised "Spirit of Truth" and "Holy Spirit."

For just as the Father (Abraham) was the representative of the 1st covenant and the Son (Jesus) of the 2nd covenant, so the "Holy Spirit" will be the representative and mediator of the coming 3rd covenant.

Through their baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, God's people are symbolically prepared for another important milestone in their journey, the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God of the 3rd covenant.

4. CONCLUSION

Although the survival of mankind depends directly on the person and activity of the Son of Man, a large proportion of Christians are not yet prepared for His coming or do not expect His at all.

Moreover, Jesus Christ warned His followers that the moment of His coming would be surprising. If Christians do not significantly deepen their knowledge of the Bible in the near future and are not vigilant enough, there is a risk that they will miss the coming of the Son of Man.

⁷These men are yet to be selected at the end of the 2nd covenant period. They must demonstrate established intelligence and moral criteria (hence holy).