

Son of Man

The title “son of man” occurs more than 150 times in the scripture. Thankfully, there are only two basic meanings: 1) Created Man, human beings, and 2) Jesus Christ of Himself as one to be given authority over all.

Even easier, the references (Jesus Christ or created man) are predominantly obvious in the passages and notably broadly differentiated between the OT (created man) or the NT (Jesus Christ).

As an additional means of understanding, passages in which Jesus Christ is the reference have the specific title “Son of Man” (capital letters). Alternatively, the passages in which created man is referenced is titled “son of man” (lower case).

References to created man: “son of man”

Simply referencing humans, as created beings, inferior (by implication) to almighty creator God. The Hebrew language’s “son of” carries the meaning of “having the characteristics of”. To the Hebrew audience “son of man” would mean a human, with characteristics of frailty and mortality; thereby dependent on God’s sustaining power.

References to Jesus Christ: “Son of Man”

Throughout the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man”. He alone used this reference. This title is a reference to Daniel 7:13, in which “*one like a son of man*” came to the “*Ancient of Days*” (Yahweh) and was “*given authority, glory, and sovereign power*”.

This title indicates that Jesus is truly human, while highlighting that He has been given more authority than any other human. Succinctly, it emphasizes his uniquely given role to rule and is a statement that He is the prophesied Messiah.

Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, we can interpret “Son of Man” as having a three part meaning:

- Christ’s unique authority as Lord over all things, the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8).
- Christ’s redemptive role in which He was betrayed, suffered, died, and rose from the dead (Mark 8:31,9:12,31; 10:33-34; John 3:14; 8:28)
- Christ’s future kingdom in which He will return in power and glory (Luke 9:26; 21:27).

Recall that ever since the exile from their God-gifted land, the people of Israel had been awaiting a messiah that would take a politically lead role in restoring their nation to independence. The common Jewish person was looking for the messiah to lead them into an insurrection against Roman rule. Jesus was careful to communicate that He was the Messiah but not politically motivated.

The Jewish religious leaders, who knew the writings of the prophets, were also looking for the Messiah. As self-described “Son of Man”, Jesus communicated to the Jewish religious leaders that He was announcing Himself as the prophesied Messiah. It was Jesus’ claim as the “Son of Man” that began the events that lead directly to His crucifixion. Note the following passage in Matthew 26 in which Caiaphas (the High Priest) and the Sanhedran were interrogating Jesus:

⁶³ ...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."

⁶⁴ *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."

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. (NIV)

Source Material

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